



# Taos Destination Stewardship Plan RESIDENT TOURISM SENTIMENT SURVEY

Town of Taos, New Mexico

Key Findings | October 2023



PREPARED BY:

International Institute  
of Tourism Studies

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY



CENTER FOR  
RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL





This resident survey is an integral part of the Destination Stewardship Plan (DSP) for the Town of Taos. The DSP represents a yearlong collaborative planning effort, led by the Town of Taos, to ensure a sustainable and community-driven approach to destination stewardship in Taos. The DSP engages residents, community leaders, and tourism stakeholders in crafting a shared vision for the future of tourism in Taos.

The DSP is thoroughly assessing the impacts of tourism in Taos, seeking strategies that enhance positive contributions and mitigate negative effects. This plan aims to strike a harmonious balance by safeguarding the local environment and culture that visitors come to experience while improving the quality of life for residents. This resident sentiment toward tourism survey is a vital component of the ongoing DSP process, providing invaluable insights into residents' current perceptions of tourism in Taos and their aspirations for the future. The survey was open to anyone 18 and older who lives or works in Taos, making it an inclusive endeavor to ensure the community's voice is heard. The online survey was deployed from July 15 to September 25, 2023. It was available in English and Spanish, and had 3,348 respondents.

The main topics covered in the survey were:

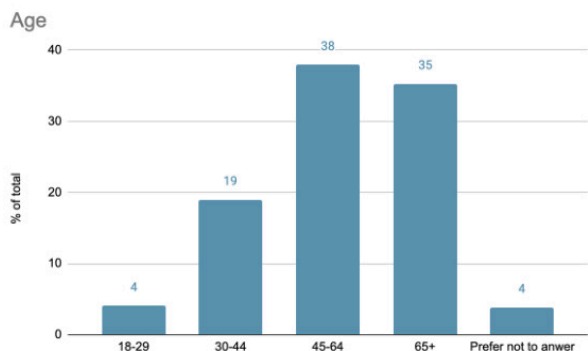
- Overall sentiment about tourism
- Tourism development and growth
- Tourism economic impacts
- Quality of life impacts
- Cultural impacts
- Resident involvement and engagement in tourism

The survey also included open-ended questions aimed at eliciting respondents' perspectives on concerns, proposed solutions, and their vision for tourism. These questions generated an average of 2,000 comments each. Content analysis was employed to identify recurring themes from these comments.

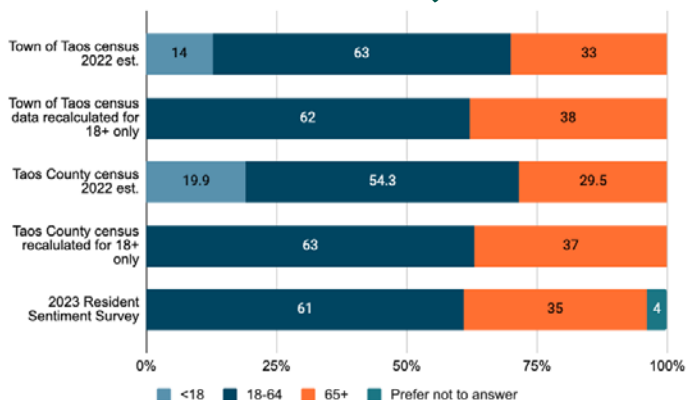
# Respondent Profile

The age distribution of survey respondents closely mirrors the most recent census data for both the Town of Taos and Taos County, as illustrated in the charts below. Specifically, 61% of survey respondents fell within the 18-64 age group, while 35% were 65 years and older. Comparatively, 2022 estimates based on the 2020 census data indicated that at the Town of Taos level, 62% and 38% of residents fell into these respective age groups, and at the Taos County level, 61% and 35% did.

**Age distribution of survey respondents**

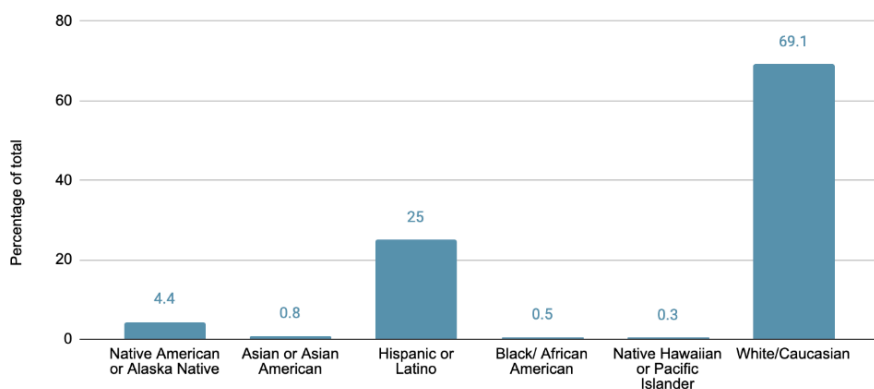


**Age demographic: Taos census data versus Survey**

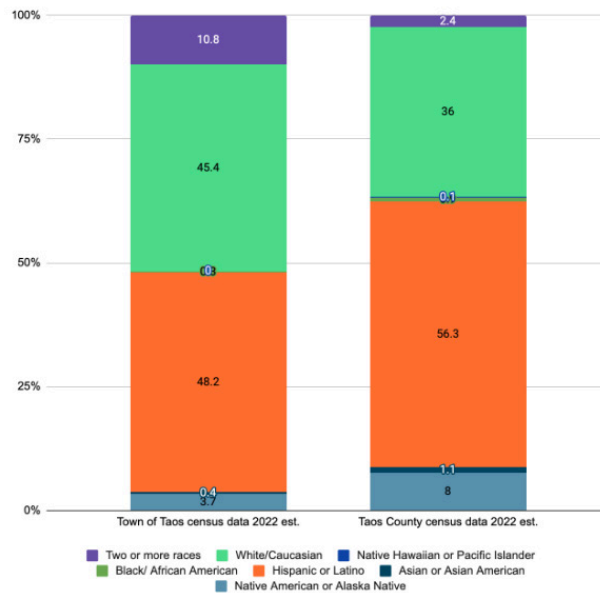


As illustrated in the chart below, 4.4% of survey respondents identified themselves as Native American or Alaska Native, compared to 3.7% of Town of Taos residents who exclusively identified as “American Indian and Alaska Native” in the 2020 census. Additionally, 25% of survey participants self-identified as Hispanic or Latino, in contrast to 48% of Town of Taos residents who identified as “Hispanic or Latino” in the 2020 census.

