

VISITOR INFORMATION

- 2023 -



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www.smithsfalls.ca

INTRODUCTION

The Visitor Information Collection Program is an initiative that was established in Smiths Falls for the purpose of gathering visitor specific data including demographics, spending habits, first impressions and general experience feedback. In order to determine why visitors are coming and what would motivate return visits, the Town of Smiths Falls needed to obtain a collection of data that highlighted the strengths of the Town's tourism and the areas that need improvement.

This data will serve businesses and local stakeholders by indicating what tourism products and services they should build upon and assist the Town in future marketing plans. These plans are intended to grow and support our local and regional tourism economy, and will foster overall community benefit and development.

This program would not have been successful without the support and partnership of local businesses and tourism partners.

METHODOLOGY

The Town of Smiths Falls Economic Development and Tourism Department partnered with the Smiths Falls & District Chamber of Commerce and the Smiths Falls Downtown Business Association to develop the first Visitor Survey and Stay and Play Contest in 2022. The survey invited visitors to provide feedback about the community of Smiths Falls and then be entered in the Stay and Play Contest for a chance to win a two-night getaway package in Smiths Falls. All data was used in a strict manner and kept confidential unless permitted.

This year the program launched on June 1, 2023 and ran until December 31, 2023. The contest's purpose was to incentivize visitors to continue to visit Smiths Falls and make it a frequent destination. It also gave insight into where our tourists are coming from, which will isolate our target marketing.

The online survey was marketed through the use of Stay and Play promotional cards that were distributed at various local accommodators, retailers and attractions that visitors frequented. Print marketing was also distributed throughout physical locations around the Town of Smiths Falls. The survey was also marketed through the Town of Smiths Falls social media channels through targeted advertisements catered to tourists who recently/currently visited or were planning to visit Smiths Falls. The Town webpage hosted a video advertisement for the contest.

Validating responses was an important part of the initial process. This gives a more accurate summary of visitor demographics and trends. Invalid responses were removed. These included; responses provided by a resident of Smiths Falls, someone who worked or went to school in Town, group and/or duplicate responses.

Visitor Information Collection Program

2023



SURVEY INTEREST AND DATA VALIDATION

278

Surveys were completed.

261

Of the completed surveys were valid.

Distribution of surveys was more widespread this year, with more than the 13 businesses from 2022 participating.

17

Of the completed surveys were invalid responses.



Additional Insights:

Overall, there were 24 more valid surveys completed in 2023 than in 2022. In 2022 there were 35 invalid responses.

PLACE OF ORIGIN

Inter-Province Visitors

87%

(14) Central
(11) Southwestern
(20) Toronto/GTA
(5) Northern
(178) Eastern



Other National Visitors

11%

(12) Western Canada
(17) Eastern Canada



2%

International Visitors
(3) USA
(1) Ireland





Insights:

The 2022 survey was developed using survey monkey and distributed through it's software. When developing the 2023 survey, it was created on survey monkey and then moved to the Town of Smiths Falls website software. The survey was recreated on Forms and distributed. When it was moved over the question "How many people (including yourself) were in your group during your stay? Please state the number of people per age category." didn't transfer correctly and the phrase "please state the number of people per age category" was removed. Since the answer options included age range categories such as 0-8, 9-12, 13-15... 65+, almost all of the respondents chose the 0-8 answer indicating that their group size was in that range. In 2022, data about group size and types of groups (groups with kids, couples, groups with no kids, individuals) as well as age ranges was extrapolated from this question. Due to incomplete data, group types and age ranges cannot be determined for visitors who participated in the Stay and Play program in 2023.



TOP 5 REASONS FOR VISITING

24%

Shopping



24%

Visiting Friends
& Family



16%

Dining



11%

Other



8%

Local Attractions



8%

Outdoor Recreation



Additional Insights:

With only 1 visitor indicating they visited Smiths Falls for indoor recreation, it is the smallest reason for visiting, the same as in 2022. Other included mostly stopping on the way to another destination or for appointments. The additional options included; a concert/entertainment, and a local festival or event.

