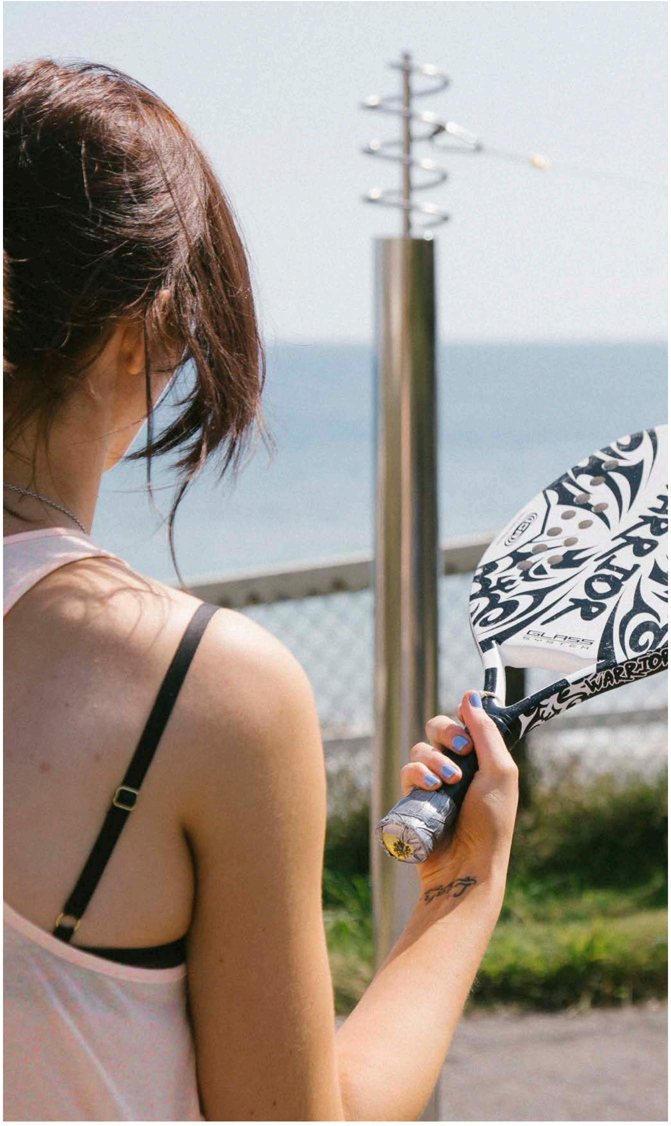
national coastal tourism academy

# Activity Holidays: Are they the key to growth on the English Coast?

Perceptions, attitudes and behaviour in the Activity Holidays market




## ABOUT US

The National Coastal Tourism Academy (NCTA) works to accelerate growth in the coastal visitor economy focused on improving the visitor experience, supporting industry and bridging gaps in research for coastal tourism development.

**phone** 01202 962 071
**visit** coastaltourismacademy.co.uk
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## INTRODUCTION

Activity Breaks have been identified by previous NCTA research as a growing trend and a key opportunity for growth for the coast, in particular for off-peak growth.

The research was commissioned to understand more about this potential opportunity and to help businesses and destinations understand what they can do to attract more of the activity market to the coast.

## METHODOLOGY

**1. Stakeholder Research**
One hour telephone interviews were held with twelve representatives from activity holiday providers and coastal destinations managers to understand their views on the current state of the industry, its challenges and opportunities.

**2. In-Depth Interviews**
Twelve in-depth interviews were held with individuals who had either been on or were considering activity holidays. They included a range of gender and lifestages and covered a variety of activities. The key objective was to understand more about the perceptions, needs and activities of those interested in these holidays and to help shape the online questionnaire.

**3. Online questionnaire**
1,250 responses to an online questionnaire with a nationally representative sample of UK adults. Responses included 1,000 who were non-rejectors of activity holidays plus 250 who had actually been on an activity holiday.

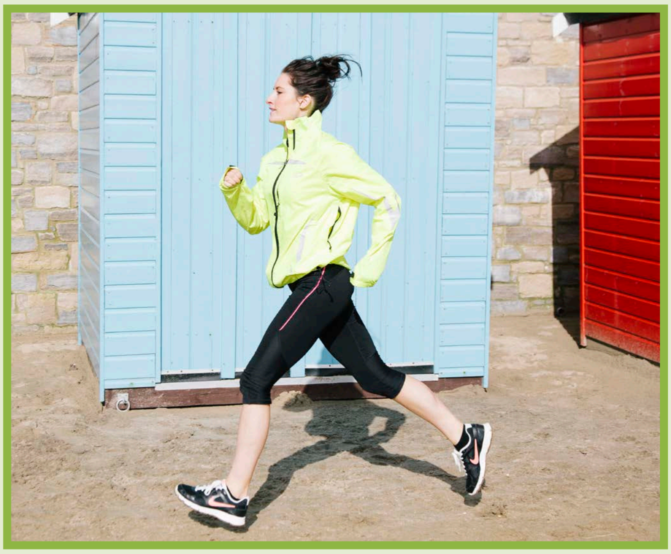
Responses combined from all three elements are presented in this report. Where relevant results are shown separately for under 35s, 36 to 55 year olds and Empty Nesters (over 55s).