**Ethnic heritage**



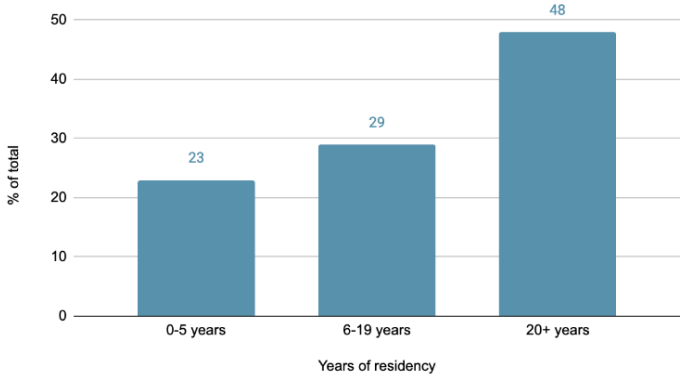
**Ethnic heritage: Taos census data versus Survey**



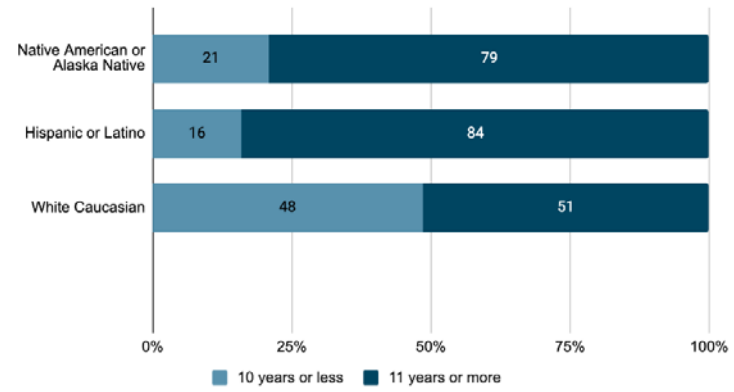


Forty-eight percent (48%) of the survey respondents have lived in Taos for more than 20 years. Survey respondents who identified as Native American or Hispanic/Latino were significantly more likely to have lived in Taos for more than 10 years.

