

Mountain Parks Visitor Reception Centre Study

Data Analysis Report October 2005



GUIDELINES LTD

778.233.8642

www.guidelines-research.com

**Mountain Park Visitor Reception Centre Study
Data Analysis Report 2005**

Table of Contents:

0.0	Executive Summary	3
0.0	Executive Summary	3
1.0	Introduction	6
1.1	Background	6
1.2	Research Problem	6
1.3	Research Objectives	7
1.4	Methodology	7
1.5	Limitations	7
2.0	Visitor Information Centre Users	8
2.1	Who are they?	9
2.2	Where the visitor centre users come from?	10
2.3	How do the Visitor Centre Users get to the parks?	12
2.4	What type of trip are they on?	13
2.5	What places did visitor centre users go to in the parks?	15
3.0	Visitor Centre Use and Visit Type	21
4.0	Visitor Information Centre Use and the Parks Experience	24
4.1	Motivation	24
4.2	Information	27
4.3	Activities	30
4.4	Spending	32
4.5	Learning	34
4.6	Satisfaction	38
5.0	Conclusions	40
Figure 1: Visitor Centre Use and Park Experience – A Model		5
Figure 2: Visitor Centre Use and Visitor Origin		10
Figure 3: Visitor Centre Use – Places Visited in Banff		16
Figure 4: Visitor Centre Use – Places Visited in Jasper		17
Figure 5: Visitor Centre Use – Places Visited in Kootenay		18
Figure 6: Visitor Centre Use – Places Visited in Yoho		19
Figure 7: Visitor Centre Use – Visit Motives		25
Figure 8: Visitor Centre Use – Visit Motives and Party Type		26
Figure 9: Visitor Centre Use – Activities in Parks		30
Figure 10: Visitor Centre Use – Participation in Learning by Visit Type		35
Figure 11: Visitor Centre Use – Satisfaction, Visit Motives		38

**Mountain Park Visitor Reception Centre Study
Data Analysis Report 2005**

Table 1: Visitor Centre Use - Visit Origin and Party Type.....	9
Table 2: Visitor Centre Use - Visit Origin and Visit Status	11
Table 3: Visitor Centre Use – Visitor Country of Origin.....	12
Table 4: Visitor Centre Use – Nights in Parks	14
Table 5: Visitor Centre Use – Parks Visited and Average # of Places Visited in Park	15
Table 6: Visitor Centre Use – Proportion of Visitor Camping by Party Type	19
Table 7: Visitor Centre Use – Visit Type and Length of Stay	21
Table 8: Visitor Centre Use – Parks Visited and Visit Type.....	22
Table 9: Visitor Centre Use – Average # of Places Visited and Visit Type – Banff and Jasper.....	22
Table 10: Visitor Centre Use - Visit type and Visit Origin of Visitor Centre Users.....	23
Table 11: Visitor Centre Use - Learning Motivation by Visit Status.....	27
Table 12: Visitor Centre Use – During Trip Information Sources	28
Table 13: Visitor Centre Use – Average \$ spent in parks by visit type and visitor origin	32
Table 14: Visitor Centre Use – Visit length, season and party type.....	33
Table 15: Visitor Centre Use – Participation in Learning in the Parks	34
Table 16: Visitor Centre Use - Participation in Learning and Visit Status	36
Table 17: Visitor Centre Use – Average # of Correct Responses	37

0.0 Executive Summary

Parks Canada Agency commissioned Guidelines Ltd. to conduct a data analysis study on the use of the visitor information centres in the Mountain Parks. This study is based on data obtained in the 2003 Visitor Study.

In all, 23% of park visitors used the visitor information centres during their trip to help them make decisions on what to do while at the parks. The demographic profile, party composition and motivation of these visitors were similar to those of visitors who did not go to the visitor centres.

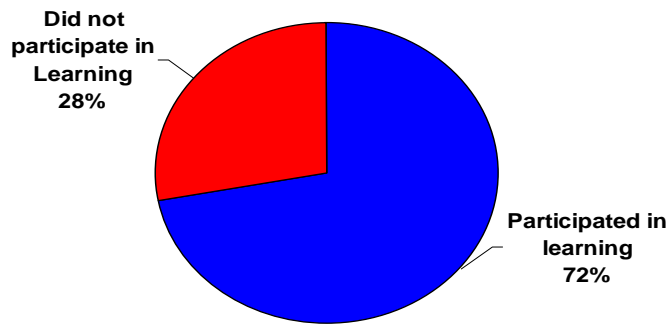
At the point of entry, visitor centre users differed from other parks visitors in variables relating to visit origin, information search patterns and some trip characteristics. There were more US and overseas visitors among visitor centre users, more first-time visitors and a larger proportion of visitors on a longer trip away from home. For many, the visit to the parks was one of many reasons for their trip. These visitors spend more money while at the parks, and they are active information seekers both before their trip and while they are at the parks. There were slightly more couples and slightly fewer families or groups among the visitor centre users, than among park visitors on average.

By visit type, many visitor centre users were on either an experience trip or a sightseeing trip. In particular, visitors on an experience trip were active information seekers and tended to use information centres more.

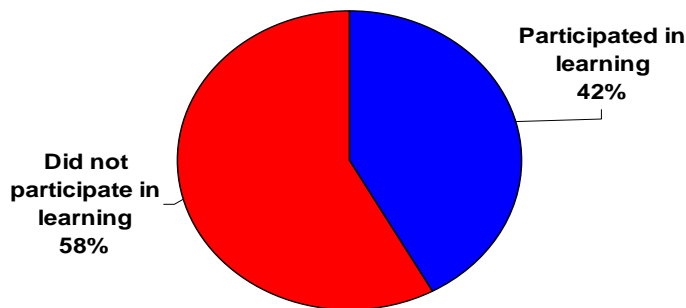
While visitor centre users were only slightly more motivated by learning when entering the parks, they ended up participating significantly more in learning-related activities while at the parks, scoring better on learning-related questions in the survey and expressing more satisfaction with their visit, particularly when it came to their learning experiences. The role of visitor centres in capturing the motivated learner audience at the parks, raising levels of participation in learning and improving the knowledge levels among visitors is an interesting area for further research.

Mountain Park Visitor Reception Centre Study Data Analysis Report 2005

Visitor Centre Users



Visitor Centre Non Users

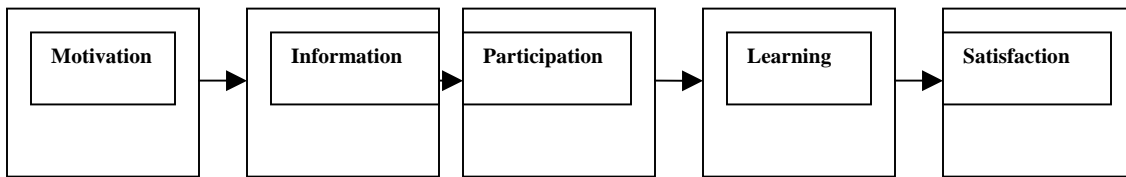


Those visitors who used the visitor centres, also participated in learning more often than those who did not use the centres. Further, visitors who had used the centres, rated their satisfaction with the park visit higher than those who did not use the centres. The largest differences in satisfaction ratings were found on items related to learning, participation in specific activities and staff friendliness in the parks.

**Mountain Park Visitor Reception Centre Study
Data Analysis Report 2005**

The results of this study suggest that the visitor centres have a role in supporting an enjoyable visit in the parks, as well as directing visitors to learn about the natural and cultural history of the area and park objectives and challenges. An interesting area for future research would be to examine further how to enhance this role by reaching an even larger proportion of visitors. The following framework, which emerged from the analysis, may be useful when designing future research or communications programs.

Figure 1: Visitor Centre Use and Park Experience – A Model



1.0 Introduction

Parks Canada Mandate:

“On behalf of the people of Canada, we protect and present nationally significant examples of Canada’s natural and cultural heritage and foster public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment in ways that ensure their ecological and commemorative integrity for present and future generations.”

This data analysis study is focusing on the use of visitor reception centres in mountain parks.

1.1 Background

Visitor centres are key tools for supporting enjoyable and safe visitor use of national parks. They also serve an important role in educating the public about the natural and cultural history of the area, as well as park objectives and challenges. Typically, these centres offer services such as interpretive displays, trip planning, backcountry information and permits and small retail outlets run by non-profit organizations that support park activities. The operation and upkeep of visitor centres require considerable investment of financial and human resources. It is therefore important to ensure that these centres are accessible to visitors, meet visitors' needs, support park communications and communicate park messages, all while making effective and efficient use of resources at hand.

1.2 Research Problem

To ensure that visitor centres serve as many visitors as possible, we need to know how and when the centres are used and to be aware of any patterns of use that are of significance. This data analysis project is one component of a set of research initiatives designed to address this research problem.

1.3 Research Objectives

This project focuses on the characteristics of visitors centre users and explores correlations between visitor centre use and activities undertaken during visits to the parks. The study is based on the data collected in the 2003 Visitor Survey in the Mountain Parks.

More specifically, the objectives of this data analysis are to answer the following questions:

- What proportion of all park visitors use the visitor centres?
- Who are the users and where do they come from?
- What type of trip are they on and what activities do they participate in at the parks?

1.4 Methodology

The SPSS 12.0 dataset for the "2003 Survey of Visitors to Banff, Jasper, Kootenay, and Yoho National Parks" was used for the analysis. This data set represents independent travelers (not including group visits) and the total number of visitors represented in this analysis is 1982.