# Key Findings

- **49%** of those interviewed had been on an activity holiday in England – but **31%** didn't perceive it as such!
- **Walking and Cycling** are the most popular activities but there is significant interest in water sports too
- Activity holidays are **popular with all generations** - but there is some variation in their needs and preferences
- The ideal activity holiday involves at least **three different** active experiences and a mix of other holiday activities
- Successful holidays are **not just about the activity** – the local scenery, accommodation, food and drink and other attractions play an important part
- **37% would choose a coastal destination for an Activity Holiday** and there is further growth potential if awareness is improved and perceptions challenged

**The key recommendation for businesses interested in this market, is to work together and connect activity product with other activity and accommodation providers to make it easy for consumers to find and book active experiences.**

# Executive Summary



Activity Holidays is a large sector of coastal domestic tourism which has had an upsurge in recent years, presenting a real opportunity for English coastal destinations. However, neither consumers nor stakeholders generally identify themselves as being on an activity holiday. Perception is a key consideration, particularly for the under 35s market where taking an activity holiday changes and improves their perception of the coast as a whole.

This research highlights what coastal businesses and destinations can do to maximise this gap in the activity market. It focussed on 12 interviews with stakeholders, 12 in-depth interviews with individuals who had been or were considering an activity break and 1,250 responses to an online questionnaire.

In summary, respondents felt England has ‘incredibly good’ raw materials and activities to offer, while stakeholders were optimistic about public interest and believe the coast is well set up to benefit from activity holidays.

Activity holidays cover a wide range of activities from walking and cycling to more intense pursuits such as coasteering. The ideal activity holiday would include at least three different activities.

Accommodation, food and transport are all important to active holidaymakers, but this group is less critical about these factors as their main focus is on the activity itself. However, packaging different activities together isn’t something currently considered by many activity providers and could present a significant increase in uptake.

Improving marketing and communication about what’s available and ease of access would encourage more people to participate.

Ethical tourism is important to activity providers but a sense of helping the local community is important to both stakeholders and holidaymakers – both groups have a love of ‘local’.

A generic internet search is the first port of call for finding information, followed by accommodation providers’ wesbites - an activity provider’s website features far lower on the list for many consumers. It is therefore key that activity providers further develop their Search Engine Optimisation and build relationships with accommodation providers to get their product featured on the accommodation provider’s website.

To encourage growth in this market it is crucial that activity providers work together to encourage recommendations amongst consumers for different activity types.

# The stakeholder perspective

### ACCOMMODATION

Stakeholders feel English coastal accommodation is improving, but is still let down by tired options

They also find it hard to book accommodation for large groups or for those with specialist needs

### FOOD

Local food has an important role to play in showing the identity of the area, but the offer isn't currently well organised in terms of capacity and availability to meet the needs of commercial customers

### TRANSPORT

Coastal roads are felt to be so busy that they make life difficult in peak season on the coast, both in terms of getting to destinations and as basic infrastructure, to cycle on, for example

**Stakeholders were positive about activity holidays and felt it was a good time to be in the market.**

There is growing interest in being active on holiday and the English coast offers the right raw materials.

Activity providers are usually started by people who have a passion for an activity and want to make a living out of it. They tend to specialise in one activity rather than offering a range, although across the operators activities vary from gentle e.g. yoga breaks to high activity or adventure options (e.g. coasteering). They don't think 'activity holiday' describes what they do well – but can't suggest an alternative.

As well as having passion for the activity, providers tend to care about the environment, sustainability and the importance of local experiences and using local suppliers.

Finding customers isn't generally perceived as a problem with high levels of repeat business. The key challenges are finding the right accommodation, food and transport options to link to the activity.

Related to this is the further challenge of tying these various elements together into an experience or holiday package.

# The market opportunity

| | |
|---|---|
| 45% | City break |
| 22% | Special occasion trip<br>e.g wedding, anniversary, birthday |
| 20% | Camping or caravan touring |
| **18%** | **Self-identified activity holiday** |
| 11% | Event-based trip<br>e.g music festival |
| 9% | Stag & hen-do breaks |

When asked whether they had been on an "activity holiday" in the last two years **18%** of people replied "yes" however, when provided with the following definition of an "activity holiday" the number of people that have undertaken an activity based break in England in the last two years rose to **49%.**

*"...a trip which includes 1 or more night's stay away from home and participation in one or more activities such as hiking, cycling, golfing, watersports etc. The purpose of the trip does not have to have been to solely to do this activity."*

**49%** of those interviewed had taken an activity break in England in the last two years


When understanding the global market, **56%** had been on an activity break somewhere in the world in the last two years.