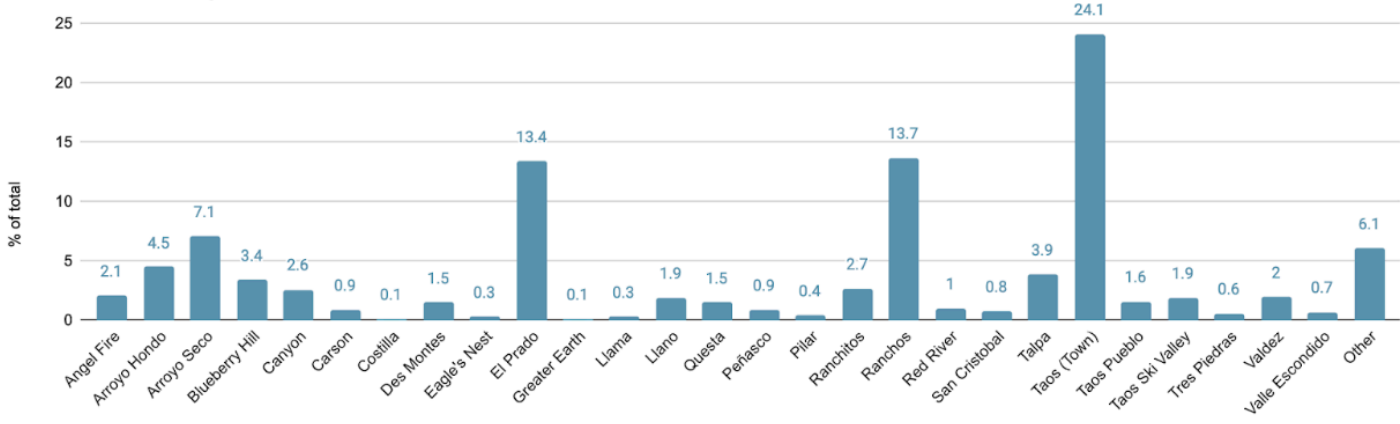
Length of residency in Taos



Length of residency by ethnic heritage



Place of residency

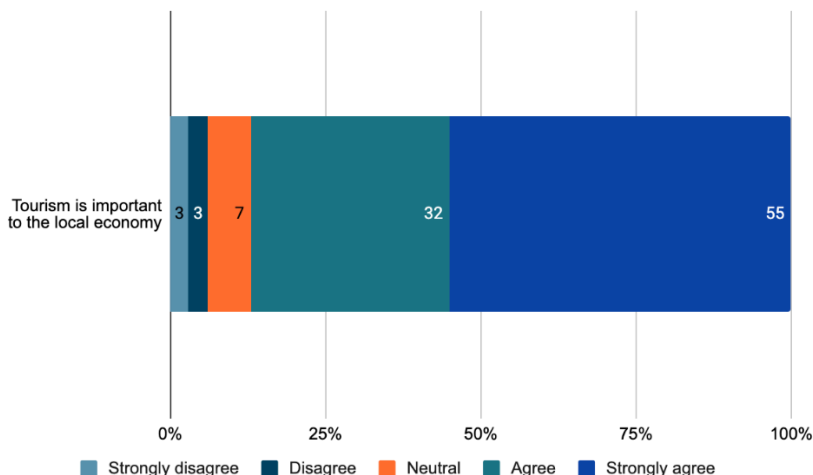


Courtesy of Town of Taos

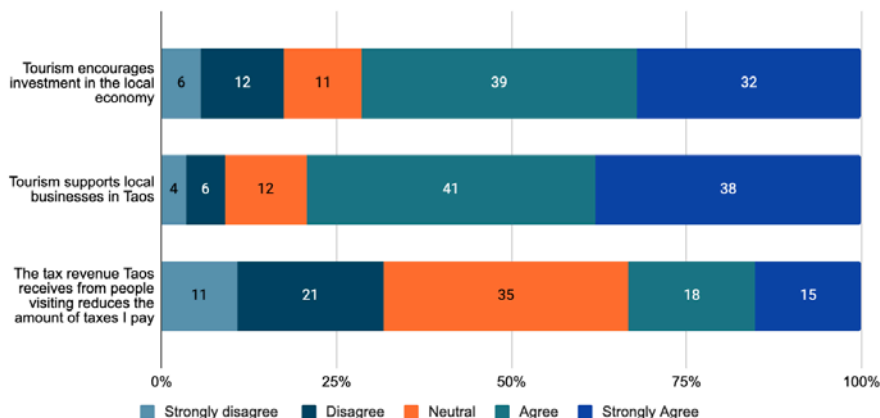
# SURVEY RESULTS

## The Economic Importance of Tourism to the Town Taos

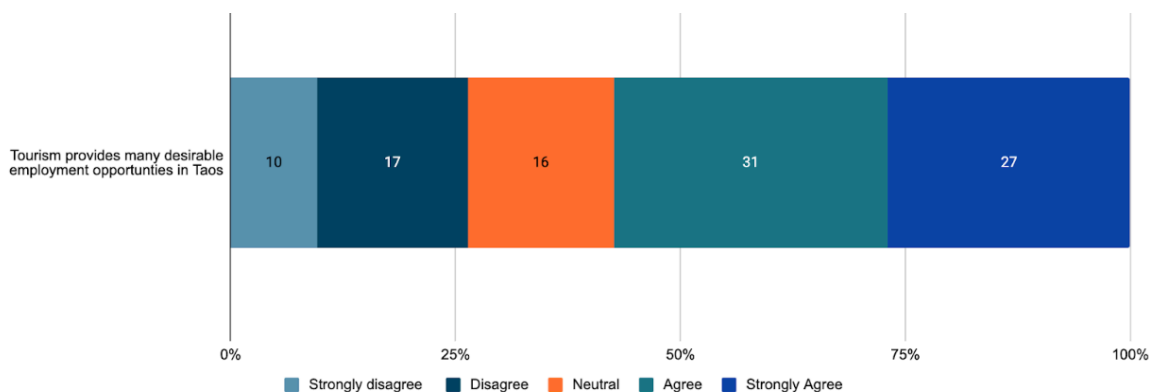
The findings indicate that 87% of respondents agree or strongly agree on the significance of tourism to the local economy. Specifically, among respondents aged 65 years and older, 92% agree that tourism plays a crucial role in Taos' economy, while 86% of those under 65 years share this sentiment. Notably, respondents who have resided in Taos for over 20 years exhibit less agreement regarding tourism's importance as a contributor to the local economy.



Most respondents believe tourism encourages local investment (71%) and supports local businesses (79%). However, respondents are divided on whether tax revenues from tourism reduce their own taxes.

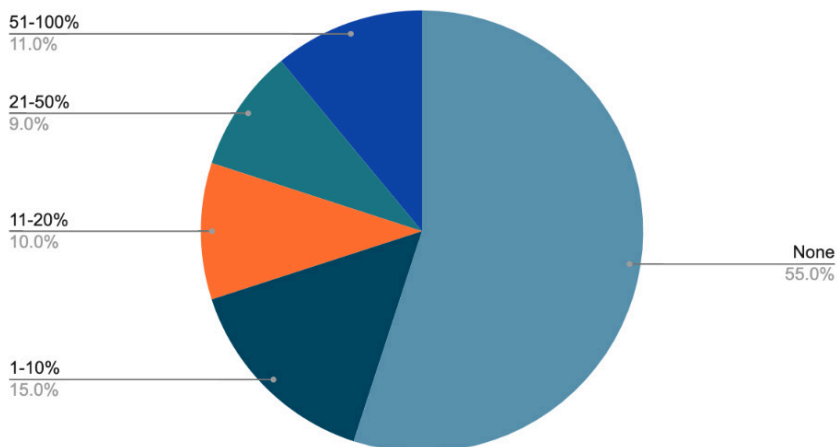


The majority of respondents (58%) express belief that tourism offers desirable employment opportunities. Notably, respondents younger than 45 exhibit a lower-than-average response rate (46%) on this question as well as respondents who identify as Native American (45%) and those who identify as Hispanic or Latino (44%). Moreover, 67% of respondents employed in the tourism industry share this belief.



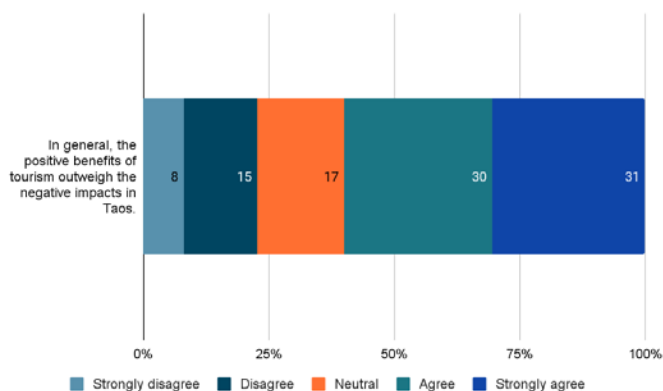
Among respondents employed in Taos, 33% (535) stated that they work in the tourism industry. Additionally, while 45% of all respondents reported tourism as contributing to their household income, this figure rose to 51% among respondents aged 30–64. Interestingly, respondents identifying as Native American were slightly more inclined (48%) to cite tourism's contribution to their household income, while Hispanic or Latino respondents were slightly less likely (42%) to do so.

### Estimated contribution to household income

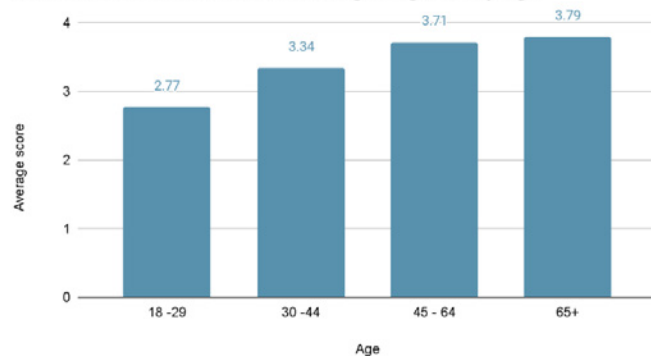


### Sentiment Regarding Benefits Versus Drawbacks

Sixty-one percent (61%) of respondents agree that the benefits of tourism outweigh its drawbacks in Taos. Among those residing in Taos for 20 years or more, 53% agree with this statement. Notably, respondents aged 45 and older (65%) are more likely to agree that tourism's benefits outweigh its drawbacks. However, Native Americans (47%) and Hispanics or Latinos (46%) were less likely than average to agree with this statement.