1.5 Limitations

The survey was not originally designed to focus on visitor centre usage, and therefore only a few questions on the survey are related to visitor centre use as an information source either before or during the trip. This somewhat limits the scope of this data analysis project. For example, we cannot find out at what point in their trip visitors used the visitor centres, as centre use was not a coded diary item. However, we have a subset of visitors (23% of all respondents) that is large enough to base conclusions on, that used the centres while at the parks. Still the wording to the question we used as the independent variable indicates that the respondents had to use visitor centres as an information source when making decisions about what to do in the parks. Therefore, those visitors who came to the visitor centres for any other reasons (such as souvenir shopping, looking around, seeing exhibits) may be excluded from this analysis.

2.0 Visitor Information Centre Users

In this study, visitor information centre use is defined by answers to question four on the Visitor Survey. This question relates to the information sources used by the respondents to make decisions about what to do during their visit to the parks. In all, 23% of visitors to mountain parks used visitor information centres in their information search during their trips, and 3% used the visitor information centres before leaving home. The group that is of special interest for this study is the 23% who used the centres in the parks during their trip. Throughout this report, we will call this visitor segment of interest “visitor centre users”, and the visitors who did not use the centres will be referred to as “visitor centre non-users”. All findings discussed in this report refer to visitors classified as “visitor centre users” unless otherwise specifically indicated.

“Visitor Centre Users” are defined as those visitors to the Mountain Parks who used the Parks Canada Visitor Information Centre as an information source during their trip when making decisions about what to do in the parks.

This report presents the findings as follows:

2.0 Visitor Centre Users

This chapter describes who the visitor centre users are, where they come from and how they get to the parks, as well as what characterizes their trip to the parks.

3.0 Visitor Centre Users by Visit Type

In this chapter, we examine visitor centre users according to their visit type: getaway, habitual, experience and sightseeing visitors.

4.0 Visitor Centre Users and the Park Experience

This section examines the relationship between visitor centre use and visit motives, information search patterns, activities undertaken in the parks, learning motivation and participation in learning and finally, satisfaction with the trip components.

5.0 Conclusions

The final chapter summarizes the main findings and presents conclusions, recommendations and suggestions for further research.

**Mountain Park Visitor Reception Centre Study
Data Analysis Report 2005**

2.1 Who are they?

The demographic profile of visitor centre users does not differ significantly from the profile of those who did not use the centres. The age profile is nearly identical with the average age 47 for both users and non users, as is the party type. The only difference was that there were more couples among the visitor centre users (58%), than non users (49%). There were slightly more females (58%) among visitor centre users than among visitor centre non-users (50%).

Visitor Centre Users by Party Type

<i>Single</i>	<i>7%</i>
<i>Couple</i>	<i>58%</i>
<i>Family</i>	<i>23%</i>
<i>(Family with youngest child < 13)</i>	<i>17%</i>
<i>(Family with teenagers)</i>	<i>6%</i>
<i>Other (group)</i>	<i>13%</i>

- Of international visitors, who used the centres, an even higher share is made up of couples, particularly of the overseas visitors (71%).

Table 1: Visitor Centre Use - Visit Origin and Party Type

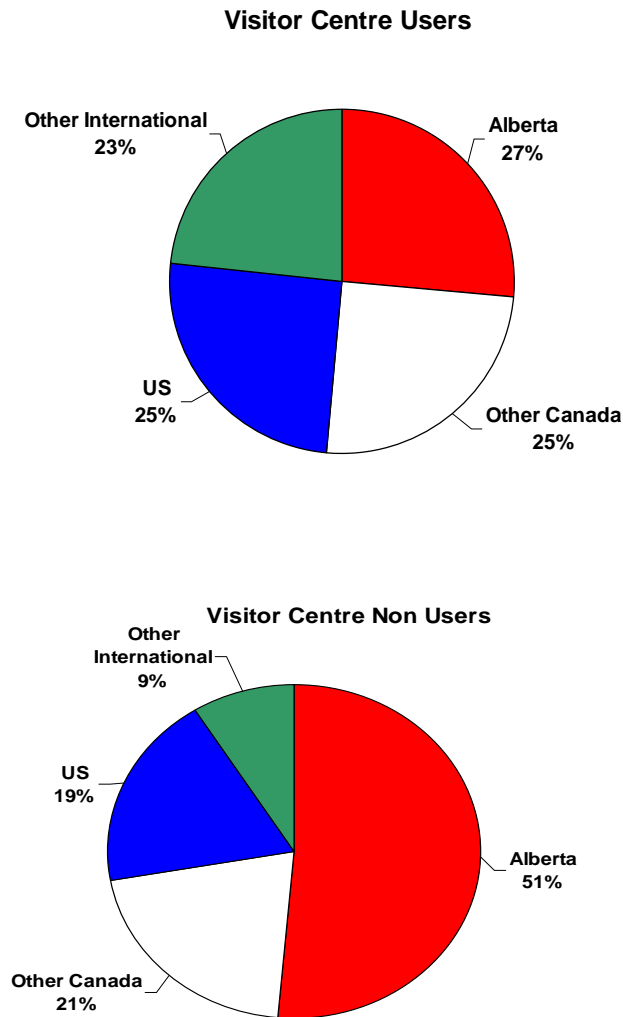
Party Type	Domestic Visitor Centre Users	US Visitor Centre Users	Overseas Visitor Centre Users
Single	7%	7%	7%
Couple	48%	65%	71%
Family with young children (< 13 yrs.)	23%	11%	11%
Family with teenagers	7%	5%	5%
Group	16%	13%	7%

Visitor centre use tends to concentrate in the summer months. The larger majority (80%) of visitor centre users visit the parks during the summer, compared with 67% of the non users. By party type, the most likely visitor centre users to come to the parks in the winter time are single travelers (31%).

2.2 Where the visitor centre users come from?

Half of the visitor centre users are international visitors, nearly equally divided between US and overseas visitors. Also, 46% of visitor centre users were first-time visitors to the parks, compared with 24% of visitors who did not use the visitor centres.

Figure 2: Visitor Centre Use and Visitor Origin



- Visitor centre users are divided fairly equally between visitors from Alberta, other parts of Canada, the US and other international destinations.

**Mountain Park Visitor Reception Centre Study
Data Analysis Report 2005**

Table 2: Visitor Centre Use - Visit Origin and Visit Status

Visitor Origin	Visitor Centre Users	Visitor Centre Non-Users
Domestic first time	11%	7%
Domestic repeat	39%	64%
US first time	19%	11%
US Repeat	7%	8%
Other first time	16%	5%
Other repeat	6%	4%
Total International Visitors	49%	30%
Total first time Visitors	46%	23%

- Visitor centre non-users were mostly from Alberta, and likely to be repeat visitors. Among visitor centre users, there is a larger proportion of international visitors and first-time visitors.

Regarding the travel patterns of the international visitor centre users, of those who stay in the parks for multiple days, 31% came directly from overseas and 12% came from overseas with a transfer in the US. Of international visitors on a day trip into the parks, the majority (80%) came directly from the US. Twenty-three percent of international visitor centre users left Canada via Vancouver.

- *There are more international visitors and more first-time visitors among those who use the visitor centres, than among park visitors in general.*
- *Visitor centre non-users are most often from within Alberta and are regular visitors to the parks.*

Of the international visitors who use the centres, 60% entered Canada by plane and 28% by private vehicle. It seems as visitor centre users, being often on a longer trip, more often than those who did not use the centres, flew to US and entered Canada from there by car.

Of international visitor centre users who came to the parks in the winter time, nearly all (94%) came to Canada by plane.

**Mountain Park Visitor Reception Centre Study
Data Analysis Report 2005**

Table 3: Visitor Centre Use – Visitor Country of Origin

Country of Origin	Used Info Centre	Did Not Use Info Centre
UK	14%	39%
France	5%	3%
Germany	35%	7%
Netherlands/Holland	9%	10%
Austria	-	1%
Other Europe	11%	13%
Japan	6%	1%
Other Asia	-	1%
Australia	20%	17%
New Zealand	2%	4%
Other	8%	3%

Among overseas visitor centre users, many are from Germany and Australia. Among those overseas visitors who did not use the centres, those from the UK form a larger proportion than what their share of the total overseas visitor population would suggest.

2.3 How do the Visitor Centre Users get to the parks?

Most visitors (94%) enter the parks by car, van, SUV or pickup. However of visitor centre users, a proportionally larger group came by motor home or RV. In all, 9% of visitor centre users came in a motor home compared with 2% of visitor centre non-users. Of the US visitor centre users, 11% came by motor home or RV, and of the overseas visitors, 25% came in a motor home or RV. There are also differences in preferred vehicle type that correlate by visit type. Thirteen percent of visitor centre users who were on a habitual visit, and 14% of visitor centre users on an experience visit, entered the parks in a motor home or RV. A large proportion (48%) of visitor centre users came to the parks in a rented vehicle where of the visitor centre non-users, only 28% were using a rented vehicle.