TOP 5 ACTIVITIES AND INTERESTS

62%

Dining



55%

Shopping



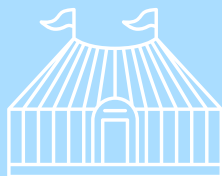
32%

Outdoor Recreation



19%

Local Attractions



14%

Local Event or Festival



Additional Insights:

Visitors were able to select more than one activity resulting in percentages equaling over 100 percent. Similar to 2022, dining and shopping were of the most interest to visitors. Additional options included; Indoor Recreation (2%), Concert/Entertainment (3%), and Other (3%). Visitors indicated in Other the canal and the library.. Attractions visited included (7) Heritage House Museum, (16) RMEQ, (2) Station Theatre, and (2) LeBoat.

PRIMARY DESTINATION



77% Smiths Falls

1.5% Merrickville

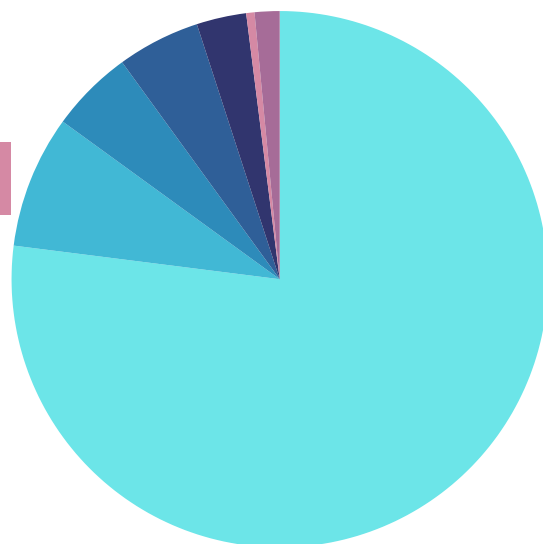
8% Other

0.5% Carleton Place

5% Ottawa

5% Kingston

3% Perth



MODE OF TRANSPORTATION



93%

Car



2%

Boat



2%

Plane



1%

Train



1%

Other

Additional Insights:

For primary destination, 12% percent of visitors chose Other which included regional destinations such as Belleville, Haliburton and Cottages. Almost the same amount of visitors from 2023 chose Smiths Falls as their primary destination (76%). Mode of Transportation survey choices also included Other (1%). The Other category included motorcycles and other modes of transportation that visitors chose not to specify. In 2023 more visitors traveled by car and less traveled by boat and train than in 2022. In 2022, 89% of visitors traveled by car.

Visitor Information Collection Program

2023



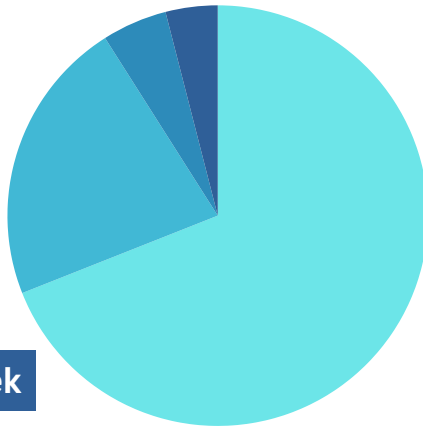
LENGTH OF STAY

69% Day-Trippers

22% 2-3 Days

5% 4-6 Days

4% More Than A Week



TIME OF YEAR



11%

Spring (Mar - May)



74%

Summer (June - Sept)



11%

Autumn (Sept - Nov)



4%

Winter (Dec - Feb)

LODGING



15%

Family/Friends
(55)



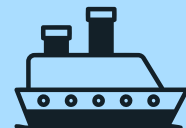
11%

Hotel/Motel/Inn
(34)



3%

Short Term Rentals
(8) Room/cottage/
Airbnb



2%

Boat
(2) Parks Canada Lock
Station
(2) Victoria Park
Marina
(2) LeBoat Docks

Additional Insights:

In 2023, more visitors were travelling to Smiths Falls for day trips than in 2022 (62%). For lodging, 69% did not stay overnight in Smiths Falls compared to 64% from 2022.