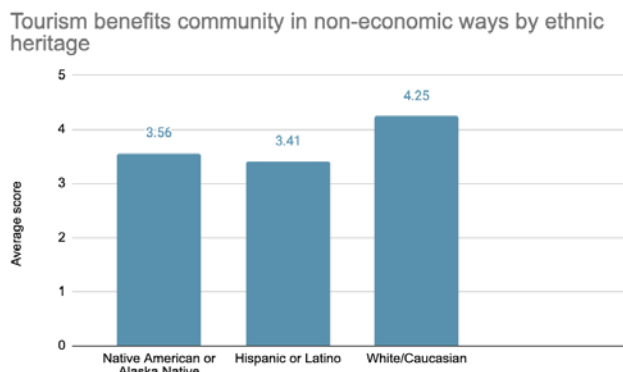
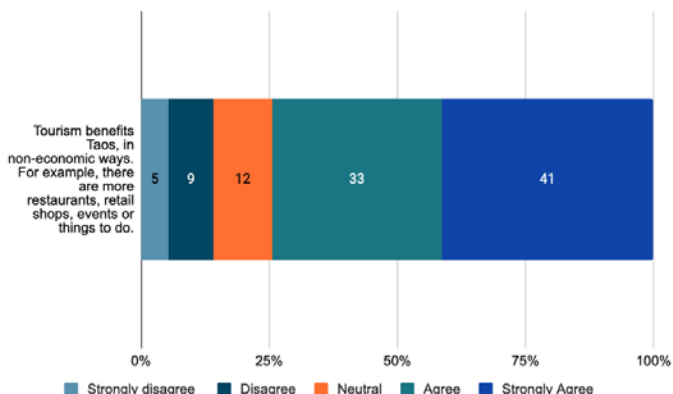
### Positive benefits of tourism outweigh negative by age





## Quality of Life

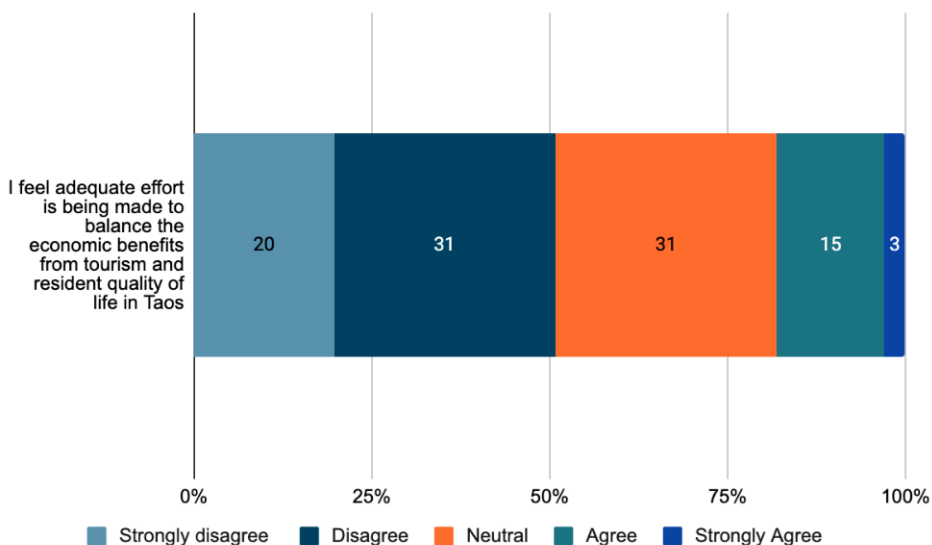
When asked about the non-economic benefits the community derives from tourism, 74% of respondents agree or strongly agree with its positive impact. However, agreement rates were slightly lower among respondents identifying as Native American (61%) or Hispanic/Latino (56%).



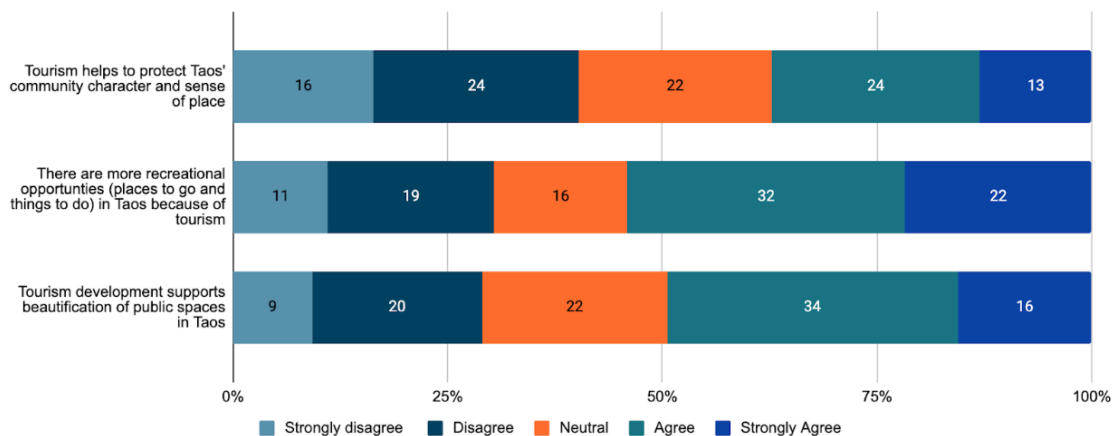
Note: The higher the score, the more likely to agree that tourism benefits the community in non-economic ways.