- ***International visitors, who came to the visitor centres in the parks, were often on a longer trip, and entered the parks in a vehicle they rented in Calgary or Vancouver.***

Mountain Park Visitor Reception Centre Study Data Analysis Report 2005

Most domestic visitors who rented a vehicle did so in Calgary (65%), and of the few US visitors who had a rented vehicle, 84% also picked up their rental vehicle from Calgary. Of overseas visitors in rented vehicles, 44% rented their vehicles in Calgary and 40% rented from Vancouver. This in turn gives an indication of the entry routes visitors used when they came to Canada from overseas. Further, if the US visitors rented a vehicle, they most likely did so at the airport (89%), whereas of the overseas visitors, only 42% picked up their rental vehicle at the airport and 58% rented from elsewhere.

There is a correlation between visitor centre users and the length of stay in the parks and whether the visitors own or rent their vehicles. The majority (69%) of visitors on a daytrip to the parks traveled in a vehicle that was owned by them or someone in the group, whereas a smaller proportion of visitors (46%) who stayed in the parks for multiple days came in their own vehicle. By party type, visitors traveling as a group were most likely to use their own vehicle to come to the parks, and families and couples who used visitor centres were more likely to have a rental vehicle. Further, 23% of visitor centre users who were on a daytrip to the parks came by bus, compared to only 3% who were visitor centre non-users.

- ***Nearly one-half of the visitor centre users arrived in a rented vehicle and one-quarter arrived by bus. Many of them, particularly overseas visitors, arrived in a rented RV or motor home.***

2.4 What type of trip are they on?

Compared to those visitors who do not use the centres, visitor centre users are on a longer trip and further away from home. Of visitors from Canada who used the visitor centres, 36% were on a 9+ night trip, and of the overseas visitors, nearly all (97%) were on a trip longer than 9 nights away from home. By party type, couples who use the centres, tended to be on the longer trips, with 64% staying more than 9 nights away from home.

Of all visitor centre users, visitors from the US were more likely to enter with a day pass than visitors from within Canada or overseas. By visit type, those on a habitual visit were more likely to be day-pass holders (75%).

Visitor centre users are on a longer trip overall, spending more nights at the parks. The largest proportion of long stays are found among overseas visitors, of whom 71% spent more than three nights in the parks. By visit type, experience and sightseeing visitors who used the centres tended to stay several nights in the parks.

**Mountain Park Visitor Reception Centre Study
Data Analysis Report 2005**

Table 4: Nights in Parks and Visitor Centre Use

Stayed in parks	0 nights	1-2 nights	3+ nights
Used visitor centres	14%	25%	34%

- A larger proportion of the visitors who stayed in the parks for several days, had also used the information centre.

Even if the visitors did not stay all their nights at the parks, some were on a multi-day trip, staying in a gateway community during the night and re-entering the next day. Of visitor centre users, 77% were on a multi-day trip. Further, by party type, 82% of couples who used visitor centres were on a multi-day trip. Of the approximately 10% of visitors, who stayed outside the parks and re-entered the next day; most (78%) were staying overnight in the Canmore area.

Visitor centre users were more likely to stay in BC at some point in their trip (34%) than visitor centre non-users (18%) and 57% of visitor centre users stayed in Alberta during their trip compared with 42% of visitor centre non-users.

The parks were not the main destination for many of those who came to the visitor centres. For 46% of visitor centre users, the trip to the parks was one of many reasons for their trip, and of the overseas travelers, 74% visited other destinations as well.

Those who used the visitor centres say that they are less likely to re-visit than those who did not. But this also reflects where the visitors are from. Seventy-eight percent of visitor centre users from within Canada will likely re-visit, whereas only 28% of visitors from overseas plan to do so. Therefore the larger proportion of international visitors in the visitor centre user group brings down the overall re-visit likelihood. Also, as the visitors who did not use the visitor centres are often repeat visitors from areas closer to the parks, their likelihood to keep re-visiting is naturally higher.

2.5 What places did visitor centre users go to in the parks?

The majority enter the parks through the Banff east gate, but there is a larger proportion of visitors, who enter through the Jasper West Gate (8%) and Yoho Gate (8%) among the visitor centre users than non users. Of overseas visitor centre users, 26% entered the parks through Jasper West Gate from Mt. Robson Provincial Park. When leaving the parks, visitor centre users (who are typically on a longer overall trip) fan out more than visitors on average, with 52% leaving towards Calgary, 14% heading towards Jasper East Gate and 9% exiting via Yoho West Gate.

Table 5: Visitor Centre Use – Parks Visited and Average # of Places Visited in Park

	Visitor Centre Users % visited	Visitor Centre User average # of places visited	Visitor Centre Non-Users % visited	Visitor Centre Non-Users average # of places visited
Banff	80%	7	79%	5
Jasper	58%	5	39%	3
Kootenay	15%	0.5	10%	0.3
Yoho	20%	0.8	9%	0.3

Visitor centre users tend to visit multiple parks, and therefore the proportion of them who visit each of the parks is higher. This is true for domestic visitors, visitors from the US and overseas visitors. Also the average number of places visited within each park by visitor centre users is higher than for visitor centre non-users.

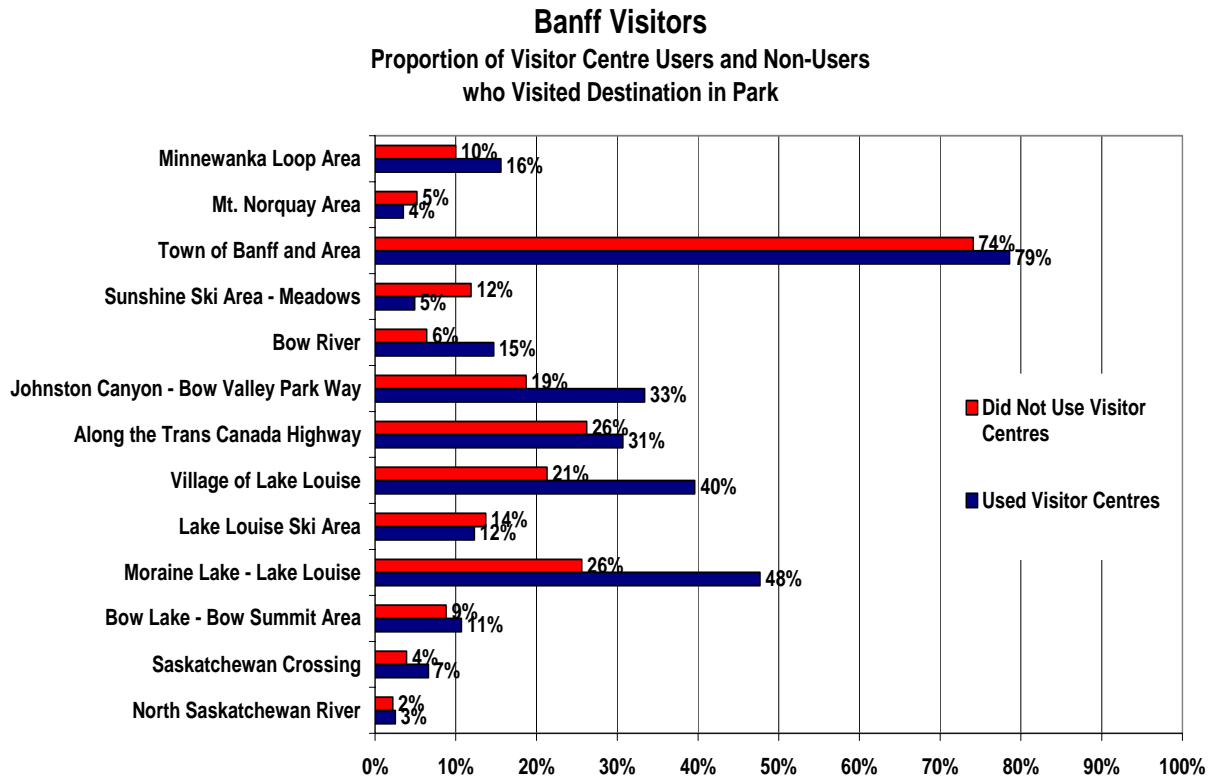
When it comes to international visitors, 80% of overseas visitor centre users also visited Jasper, compared with 59% of those overseas visitors who did not go to a visitor centre.

By visit type, those on an experience or sightseeing visit who did use the visitor centres were significantly more likely to visit Jasper and Yoho, than visitor centre non-users.

In Yoho, 20% of visitor centre users visited at least one place in the Yoho parks, whereas only 9% of those not using visitor centres did so. This same pattern applies to Yoho visits by season, with visitor centre users in both the summer and winter more likely to visit at least one place at the parks.