Visitor Information Collection Program

2023

HOUSEHOLD INCOME



3% Less Than \$20,000

15% \$75,000 - \$99,999

7% \$20,000 - \$34,999

14% \$100,000 - \$149,999

9% \$35,000 - \$49,999

23% \$150,000 +

18% \$54,000 - \$74,999

11% No Data

\$96,594.50 Total Spent by Survey Respondents (Approx.)

\$8,659.50 less than total spent in 2022

\$367.28 Average Spent Per Group/Visit

SPENDING AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS

31%

Less Than \$100

81

32%

\$100 - \$250

85

23%

\$500 - \$1000

60

9%

\$1500 - \$2999

25

3%

\$1000 - \$2500

8

2%

\$2500+

4

Additional Insights:

There was no clarification in this survey question between regional and non-regional spending. Those who are in the 2% of spending group were evenly spread for length of stay ((1) Day Trip, (1) 2-3 Days, (1) 4-6 Days, (1) Week +).

SPENDING BY CATEGORY



47%

Shopping and Retail

(\$44,911.50)



26%

Food and Dining

(\$24,921.00)



20%

Accommodations

(\$18,767.00)



7%

**Recreation and
Entertainment**

(\$6581.00)

Additional Insights:

Visitor overall spending was an open-ended survey question. In 2022, visitors spent more money on Food and Dining (31%) as the highest spending category than in 2023. The amount spent on Recreation and Entertainment dropped significantly from 2022 (\$11,538.50) whereas the amount spent on Shopping and Retail rose significantly from 2022 (\$24,104.50).

PLANNING AND RESEARCHING VISITS

37%

**Personal Experience or
Connection**

(93) Word of Mouth
(4) Visitor Center



47%

Internet & Social Media

(70) Internet Search
(31) Social Media
(15) Smiths Falls Website
(7) Experience Facebook
(0) Experience Instagram
(1) Town of Smiths Falls Website



4%

**Print and Traditional
Advertising**

(7) Print or Traditional
Advertisement
(4) Smiths Falls Visitor Guide



Additional Insights:

The total above exceeds 100% as many visitors are using multiple methods when planning their trip or when looking for things to do once they get here. The survey options also included Other (75), but visitors did not indicate what those other methods may be. In 2022, 77% used Internet & Social media indicating a significant decrease in 2023, however there were only 7 survey respondents that chose Other in 2022.

OVERALL EXPERIENCE



Visitor Status: 16% First Time Visitors, 39% Have Been a Few Times, 44% Regular Visitors



95% Enjoyed their visit to Smiths Falls

4.5% Neither dissatisfied or satisfied

0.5% Dissatisfied



50% Wanted direct info on future tourism events, etc.



96% Plan on returning to Smiths Falls

0% Are not returning

WHAT VISITORS SAID THEY LIKE ABOUT SMITHS FALLS

“Love the new look and all the activities that are happening”

“Absolutely loved the PowWow! Smiths Falls is looking beautiful! The lamp posts, flowers, sidewalks, food and parking...everything was looking fantastic!”

“I was very happy that I could easily walk to everything I wanted to do.”

“I love all the events like paddlefest and pow wows. The pubs are great and the boutiques.”

"I simply LOVE all the changes underway in Smiths Falls,, from the downtown street refurbishments to the Town Square, to the street life - the Porch music, and the Night Market and other street events and music. It's an incredible transformation, keep it up."

"Old world charm and eclectic mix of shops. A wonderful day trip!"

Additional Insights:

No respondents selected that they would not be returning to Smiths Falls, however some declined to comment. The percentage of those who enjoyed their visit has increased from 2022 (93%). Many respondents shared positive comments and experiences as part of the survey; they enjoyed the shops, scenery, events, renovations, and often mentioned how friendly the town was.