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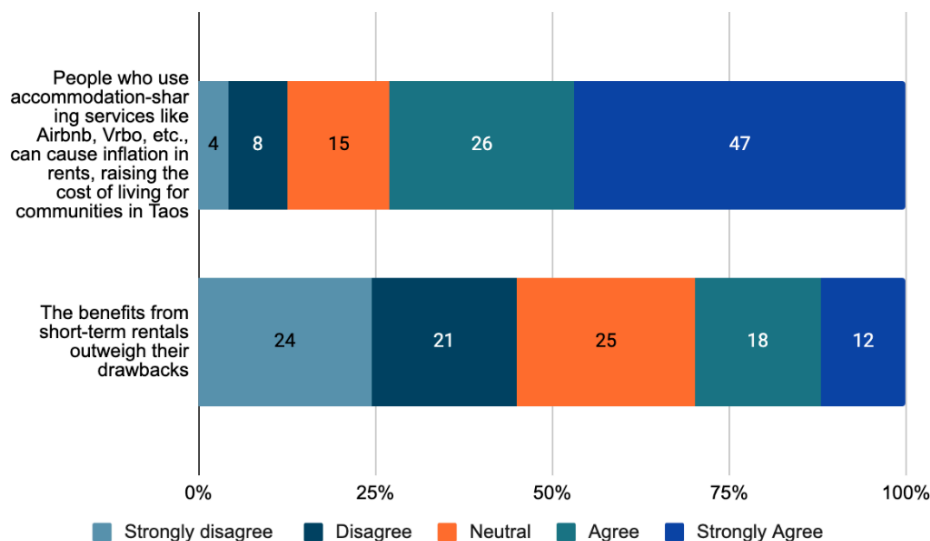
The findings indicate that 51% of respondents disagree with the notion that sufficient efforts are being made to balance the economic benefits of tourism with residents' quality of life. Notably, 60% of Native American respondents and 58% of Hispanic or Latino respondents express disagreement with this statement.



When asked about the impact of tourism on culture, 37% of respondents believe that tourism helps protect community character, 54% feel tourism contributes to having more recreational activities, and 50% state that tourism helps support the beautification of Taos.

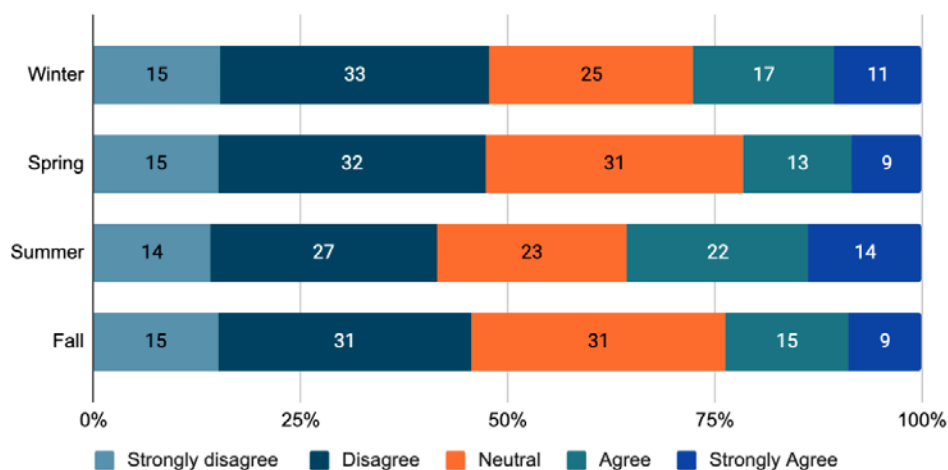


Of all respondents, 73% feel that users of accommodation-sharing services contribute to inflation of rents and cost of living in Taos, and 45% feel that the benefits of these platforms do not outweigh the drawbacks. Older respondents are less critical of short-term rentals than younger respondents, but long-term residents (>20 years) are more critical than those that have lived in Taos for 1–5 years.

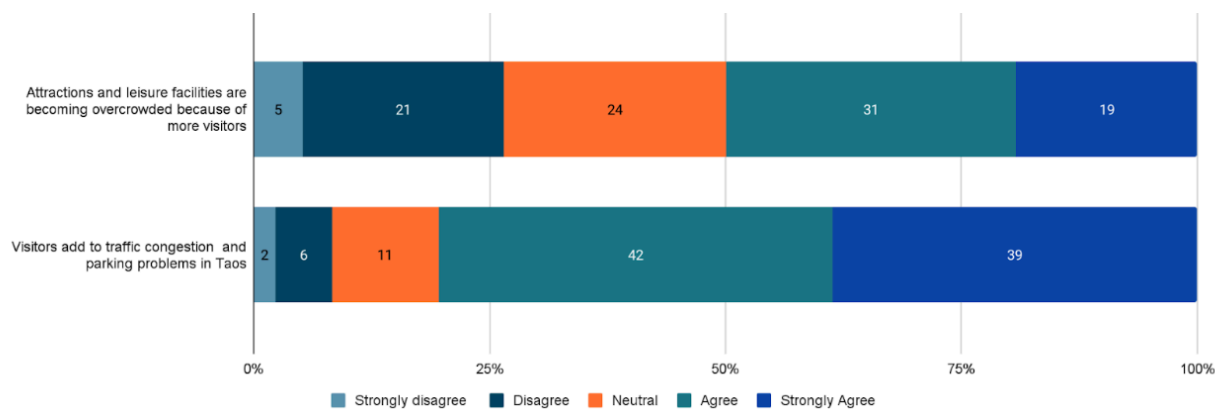


Most residents do not seem bothered by the number of tourists in Taos in terms of their quality of life. The greatest quality of life impacts are felt in summer when 36% of respondents agree or strongly agree that the number of visitors has a negative impact on their quality of life.

### The number of people visiting Taos has a negative impact on the quality of life in the area in ...



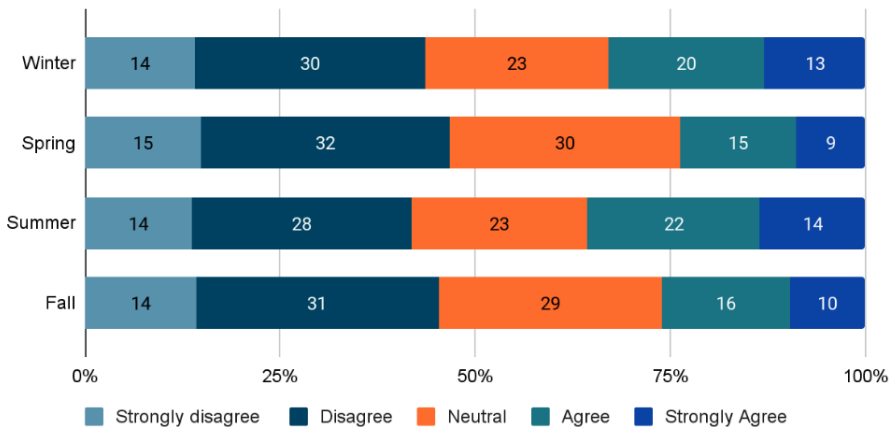
Half of the respondents (50%) express concern about attractions and leisure facilities becoming overcrowded due to the number of visitors. Additionally, a significant majority (81%) believe that visitors contribute to traffic congestion and parking issues.