The research also showed that this is not a niche sector– only **18%** are considered "enthusiasts" where the sole purpose of the trip was to undertake one particular activity (e.g. a cycling holiday).

When asked "Would you ever consider a holiday where one purpose of the trip was a specific activity or a range of activities, such as hiking, cycling, golfing, or watersports?" - a significant **35%** said they were considering an activity holiday right now!

So this is a large market, but generally consumers and stakeholders don't identify themselves as being on an activity holiday.

56%

have taken an activity break somewhere in the world in the last two years

# Which activities are popular?

Walking and cycling were the most popular activities that consumers undertook, but there is actually a broad range engaged in and the combinations can vary significantly.

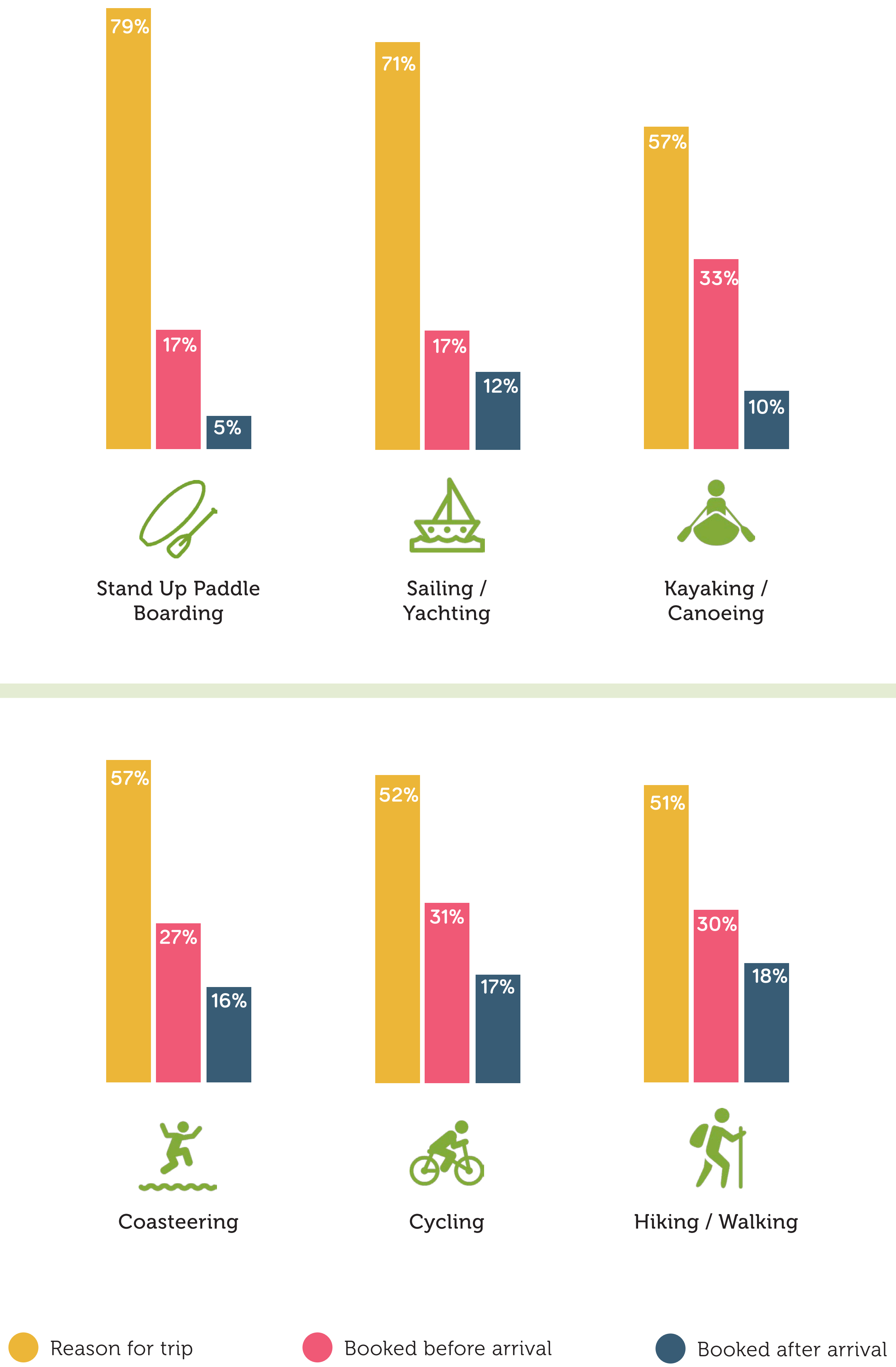
Activities Respondents Had Participated In


This range of activities is seen across different age brackets, with many empty nesters (over 55s) becoming more adventurous (see Empty Nester research) they are also including activities like surfing, coasteering and stand up paddle boarding.