WANTS AND IMPROVEMENTS

16%

Dining
(44)



29%

Events/Festivals
(84)



22%

Attractions
(53)



17%

Retail
(43)



3%

Traffic/Wait/Idle Times
(22)



11%

Beautification
(44)



DO YOU HAVE ANY OTHER COMMENTS? (EXPERIENCES, SUGGESTIONS OR IMPROVEMENTS)

- Renovations to accommodations (Econolodge) & more accommodations *
- More advertising
- Evening/extended hours for retail *
- More clothing stores
- Swimming pool
- More events and festivals
- Street clean-up/flowers *
- Traffic waits at bridges
- More independent shops and boutiques
- Parks clean up (goose poop)
- More activities for day trips

Additional Insights:

Totals will not add up to 100% as respondents may have selected multiple areas of improvement and may not have provided additional insights or suggestions for each. Events/Festivals continues to be the most selected needs improvement category, in 2022 it was the highest with 21%. Comments with an * indicate suggestions that were also offered in 2022.

VISITOR GROUPS - OVERVIEW AND INSIGHTS

DAY TRIPPERS

This group of visitors is the **largest survey demographic (69%)** visiting Smiths Falls in 2023. This was also the largest group in 2022 (62%)

On average, Day Trippers are spending approximately **\$266/per group/per trip**, with the largest group spending between \$0-\$100 (41%), in 2022, more day trippers spent between \$100 - \$250. In total, Day Trippers surveyed **spent approximately \$47,958.50**. This is the highest amount spent by visitor group respondents, which may relate to the amount of respondents in this group.

88% of this visitor group did not stay overnight. This year 32% of day trippers came to Smiths Falls to visit friends and family, this is an increase from the 5% percent last year. Therefore, less day trippers enjoyed the amenities Smiths Falls had to offer. 90% were identified as visiting two or more times or are frequent visitors, an increase from 83% in 2022. While in Smiths Falls their top activities while visiting were dining and shopping. **Their top wants/improvements were to events/festivals, attractions, and retail.**

Many of the comments Day Trippers left were praising the updates to the town including the bandstand and the bike lanes. Day Trippers enjoyed the events and festivals like Pow Wow and Paddlefest as well as attractions like the two museums. Other comments suggested doing more to attract day trippers, having better signage and longer parking times.

Top 3 Main Reasons for Visiting

11%	Shopping
19%	Dining
32%	Visiting Friends/Family

Spending Habits

41%	Less than \$100
38%	\$100 - \$250
17%	\$250 - \$500
3%	\$500 - \$1000
0%	\$1000 - \$2500
1%	\$2500 +

Top 3 Activities While Visiting

34%	Dining
31%	Shopping
16%	Outdoor Recreation

Top 3 Wants/ Improvements

31%	Events/Festivals
23%	Attractions
17%	Retail

Overall Experience

92%	Satisfied with Visit
97%	Plan to Return

VISITOR GROUPS - OVERVIEW AND INSIGHTS

SHORT TRIPPERS (2 - 3 DAYS)

This group makes up **22% of the total visitor respondents**, and is the second largest group behind day-trippers. This is a slight decrease from 2022 when short trippers made up 25% of the respondents.

Slightly more visitors that stay 2-3 days are staying with friends and family (41%) than in hotels/inns/BnB's (32%.) similar to 2022. 11% are staying in Short Term rentals which includes Airbnb's and cottages. 6% of visitors are also staying in boats at the marina and lock station, a decrease from 2022 (13%).