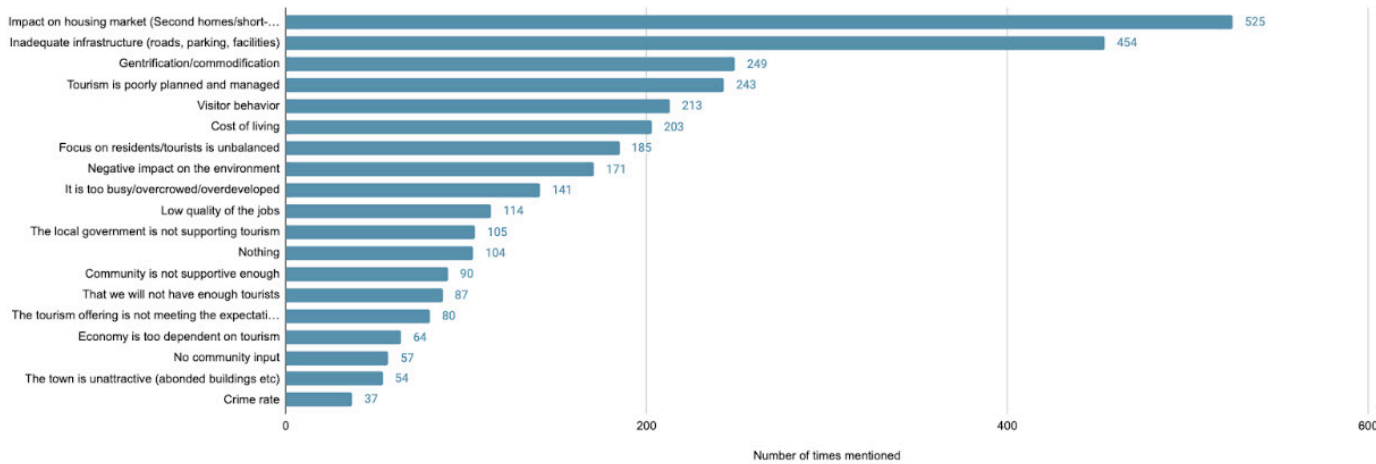
Respondents are largely neutral or disagree about whether the number of visitors negatively affects access to outdoor recreational activities. However, 36% agree that accessing outdoor activities becomes more challenging during the summer months.

### Outdoor recreational activities for residents are negatively affected by the number of visitors in ...



The primary concerns highlighted in the open-ended questions revolve around the housing market and insufficient infrastructure, particularly issues related to traffic and parking. Additionally, respondents expressed concerns regarding gentrification and commodification. Poor tourism planning and visitor behavior were also cited as notable concerns.

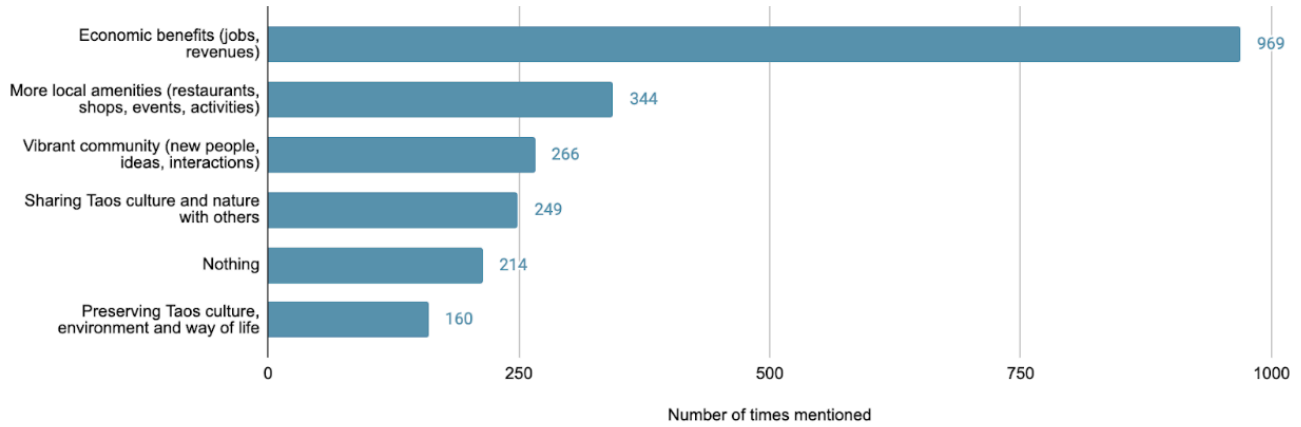
### What concerns do you have about tourism?



Courtesy of Town of Taos

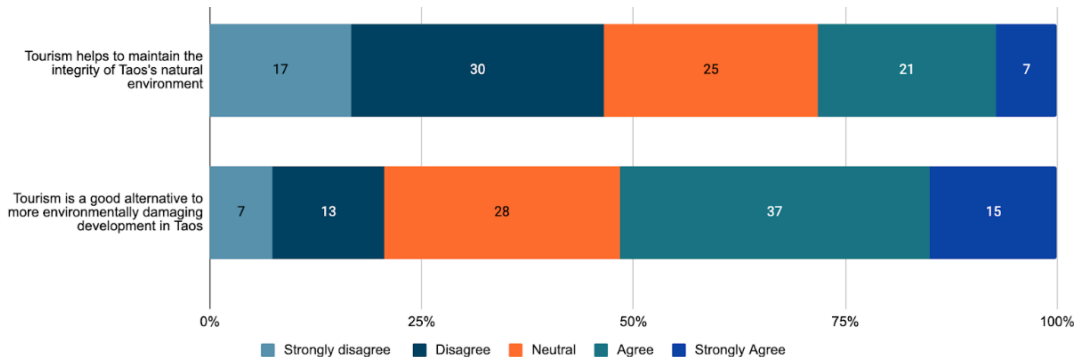
Through analysis of the open-ended question regarding the benefits of tourism, two main advantages emerged: the significant economic impact, including job creation and revenue for local businesses and the government, and the provision of additional local amenities such as restaurants, shops, and events. Moreover, respondents highlighted that tourism revitalizes the town, creating a vibrant atmosphere and offering opportunities to interact with new people. Additionally, respondents appreciate the chance to share their culture and environment with visitors.