**Mountain Park Visitor Reception Centre Study
Data Analysis Report 2005**

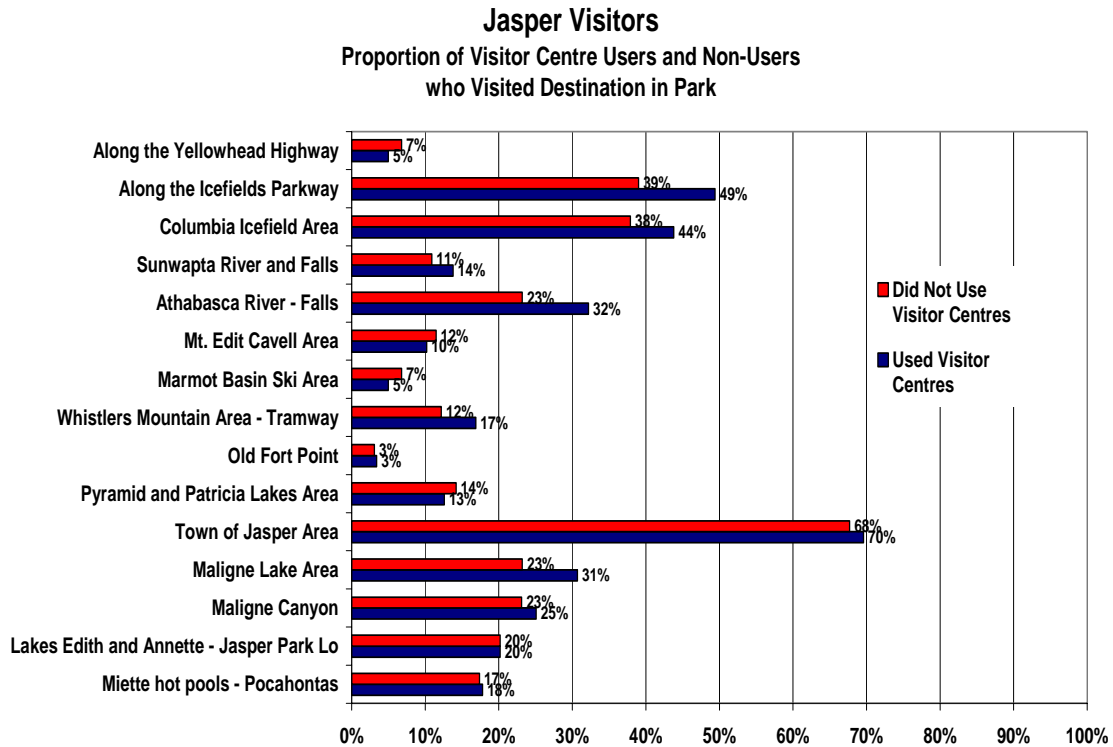
Figure 3: Visitor Centre Use – Places Visited in Banff



In Banff, visitor centre users visited the Johnston Canyon-Bow Valley Park Way, the Village of Lake Louise and the Moraine Lake-Lake Louise areas more often than the non users. Further, they were also more often visiting most of the other points of interest in Banff (except the ski areas).

Mountain Park Visitor Reception Centre Study Data Analysis Report 2005

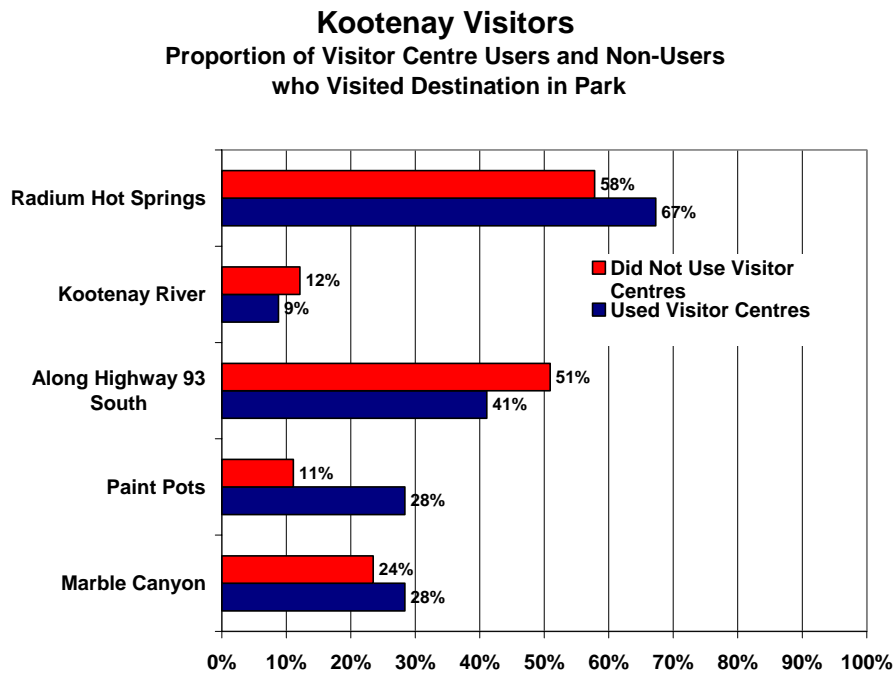
Figure 4: Visitor Centre Use – Places Visited in Jasper



In Jasper, the difference between visitor centre users and non-users was not as large as at the other parks. However, those who used the centres as information sources were more likely to have visited areas along the Icefields Parkway, the Columbia Icefield Area, the Athabasca River and Falls and the Maligne Lake area.

Mountain Park Visitor Reception Centre Study Data Analysis Report 2005

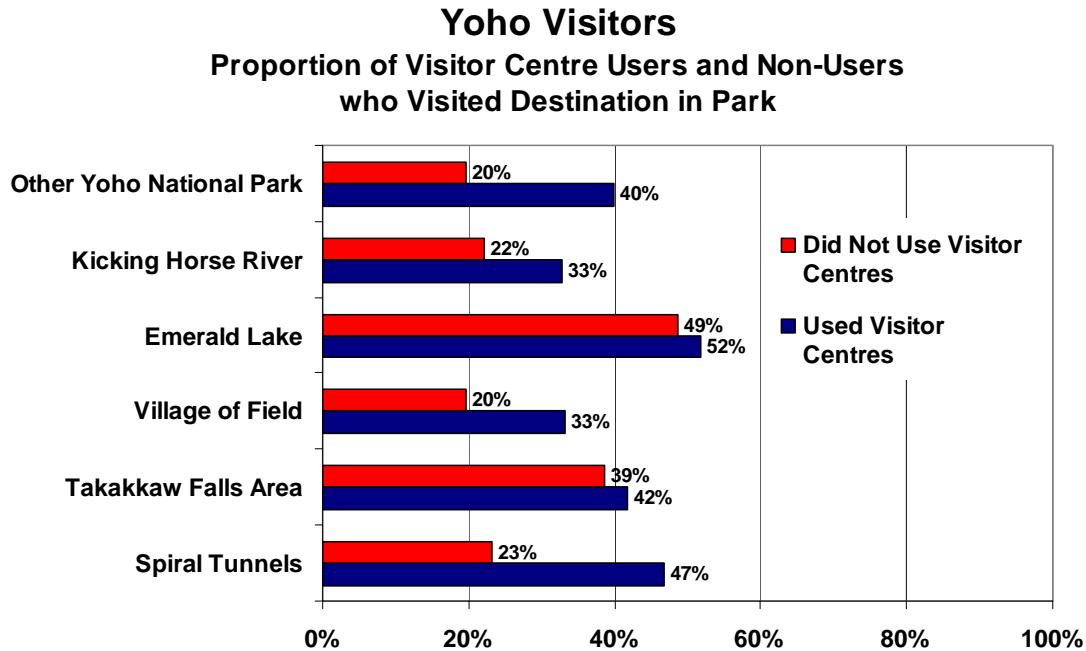
Figure 5: Visitor Centre Use – Places Visited in Kootenay



In Kootenay, visitor centre users were more likely to have visited the Paint Pots and Radium Hot Springs, but less likely to have visited areas along Highway 93 South.

**Mountain Park Visitor Reception Centre Study
Data Analysis Report 2005**

Figure 6: Visitor Centre Use – Places Visited in Yoho



Again, visitor centre users also visited more places in Yoho parks. They were especially more likely to visit the Spiral Tunnels, Village of Field, Kicking Horse River and other destinations in Yoho National Park.

One in five (21%) of visitor centre users were camping in the parks.

Table 6: Visitor Centre Use – Proportion of Visitor Camping by Party Type

	<i>Visitor Centre Users</i>			<i>Visitor Centre Non Users</i>		
Total camping	21%			7%		
Place	% camping	couple	family	% camping	couple	family
Banff	16%	17%	23%	4%	4%	5%
Johnston Canyon	2%	4%	-**)	1%	0%	1%
Town of Jasper	0%*)	0%	-	0%	0%	0%
Tunnel camping	13%	14%	21%	3%	3%	4%
Jasper camping	13%	18%	7%	4%	6%	3%

*)Value of 0% indicates that the proportion of observations was between 0.1 and 0.4

**) A missing value noted as a – indicates that there were no observations in the subcategory

**Mountain Park Visitor Reception Centre Study
Data Analysis Report 2005**

- Visitor centre users are twice as likely to camp in the parks than the non users.
- By party type, couples and families were among the most avid campers. Nearly a quarter of families who used the centres camped in Banff or did tunnel camping, whereas couples who camped were more likely to camp in Jasper or Banff.
- By visit origin, 29% of overseas visitor centre users camped in Jasper, 21% did tunnel camping and 30% camped in Jasper.

Finally, fewer visitor centre users are definitely planning to return to the mountain parks (37%), compared with 54% of visitor centre non-users who plan to do so. This is consistent with the earlier findings that visitor centre users are more likely to be international visitors on a longer trip from home. They are most likely directing their next long holiday to a different destination, whereas the domestic visitors from nearby areas, who don't use visitor centres as much, are more likely to return in the future. This is particularly the case with winter visitors (who did not use the centres), who are likely to return, with 90% either definitely or probably planning another trip. By party type and type of trip, visitors on a daytrip and families, both among visitor centre users and non-users, are most likely to return on another trip.