The majority of this visitor groups' main reason for visiting was to visit family and friends (44%) an increase of 11% from 2022. While they were here, their top activities were dining (31%) and shopping (27%). Participation in outdoor recreation increased from 5% in 2022 to 14% this year.. **Their top wants/improvements were to attractions, dining, and events/festivals.**

On average, **this visitor group spent \$492 per group/per trip**, with the largest segment spending within the \$250-\$500 range similar to 2022. In total, **this group spent approximately \$28,042, a slight decrease from \$33,050 in 2022.**

A number of short trippers are return visitors (67%). Most of their comments praised the friendliness and renovations of the town. Some comments suggested more drop-in children's activities, more local artisans, expanded bike lanes and updated accommodations.

Top 3 Main Reasons for Visiting

44%	Visiting Friends/Family
18%	Other
13%	Local Attraction

Spending Habits

10%	Less than \$100
25%	\$100 - \$250
35%	\$250 - \$500
23%	\$500 - \$1000
5%	\$1000 - \$2500
2%	\$2500 +

Top 3 Accommodations

42%	Friends/Family
41%	Hotel/Inn/BnB
11%	Short Term Rental

Top 3 Activities While Visiting

31%	Dining
27%	Shopping
14%	Outdoor Recreation

Top 3 Wants/Improvements

22%	Attractions
21%	Dining
21%	Events/Festivals

Overall Experience

98%	Satisfied with Visit
98%	Plan to Return

VISITOR GROUPS - OVERVIEW AND INSIGHTS

WEEKDAY TRAVELERS (4-6 DAYS)

This demographic of visitors makes up **5% of total visitor respondents**. This is the 3rd largest group, the same as 2022.

On average, this survey group are **spending \$901 per group/per trip**, mostly within the \$250-500 range. This group is spending the most on average per trip. **In total, they spent approximately \$12,619, a large decrease from last year (\$29,600).**

Just like the 2-3 Day visitor group, slightly more visitors are staying with friends and family (40%) than in Hotels/Inns/BnB's (27%.) 13% are staying in Short Term rentals which includes Airbnb's and cottages. 18 percent are staying in docked boats (3 visitor groups), compared to none last year.

This visitor group's main reason for visiting is to get away and enjoy the company of friends and family, similar to 2022. While here, they are taking part in a number of activities such as dining and shopping.

85% of these visitors have been to Smiths Falls before or are frequent visitors an increase from 60% in 2022. **Wants or Improvements requested by this group include events/festivals, retail, attractions, and beautification.** Most comments praised the friendliness and beauty of the town. Some comments suggested extended business hours, and a shuttle to the grocery stores for boaters.

Top 3 Main Reasons for Visiting

71%	Visiting Friends/Family
14%	Other
7%	Concert/Entertainment
7%	Dining

Spending Habits

0%	Less than \$100
0%	\$100 - \$250
57%	\$250 - \$500
14%	\$500 - \$1000
21%	\$1000 - \$2500
7%	\$2500 +

Top 3 Accommodations

40%	Friends/Family
27%	Hotel/Inn/BnB
13%	Short Term Rental

Top 3 Activities While Visiting

30%	Dining
30%	Shopping
19%	Outdoor Recreation

Top 3 Wants/Improvements

30%	Events/Festivals
20%	Retail
20%	Attractions
20%	Beautification

Overall Experience

93%	Satisfied with Visit
93%	Plan to Return

VISITOR GROUPS - OVERVIEW AND INSIGHTS

EXTENDED VACATIONERS (7+ DAYS)

This visitor group is the smallest group of respondents, staying the longest, but **making up only 4% of total visitors**.

Similar to all of the visitor groups, most are staying with Friends and Family (82%), while the others are staying in Hotels/Inns/BnBs. Less visitors stayed with family and friends in 2022 (55%).

As is similar with other overnight groups, their main reason for visiting was to visit friends and family (64%). While here they are taking part in a number of activities including dining, shopping, and outdoor recreation, similar to 2022.

This visitor group surveyed are **spending per group/per trip, an average of \$797**. In 2022, extended vacationers spent the most per average whereas in 2023 the weekday travelers did. This could be due to the fact that in 2023 most of this visitor group are staying with friends/family (82%) compared to 55% in 2022. The largest spending bracket was the \$500- \$1000 range. In total, those who took the survey spent approximately **\$7,975, a large decrease from 14,700 in 2022**.