### What do you like most about tourism in Taos?

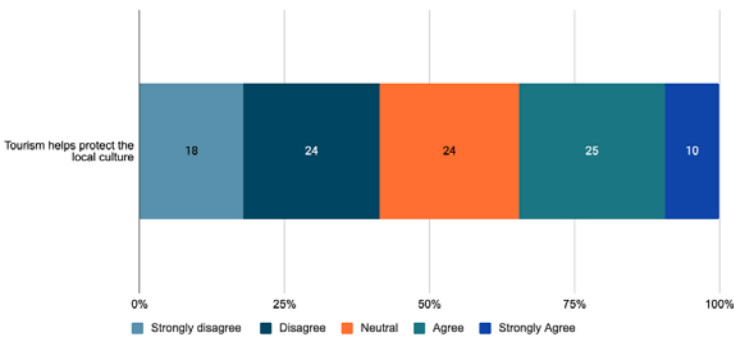


### Environmental and Cultural Impacts

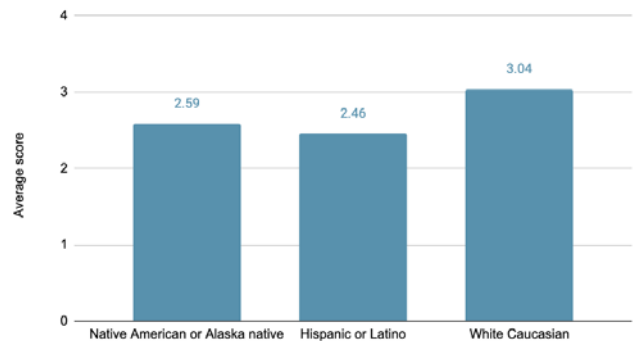
Forty-seven percent (47%) of respondents do not believe that tourism aids in preserving the integrity of the natural environment, yet 52% view tourism as a favorable alternative to more environmentally damaging development in Taos.



When asked about the preservation of local culture, 35% of respondents agree while 42% disagree that tourism helps to protect the local culture in Taos. Notably, older residents exhibit less concern regarding cultural impacts, with 42% of those over 45 years agreeing that tourism helps protect local culture. Furthermore, Native American and Hispanic or Latino respondents are also less inclined to agree with the notion that tourism helps protect culture.



### Tourism as protector of local culture by ethnic heritage



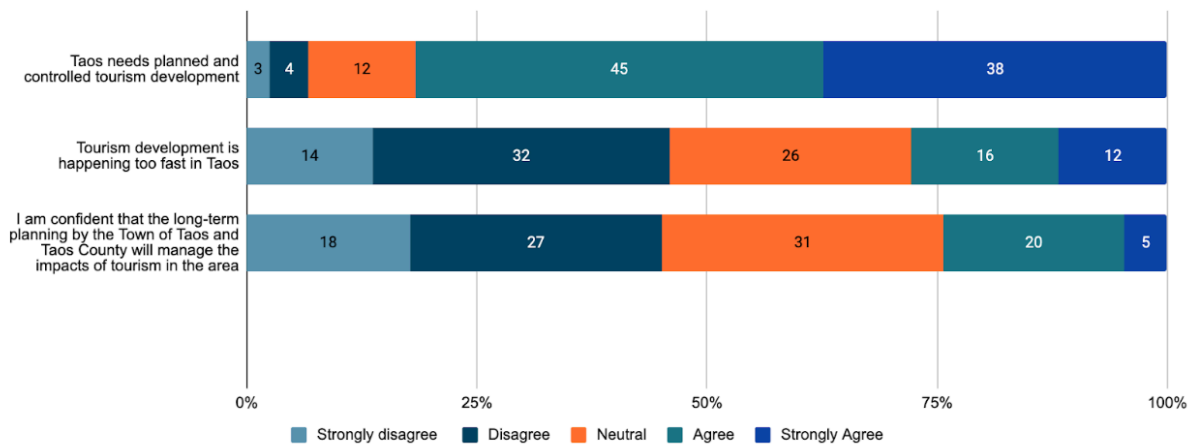
Note: The higher the score, the more likely to agree that tourism is important to protecting local culture.

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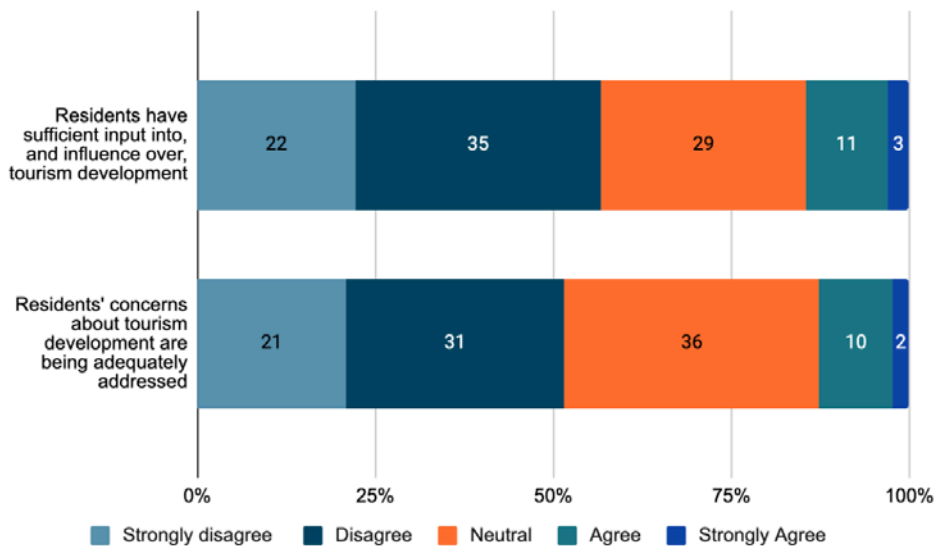


## Resident Participation and Engagement

The survey identified opportunities for addressing resident priorities and needs, as well as enhancing resident involvement and engagement in tourism. For instance, 83% of all respondents indicate that tourism development is occurring too fast, while 46% disagree with this sentiment. Furthermore, 45% of respondents express a lack of confidence in the Town of Taos and Taos County's ability to manage the impacts of tourism.