3.0 Visitor Centre Use and Visit Type

The different types of visits to the parks are segmented into getaway visits (34%), habitual visits (39%), experience visits (12%) and sightseeing visits (15%). The overall distribution of visit types among visitor centre users follows this general pattern. However, we find that more visitor centre users are on an experience or a sightseeing visit, than visitor centre non-users. This is due to the larger proportion of international visitors among those who come to the centres.

Table 7: Visitor Centre Use – Visit Type and Length of Stay

Stayed in parks 3+ nights	Getaway Visit	Habitual Visit	Experience Visit	Sightseeing Visit
Used info centre	36%	33%	71%	52%
Did not use info centre	26%	20%	42%	39%

Also, of visitors who stayed in the parks for more than three nights, v
The following are some differences by party type, visit length, season and visit type:

- Singles and couples who stayed in the parks for multiple days, and used the visitor centres, were likely on an experience visit.
- Of the winter visitors who did not use the centres, half (50%) were on a habitual visit.
- People who were on a daytrip to the parks and used the centres were likely on a habitual visit (46%). Also, of families who used the centres, 42% were on a habitual visit.
- During the summer, visitor centres see the proportion of people on an experience visit increase to 21%.

**Mountain Park Visitor Reception Centre Study
Data Analysis Report 2005**

Table 8: Visitor Centre Use – Parks Visited and Visit Type

Park	Visitor Centre Users				Visitor Centre Non-Users			
	Getaway	Habitual	Experience	Sightseeing	Getaway	Habitual	Experience	Sightseeing
Banff	78%	69%	91%	92%	79%	76%	80%	88%
Jasper	45%	58%	74%	60%	36%	34%	54%	48%
Kootenay	6%	18%	17%	19%	8%	10%	10%	14%
Yoho	10%	7%	40%	38%	7%	6%	18%	14%

High Proportion

Although nearly all visitor centre users visited Banff, a higher proportion of people on a habitual visit or an experience visit visited Jasper, and of those on experience or sightseeing visit, a higher proportion visited Yoho park.

Table 9: Visitor Centre Use – Average # of Places Visited and Visit Type – Banff and Jasper

Park	Visitor Centre Users Average # of places visited				Visitor Centre Non-Users Average # of places visited			
	Getaway	Habitual	Experience	Sightseeing	Getaway	Habitual	Experience	Sightseeing
Banff	6.7	3.0	12.2	9.5	5.5	3.1	9.1	8.3
Jasper	3.6	2.5	9.2	5.4	2.6	1.6	5.6	4.8

The above table shows that the visitor centre users on an experience trip visited on average the most places in Banff as well as Jasper.

The average number of places visited in Yoho and Kootenay parks was too low to compare averages in a meaningful way, but we can compare the proportions of visitors who did visit at least one place and those who did not visit any places at all in these two parks. Of all Yoho visitors, 11% did visit at least one place, and of visitor centre users, 20% did visit at least one place in Yoho. By visit type, 41% of visitors on an experience visit, and 32% of visitors on a sightseeing visit who used visitor centres, visited one or more places in Yoho. In Kootenay, of visitor centre users, 15% visited one or more places, compared with 10% of those who did not use centres as an information source. Yet, for Kootenay park, the differences between visitor centre users and non-users, and by party type or visit type, were smaller than in the other parks.

**Mountain Park Visitor Reception Centre Study
Data Analysis Report 2005**

There were also some differences found by visit type when it comes to camping in the parks. Those visitor centre users who were on an experience visit, were the most likely to camp in Banff (24%), in the Tunnels (21%) and in Jasper (30%).

We learned in the earlier segmentation analysis that 34% of visitors to the parks are on a getaway visit (enjoying spending time relaxing in the parks), 39% are on a habitual visit (coming to the parks to engage in their favourite sport such as skiing), 12% are on an experience visit (taking part in a multitude of activities) and 15% are on a sightseeing visit.

When looking at visitor information centre use and visit type, among visitor centre users from overseas Canada we have almost equal proportions of visitors on getaway visits (21%), habitual visits (27%), experience visits (27%) and sightseeing visits (26%), compared to the domestic visitor centre users and those who do not use the centres, who are more often on a getaway or a habitual visit.

Table 10: Visitor Centre Use - Visit type and Visit Origin of Visitor Centre Users

Visit Type	Visitor Centre Non Users	Visitor Centre Users	Domestic Visitor centre users	US Visitor centre users	Overseas Visitor centre users
Getaway	36%	30%	32%	32%	21%
Habitual	41%	33%	36%	31%	27%
Experience	10%	19%	15%	20%	27%
Sightseeing	14%	19%	16%	18%	26%

4.0 Visitor Information Centre Use and the Parks Experience

4.1 Motivation

Trip motives are of interest when studying visitor centre usage, as we can explore if there is a link between visit motives and the likelihood to use the visitor centres as an information source. When we compare the visit motives of visitor centre users with the motives of visitor centre non-users, we can reach conclusions about whether the people who use visitor centres are different from non-users in ways other than demographics or trip characteristics.

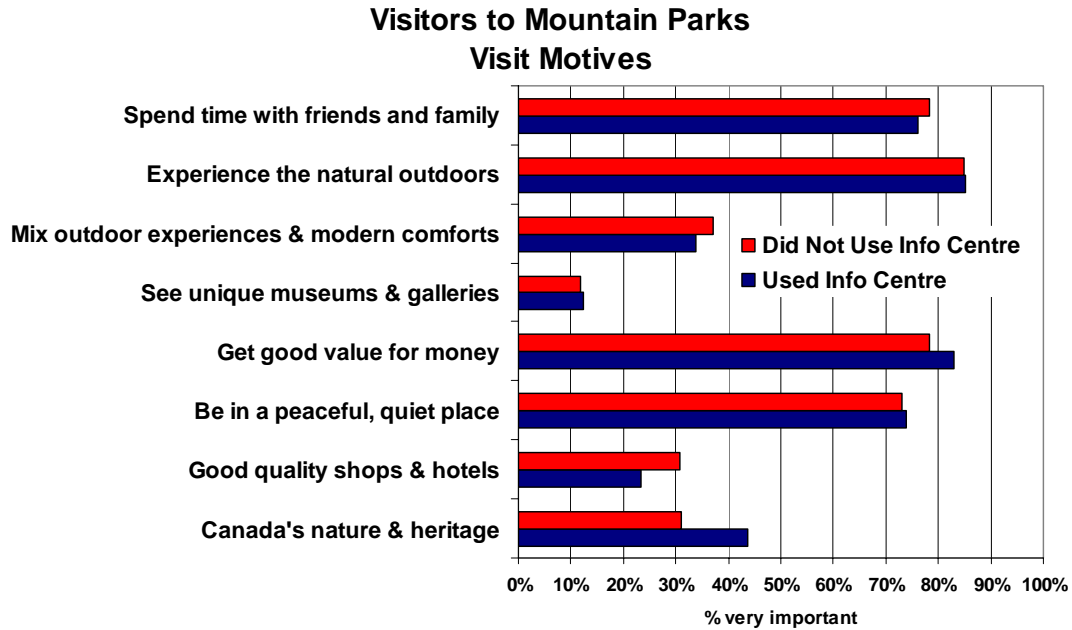
At this point we already know that visitor centre users are typically on a longer trip, visiting several destinations, and that they are likely first-time visitors, from overseas or the US, and arriving in a rented vehicle or a motor home. But are they different when it comes to reasons for their trip and what motivates them? Can we argue that the people who use visitor centres are active information seekers with a keen interest in learning who therefore get more out of their trip? Or is the fact that they did get more and better directions, guidance and advice for their trip one of the (main?) reasons behind the fact that they did more while at the parks, participated in learning and were more satisfied regarding some elements of their trip? Let's take a look.

Of visitor centre users, most come to the parks for recreation, as do parks visitors in general. Only in the single visitor category, did 20% come for business. As mentioned in the earlier chapters, for 46% of visitor centre users, the visit to the parks was one of the many reasons for their trip, and this applies particularly to couples and families who use the centres. The exception is winter travelers, of whom 68% state their visit as the main reason for their trip.

The chart below illustrates that in general, the motives of visitor centre users and non-users are the same.