70% of respondents in this category have been to Smiths Falls before or are frequent visitors. All of these visitors plan to return. **Wants or Improvements requested by this group include retail, dining, and events/festivals**. The comments were all positive, with visitors praising the improvements in the town, the waterway, and the locals. one comment suggested more restaurants be open on Mondays.

Top 3 Main Reasons for Visiting

64%	Visiting Friends/Family
18%	Other
9%	Dining
9%	Local Event

Spending Habits

0%	Less than \$100
27%	\$100 - \$250
9%	\$250 - \$500
36%	\$500 - \$1000
18%	\$1000 - \$2500
9%	\$2500 +

Top 3 Accommodations

82%	Friends/Family
18%	Hotel/Inn/BnB
0%	Short Term Rental

Top 3 Activities While Visiting

22%	Dining
22%	Outdoor Recreation
19%	Shopping

Top 3 Wants/Improvements

31%	Retail
25%	Dining
19%	Events/Festivals

Overall Experience

82%	Satisfied with Visit
91%	Plan to Return

CONCLUSION



ACHIEVEMENTS

Smiths Falls' charm, dining, attractions and waterfront area continues to draw visitors back annually with 83% noting they have been before (78% in 2022) and 96% (the remaining 4% just chose not to answer the question) saying they would return in the future (98% in 2022).

Several comments mentioned how impressed visitors were with the overall improvements since the last time they were in Smiths Falls including; the bandstand, the bike lanes, flowers, waterfront areas and the general downtown. Most of these comments were echoed from 2022. Many were impressed with the current attractions we do have, with the Heritage House Museum, Railway Museum of Eastern Ontario, and the Parks being mentioned. Many commented on the events/festivals such as Pow Wow, Porchfest and Paddlefest which were meant with positive reviews. Many dining options were praised as well.

SURVEY RESULTS SHOW

- Visitors are traveling to Smiths Falls primarily to visit family/friends (24%) and for shopping (24%).
- Visitors spent more money on shopping and retail and less money on accommodations than in 2022.
- Day Trippers made up the largest survey group respondents at 69%.
- 74% of visits occurred in the "Summer Season" between June 1 – August 31.
- More visitor groups are spending between \$100-\$250 per visit.
- Smiths Falls was the primary destination for 77% of the visitors.

Visitor Information Collection Program

2023

CONCLUSION

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

Similar to 2022, many of our visitors are day-trippers that are not staying overnight. This year, more visitors that are staying for lengthier times chose to stay with family and friends followed by traditional accommodations. Several comments mentioned needing more affordable accommodations as well as more options. While the shopping and retail was met with positive comments, many continued to express the desire for businesses to have extended hours and be open evenings. More attractions and more events/festivals were the top complaint from survey respondents, similar to 2022. The attractions and festivals we do have are excelling, however some visitors are finding there is not a lot to do in Smiths Falls, especially to attract day-trippers. In order to attract visitors that extend their stay for more than a day trip, investment in additional attractions is needed.

OPPORTUNITIES

This year less visitors are getting their information through social media to plan their trips than in 2022. There was an increase in visitors getting information through word of mouth. However, it is important to continue to market Smiths Falls through all the online avenues so the correct information can then be distributed.

Visitors were impressed with the local retail and dining options but expressed the desire for extended business hours and for more restaurants to be open on Mondays. Visitors also indicated the want for more local restaurants and stores.

Survey respondents continued to be happy with the attractions, recreation and events that are already being offered, but similar to last year many requested more options especially during the off-season. This could be an opportunity to increase tourism by creating regularly scheduled drop-in programming such as a town-wide scavenger hunt, etc.

Smiths Falls has many opportunities to build and grow as a tourism destination by investing in our assets and infrastructure to create new experiences and reasons to visit.