Also, 57% of respondents feel that residents do not have sufficient input into and influence over tourism development and 52% feel unheard. Notably, 69% of respondents who identify as Native American and 65% as Hispanic or Latino share the same sentiment.

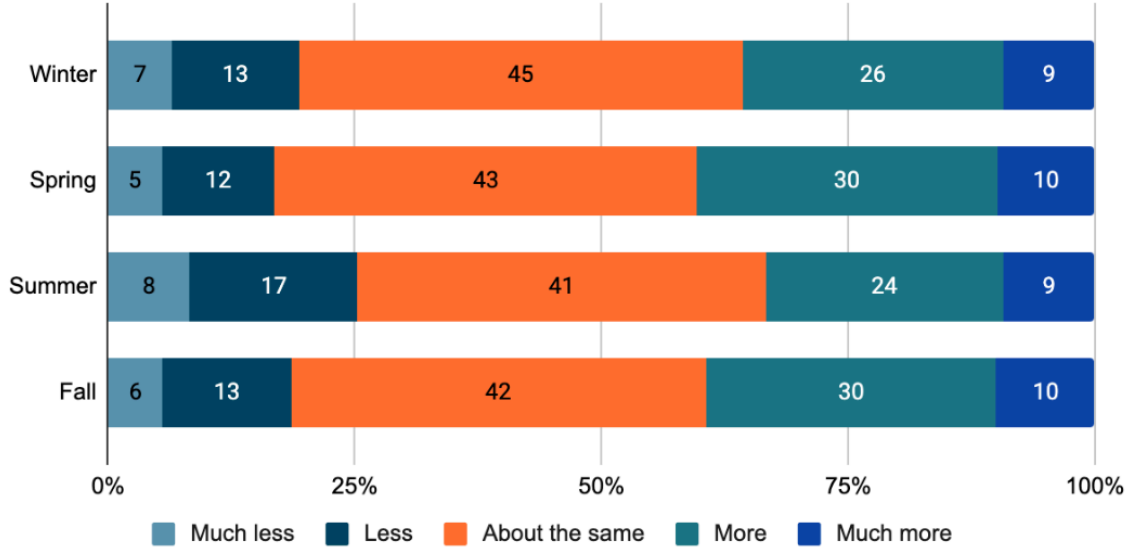


Courtesy of Town of Taos

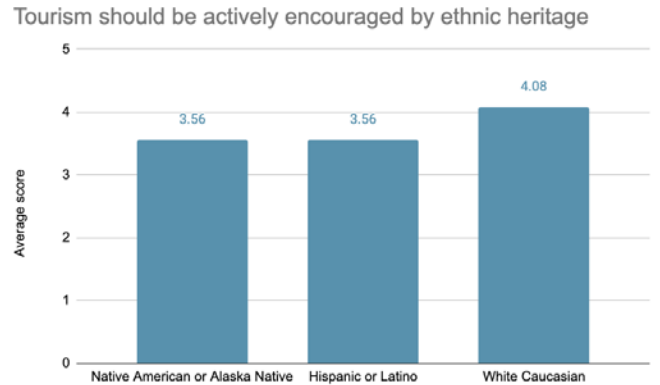
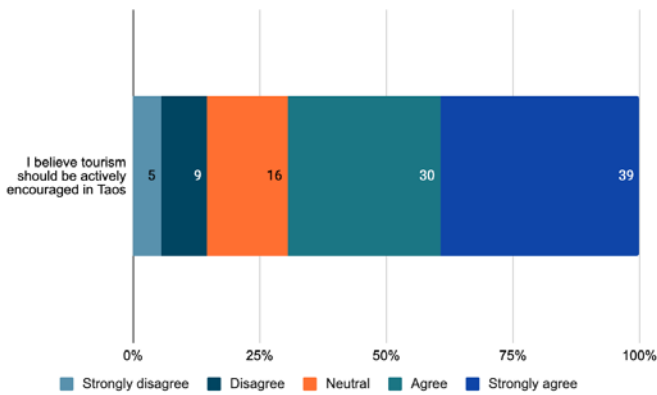
## The Future of Tourism

The vast majority of respondents think tourism visitation in the spring (83%), fall (82%), winter (80%) and summer (74%) should remain the same or increase. This sentiment is shared by respondents who identify as White Caucasian (79%), Hispanic or Latino (69%) and Native Americans (67%) when it comes to summer.

### Looking into the future, should Taos, have less, more, or about the same amount of tourism in ...?



69% of all respondents believe that tourism should be actively promoted in Taos. For those who have lived in Taos 20 or more years, this figure stands at 63%. Notably, those between the ages of 45 and 64 are the most likely to agree (74%) that tourism should be actively encouraged. Respondents who identify as White Caucasians (76%) were more likely to agree with this statement than Native American (61%) and Hispanic or Latino (58%) respondents.



Note: The higher the score, the more likely to agree that tourism should be actively encouraged in Taos.

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# Concluding Insights

The main takeaways from survey findings are outlined below:

Respondents see tourism as a strong contributor to the creation of desirable employment opportunities, the promotion of local investment, and support for local businesses.

Respondents feel that they have limited influence on the development of tourism in Taos and that their concerns are unaddressed.

Respondents who identify as Native American see more of a contribution of tourism to their household than average, and most agree that tourism should be actively encouraged.

More respondents are satisfied with tourism than dissatisfied, and most agree that the benefits of tourism outweigh its drawbacks in Taos.

Those who have lived in Taos for more than 20 years are in general more critical of tourism and its impacts on the community. Those under the age of 45 also tend to be more critical about tourism.

Looking forward, respondents would like tourism actively promoted in Taos and believe that Taos should have the same amount of tourism or more.

The main concerns are availability of affordable housing and the issues around infrastructure, especially traffic and congestion brought on by tourism.

Respondents who identify as Hispanic or Latino see less of a contribution to their household from tourism, see fewer non-economic benefits, and are more critical about tourism than average.

*"I would like to see the Town of Taos let go of the fear that too much tourism will hurt us. It can only hurt us if we are irresponsible about how we build it...We don't have to "sell out" to become more prosperous as a town."*

*"I want to love Taos."*

*"We can make something beautiful for us that others can enjoy."*

*—Resident Survey Respondents*



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