**Mountain Park Visitor Reception Centre Study
Data Analysis Report 2005**

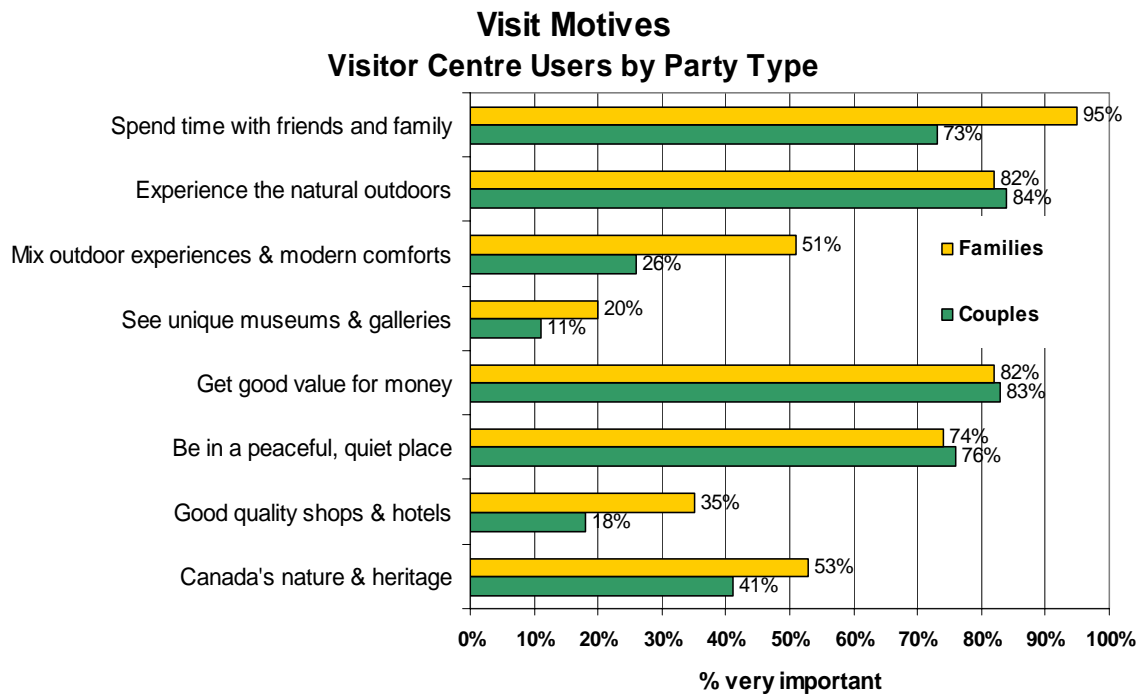
Figure 7: Visitor Centre Use – Visit Motives



Overall, the main motivators among visitor centre users and non-users are to spend time with friends and family, experience the natural outdoors, get good value for money and be in a peaceful and quiet place. Only the item “learn about Canada’s nature & heritage” brings about a larger difference between those who seek information from visitor centres and those who don’t. So overall, these two visitor segments are motivated by same elements in their visit. That, in turn, could mean that the differences we observe in activities, learning and satisfaction are not due to a different motivation.

**Mountain Park Visitor Reception Centre Study
Data Analysis Report 2005**

Figure 8: Visitor Centre Use – Visit Motives and Party Type



Among visitor centre users, we however find motivational differences by type of party. Visitor centre users traveling with their families are significantly more motivated by spending time with their family, but also by mixing outdoor experiences with modern comforts; seeing unique museums and galleries, good quality shops and hotels; and learning about Canada's nature and heritage.

As a special item relating to motivation, we examined the motivation to participate in learning that we identified in the analysis done in conjunction with the spring 2005 ecological integrity research project. That project revealed a subgroup of visitors named "motivated learners", who scored high on the questions relating to motivation to learn while at the parks. When we bring in the concept "motivated learners" to this analysis, we can see that there is a connection between the learning motivation, visit status and visitor centre use.

**Mountain Park Visitor Reception Centre Study
Data Analysis Report 2005**

Table 11: Visitor Centre Use and Learning Motivation by Visit Status

Learning Motivation and Visit Status	Visitor Info Centre Users	Visitor Info Centre Non-Users
Motivated – first visit	29%	14%
Motivate – repeat visit	32%	42%
Non-motivated first visit	17%	9%
Non-motivated – repeat visit	21%	34%

Among visitor centre users, there is a higher proportion of motivated learners who are on their first visit to the parks. Similarly, among the visitor centre non-users, there are proportionally more non-motivated learners who are on a repeat visit to the parks.

- ***Whereas the motivation pattern between visitors who use the visitor centres in the parks and those who don't use them is very similar, there are some differences between the learning motivation of users and non-users.***

4.2 Information

Visitor centre users are more active information seekers both before and during their trip compared to non users. Regarding pre-trip information sources, they rely slightly less on their own experience, and ask slightly more often for suggestions on what to do in the parks from friends and relatives. They are especially fond of maps and travel guide books, and are more likely to belong to a travel club such as the CAA or AAA. They also visit the websites more often than those who don't visit the centres in the parks. The preference for obtaining maps prior to their trip is a pattern that holds true for all nationalities of visitors. US visitors are the most active map users, most likely because they international visitors who have driven to the parks from home with their own vehicle. Overseas visitors also use maps, but during their trip they like to use travel guide books.

In short, visitor centre users are people who seem to plan their trip carefully. In all, the most used information sources pre-trip are the same as those used by those who don't go to the visitor centres, but visitor centre users are just more likely to use them and are less likely to rely on their own experience.

**Mountain Park Visitor Reception Centre Study
Data Analysis Report 2005**

Differences in information search by visitor centre users by visit type:

- Visitors on a getaway trip use the Parks Canada website more often than others.
- Those on a habitual trip use travel guide books and accommodation guides more than visitors on other types of visits.
- Experience visitors use the maps most of all visit types, and are the most likely to visit the Parks Canada website before their trip.
- Sightseeing visitors are more likely users of the Travel Alberta Website, as well as other websites pre-trip, than visitors on other types of visits.

Table 12: Visitor Centre Use – During Trip Information Sources

Other Information Sources Used During Trip	Used Visitor Information Centre	Did Not Use Visitor Information Centre
Own past experience	25%	52%
Map(s)	50%	36%
“Mountain Guide” Publication	31%	22%
Info Centre in Alberta or BC	42%	11%
Attraction/activity brochures	29%	16%
Travel Guide books	24%	16%
Billboards or Road Signs	25%	14%

During their trip, the information-seeking patterns again differ between visitor centre users and non-users. For example, those who use visitor centre services have most likely also visited an information centre in Alberta or BC, and are more likely to use other printed information sources during their trip, whereas the non-users rely heavily on their own experience (being often repeat visitors) as well as maps and the Mountain Guide.

By visit type, of visitor centre users, those on an experience or sightseeing visit are the most active during their trip as information seekers, using maps, the Mountain Guide, and attraction and activity brochures approximately twice as often as parks visitors on average. The visitors on an experience visit also use the travel guidebooks and travel guides more often than visitors on any other type of visit. In all, the experience visitors who come to the visitor centres are the most active users of the different information sources available.

**Mountain Park Visitor Reception Centre Study
Data Analysis Report 2005**

It appears that visitor centre users are generally more active seekers of information both prior to their trip and during their trip. They rely less on their experience and more on secondary information sources, depending on the type of visit they are on.

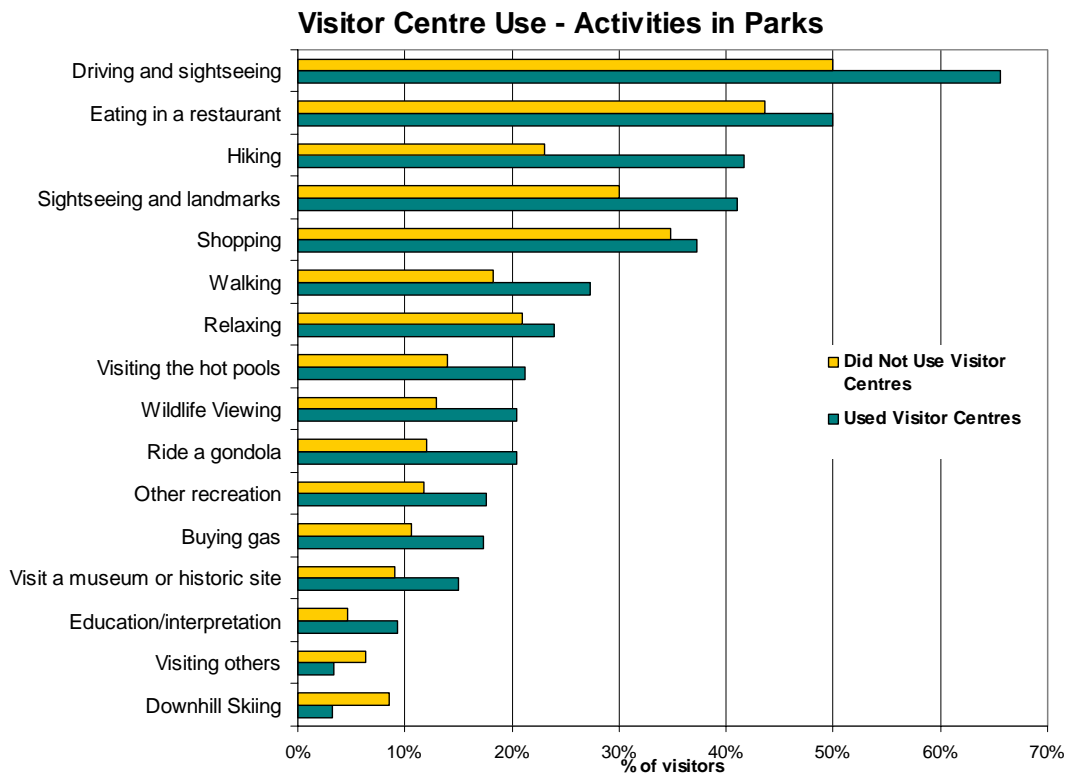
The use of maps is a behaviour that stands out, particularly when it comes to Canadian visitors. In short, of domestic visitors, visitor centre users are more likely to also be users of maps, indicating that they are on a trip farther away from home, beyond their familiar territory. It is also interesting that sightseeing visitors tend to frequent other visitor centres outside the parks, and that many of the visitors on an experience trip are heavy users of guide books and travel club memberships. Finally, visitor centre users were twice as likely to have used the Parks Canada website, www.parkscanada.gc.ca.

**Mountain Park Visitor Reception Centre Study
Data Analysis Report 2005**

4.3 Activities

Visitor centre users are more active in the parks, engaging in more activities than those who do not visit the visitor centres.

Figure 9: Visitor Centre Use – Activities in Parks



Visitors centre users engage more often in most of the activities in the parks, except for visiting others and downhill skiing. They do significantly more driving and sightseeing, and walking and hiking, but they also visit more tourist attractions (such as the hot pools), ride the gondola, visit museums and historic sites and participate in education and/or interpretation activities.

Mountain Park Visitor Reception Centre Study Data Analysis Report 2005

Of the domestic visitors, those who used the centres were more likely to participate in driving and sightseeing (58%) and sightseeing and landmarks (35%), than those who did not use the visitor centres. This supports the idea that visitors from within Canada who do not come to the centres are on a "routine" trip from nearby, whereas domestic visitors who do come to the centres are being "tourists in their own country" and are typically on a longer trip away from home, more often on a sightseeing or experience visit.

Overseas visitors who use the centres participate in considerably more wildlife viewing, visiting the hot pools, participating in education and interpretation, visiting museums and historic sites, and engaging in "other recreation" than overseas visitors who do not use the visitor centres. Also, all the international visitors who visited the centres did significantly more walking and hiking in the parks than those who did not visit the centres.

As overseas visitors generally are in the parks for the first time, and have little prior information or experience, these findings suggest that the information the visitors obtained from the centres may have had a central role in what they did on their trip. These findings also reflect the pre-trip motivation patterns for overseas visitors.

The following points summarize some of the differences in levels of engagement in activities by visit type, trip length, season and party type among visitor centre users:

- All visitor centre users did more driving and sightseeing, and sightseeing and landmarks, regardless of their type of visit, than their visitor centre non-user counterparts. Of these, visitors on experience and sightseeing visits were at the top of the scale, with nearly all of them having done sightseeing by car (90%+).
- Those on an experience visit were more likely to have visited the hot pools (47%) and museums and historic sites (36%), while those on a sightseeing visit were more likely than others to do wildlife viewing and to ride the gondola (33%).
- Visitor centre users on a getaway trip tended to do more walking (38%) or hiking (50%) more than visitors on average, of whom 20% did walking and 28% went hiking. Visitors on an experience visit were the most likely to go for a hike (83%) of all visitor centre users.

**Mountain Park Visitor Reception Centre Study
Data Analysis Report 2005**

By trip length, the majority (71%) of visitor centre users who stayed in the parks for multiple days did driving and sightseeing, compared with 48% of multi-day visitors who did not use the centres. Of multi-day visitors, 12% also participated in education/interpretation and 24% rode the gondola, a significantly higher proportion than those who did not use the centres.

By party type, families or larger groups were the most likely to engage in sightseeing and landmarks (47% and 48%). Couples were likely to participate in interpretation (11%) and ride the gondola (22%), as were the "other" i.e. larger groups (29%). Of party types, hiking was done mostly by couples who used the centres (49%).

4.4 Spending

On average, visitors spent \$701 during their trip in the parks. Visitor centre users spent more than this average, because they tended to be on longer trips and they participated in more activities. The average amount spent by visitor centre users during their trip in the parks was \$875, whereas visitor centre non-users spent an average of \$647. The table below shows the average amount spent by visitor origin and visit type.

Table 13: Visitor Centre Use – Average \$ spent in parks by visit type and visitor origin

Average \$ spent in parks	Used Visitor Centre	Did Not Use Visitor Centre
Canada	\$615	\$474
US	\$1161	\$1052
Other	\$1131	\$1199
Getaway	\$708	\$622
Habitual	\$756	\$515
Experience	\$1127	\$909
Sightseeing	\$1087	\$914

US visitors are the biggest spenders in the parks, and by visit type, experience visitors who use the visitor centres, tend to spend more in the parks than those who do not.

**Mountain Park Visitor Reception Centre Study
Data Analysis Report 2005**

Table 14: Visitor Centre Use – Visit length, season and party type

Average \$ spent in parks	Used Visitor Centre	Did Not Use Visitor Centre
Day Trip	\$406	\$239
Multiple Days	\$1015	\$924
Single	\$567	\$464
Couple	\$817	\$678
Family	\$1161	\$534
Other	\$805	\$820
Summer Visit	\$912	\$669
Winter Visit	\$671	\$608

Visitor centre users spent more money in the parks both on day trips and multi-day trips. Only one type of visitor – the “other” group – spent on average slightly more if they did not use the visitor centres.

**Mountain Park Visitor Reception Centre Study
Data Analysis Report 2005**

4.5 Learning

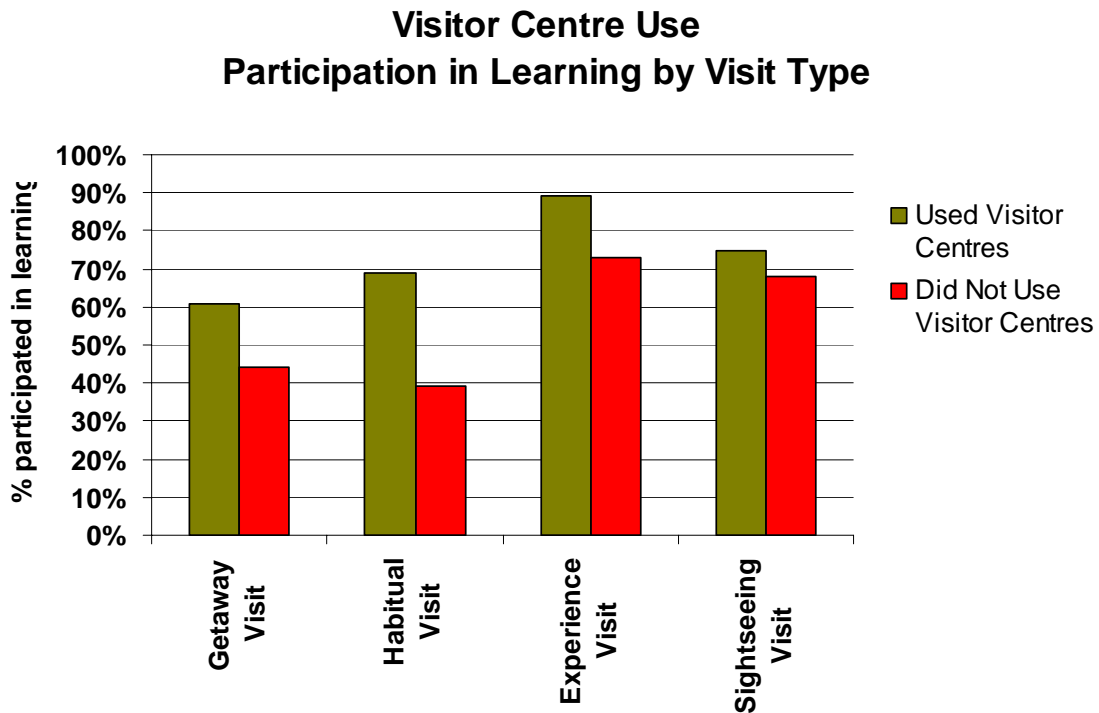
In total, 72% of visitor centre users participated in learning, compared to 48% for visitor centre non-users, a 24% difference. Therefore, we can hypothesize that visiting the centres had a positive role in learning participation among park visitors, even though at this stage we can not prove the direction of the relationship. The US visitors who used the visitor centres had the highest level of participation in learning (83%) where the domestic visitors who did not use the centres had the lowest participation in learning (41%).

Table 15: Visitor Centre Use – Participation in Learning in the Parks

Visitor Centre Use	Participated in Learning
Total Visitor Centre Users	72%
Domestic	65%
US	83%
Other International	73%
Total Visitor Centre Non-Users	48%
Domestic	41%
US	69%
Other International	62%
High Proportion	
Low Proportion	

Mountain Park Visitor Reception Centre Study
Data Analysis Report 2005

Figure 10: Visitor Centre Use – Participation in Learning by Visit Type



The above chart shows that the visitors on an experience visit who also visited the visitor centres, participated in learning most with nearly 90% taking part in some type of learning-related activity in the parks.

The relative difference in learning participation among visitor centre users and non users, is largest among those on a getaway visit or a habitual visit –visitors who are often repeat visitors from nearby and who typically have a lower participation rate in learning. Of visitors on a habitual visit who did use the visitor centres, nearly 70% participated in learning, whereas the proportion among the visitor centre non-users was below 40%. In all, for each of the visit types, the participation in learning was about one-third higher among those who visited the centres than among those who did not.

**Mountain Park Visitor Reception Centre Study
Data Analysis Report 2005**

Table 16: Visitor Centre Use - Participation in Learning and Visit Status

VISITOR CENTRE USERS	Day Trip	Multiple Days	Couple	Family
Participated in learning	52%	77%	74%	73%
First time visit	20%	45%	46%	29%
Repeat visit	32%	31%	26%	44%
Did not participate in learning	48%	23%	26%	27%
First time visit	15%	5%	6%	10%
Repeat visit	33%	18%	19%	17%

Visitors were more likely to participate in learning if they were on a multi-day trip. Of those who did participate, couples on their first visit and families on a repeat visit were the most likely participants.

- A larger proportion of families who had used the visitor centres, had participated in learning (40%) than of families who did not use visitor centres (22%).

The survey also contained a set of questions that measured visitors' knowledge relating to a set of statements about aspects of Canada, the parks and protection. The table below shows the mean scores among visitor centre users and non-users. Bearing in mind that proportionally more of those who used the visitor centres participated in learning, the results add to the notion that going to the visitor centres has a role in participation in learning and may influence actual learning in the parks.

**Mountain Park Visitor Reception Centre Study
Data Analysis Report 2005**

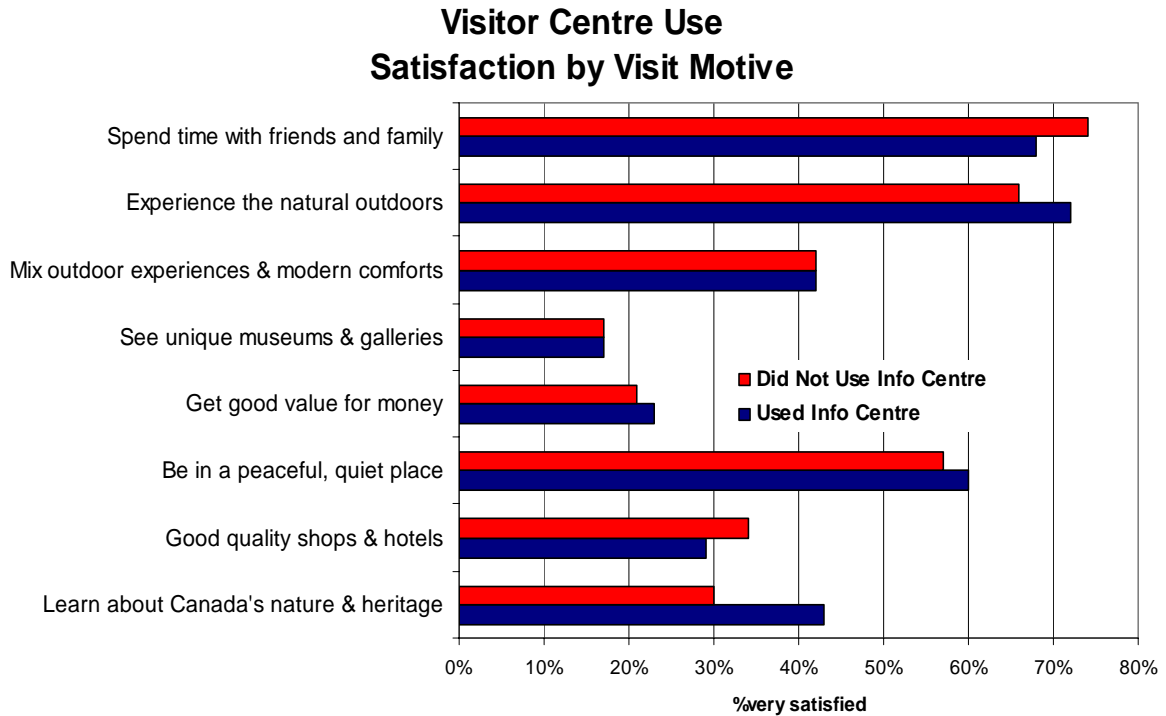
Table 17: Visitor Centre Use – Average # of Correct Responses

	Used Visitor Centres	Did Not Use Visitor Centres
Overall score	5.08	4.78
Banff score	3.30	3.15
Jasper score	3.37	3.16
Kootenay score	2.77	2.65
Yoho score	2.95	2.87

Visitor centre users score consistently higher in the questions. As the visit motives of these two groups were fairly similar, as was the learning motivation, we can assume that the differences in the information-seeking patterns influence visitors' behaviour in parks. Those who went to the visitor centres participated in more learning activities, which may have an impact on their learning.

4.6 Satisfaction

Figure 11: Visitor Centre Use – Satisfaction, Visit Motives



Visitor centre users were significantly more satisfied regarding the learning in the parks, their experience of the natural outdoors and being in a peaceful, quiet place. They also rated their satisfaction with some of the other motives slightly higher, but the difference is small. Their satisfaction is slightly below the other visitors on a couple of items; but these items were rated also as being of low importance to them at the beginning of the survey.

Some differences emerged by sub-category. Families who used the visitor centres were more satisfied on several items than those families who did not use the centres. For example, families who used the centres, were more satisfied with the opportunity to learn about Canada's natural and historic heritage (51% very satisfied), whereas only 32% of those families who did not use the centres were very satisfied. Also when it comes to seeing unique museums, galleries and culture, 26% of families using the visitor centres were very satisfied, compared with 17% of families who did not visit the centres.

**Mountain Park Visitor Reception Centre Study
Data Analysis Report 2005**

Among winter time visitors to the parks, those who used the visitor centres were significantly more satisfied regarding their experience of good quality hotels (49% very satisfied) and being in a peaceful quiet place (71% very satisfied), compared with 36% and 56% respectively for the visitor centre non-users.

Regarding the satisfaction with specific elements of the trip, the significant difference between visitor centre users and non-users as a whole and by subcategory are summarized below:

- The families who used the centres were significantly more satisfied with the Parks Canada website (57% very satisfied) compared with non-user families (43%).
- Visitor centre users were more satisfied with guided walks and tours (56% very satisfied) and of single visitors, 84% were very satisfied.
- Overall, visitor centre users were more satisfied with The Mountain Guide publication (49% very satisfied) and of the multi-day visitors who used the centres, 57% were very satisfied.
- Visitor centre user families were more satisfied with the history/geography information they received from business staff in the parks with 51% very satisfied, whereas the overall satisfaction was 44% very satisfied.
- The families who used the centres were also more satisfied with the friendliness of staff in the parks (58% very satisfied) compared with 48% of the families who did not use the centres.
- Winter visitors who used the centres were more satisfied with the overall value for money (23% very satisfied), whereas the overall satisfaction was 16%. Visitor centre users were also more satisfied with value for money in hotels.
- Families who used the centres were more satisfied with the Columbia Icefields Snowcoach tour (74% very satisfied) than the overall satisfaction of the parks visitors at 59%.

5.0 Conclusions

Approximately one in four visitors to the parks used the visitor centres as a source of information on what to do in the parks. Demographically, the visitors to the mountain parks who use the visitor centres are similar to those visitors who don't use the centres. Both groups are also seeking similar experiences in terms of what they want to "get out of" their trip (motivators).

However, there are some differences between the two groups when it comes to where they come from and what kind of trip they are on. Visitor centre users tend to come from farther away and be on a longer trip. There are proportionally more overseas visitors in this group and many of them are touring in a motor home or an RV. Those who are from farther away geographically are more likely to be couples rather than families with young children. In all, as a rough generalization, we can say that the visitor centre users are likely to be either Canadian visitors on a longer trip from home, US visitors on a destination visit to the parks arriving in their own vehicle, or overseas visitors spending up to a month or more touring Canada or Canada and the US. Many are in the parks for the first time, but not all. And visitor centre non-users are mostly repeat visitors from Alberta.

Visitor centre users are distinguished by their tendency to conduct a thorough information search both before and during their trip. Visitors from within Canada and the US do even more pre-trip information searching, while the overseas visitors naturally start obtaining information when they arrive to the continent and are therefore already on their trip. There is also a strong likelihood that if the visitors used the centres in the parks, they visited information centres elsewhere – that is, there may be a type of traveller who is an "avid information centre user", when the influences of other variables such as visit status (first-time/repeat) and length of trip (weekend/month) are eliminated. Further research could shed some light into the cause-effect relationships we can now only hypothesize about within the framework of this study.

Visitor centre users also visited more places in the parks and participated in more activities. As their motivators were fairly similar with those who did not go to the visitor centres, we can conclude that the additional information that the visitor centre users received from the centres (as well as their other information-searching activities) had some effect in increasing their activity and participation levels in the parks.

Mountain Park Visitor Reception Centre Study Data Analysis Report 2005

While the motivators may be largely the same for visitor centre users and non-users, there is one area where there is a difference. Being avid information seekers, they are also more motivated by learning, and they are therefore an opportune target for educational messages and learning-related activities in the parks. While there is some proportional difference between the motivated learners, there is a much larger difference between the proportion of those who participated in learning and those who did not, between the visitor centre users and non-users. This in turn supports the idea that the audience inside the centres is providing a pre-selected group of people who participate in learning, and therefore furthers the purpose of the centres as educating the public about the natural and cultural history of the area as well as park objectives and challenges. Of visitors who did not use the info centres, 41% participated in learning whereas 72% of the visitors centre users did so.

The visitor survey this analysis is based on included questions testing the learning and/or knowledge levels of respondents on some park-related facts or other facts on history and culture. The visitor centre users scored higher on all sets of questions than those who did not use the centres. Again, the causal relationship is not clear, but it seems natural to assume that the higher levels of participation in learning-related activities had some effect on the scores. Further, this finding can serve as evidence that the visitor centres fulfill their mandate of educating the public who visits the parks.

Visitor centre users spend more money in the parks, both on day trips and multi-day trips. This may be caused by several factors, some potentially being the length and investment in the overall trip, perhaps being the "big trip" that is not made on a regular basis and/or the financial status of the users.

Finally, the visitor centre users tend to be more satisfied with their visit, especially when it comes to the learning-related items. They also express more satisfaction with guided walks and tours, the Mountain Guide and the friendliness of parks staff. In all, this finding suggests that the visitor centres therefore also fulfilled the second part of their objective of "supporting an enjoyable and safe visit for the visitors".

GUIDELINES LTD
778.233.8642

www.guidelines-research.com