However, some activities are more likely to be the key reason for the holiday while others are more likely to be add-on experiences, often booked in destination.

In particular, more niche activities such as stand-up paddle-boarding, sailing and windsurfing are much more likely to be the reason for the trip.

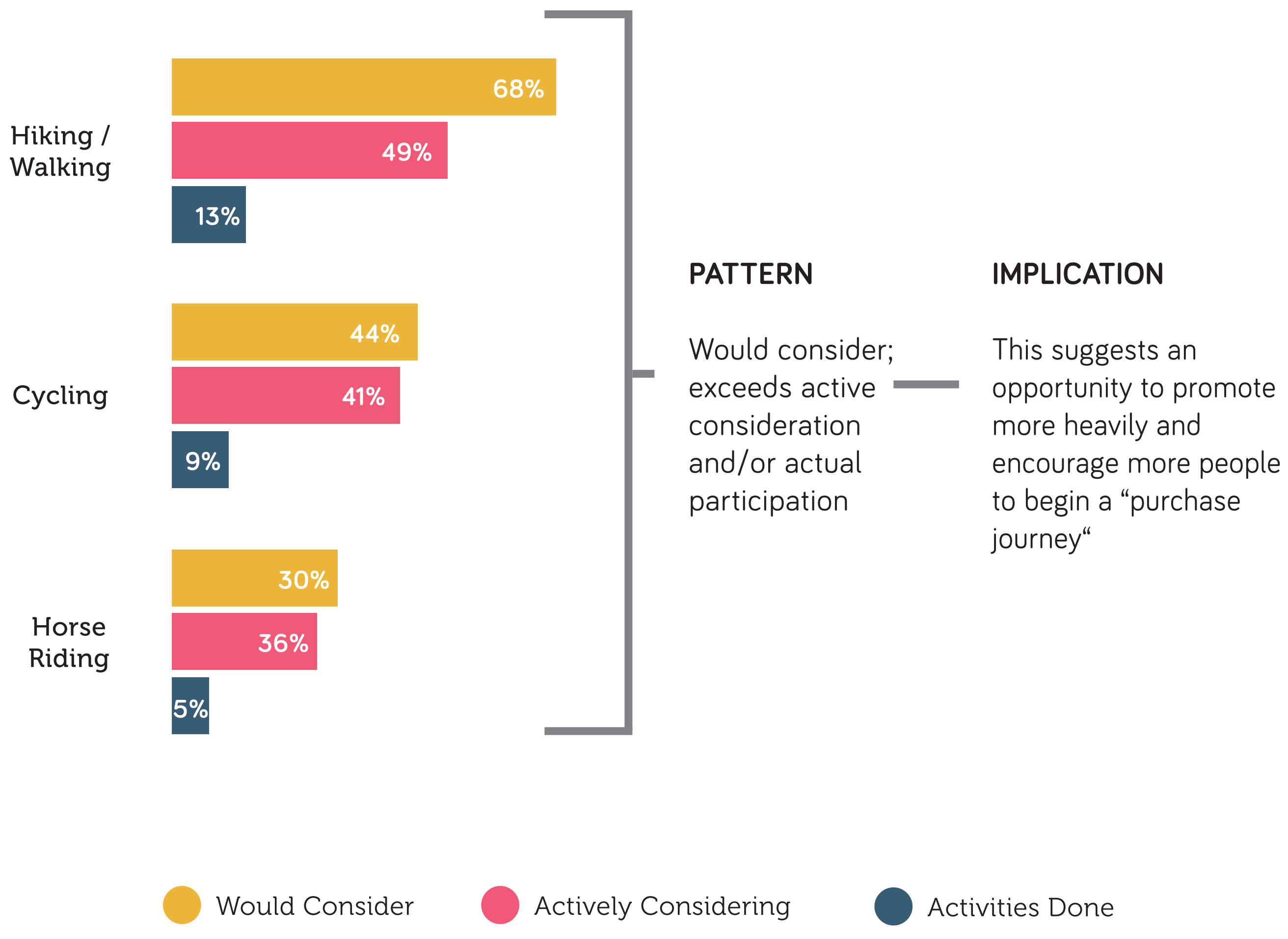
## How Activity Holidays Are Booked



**Soft adventure activities** such as cycling, walking and horse riding are less likely to be a key driver for the trip, and although many consumers consider undertaking these activities in advance, conversion to actually undertaking them is relatively low.

There is therefore an opportunity to improve communication about provision and ease of access for these activities to encourage more people to participate.

Conversion Rates For Activites




**A NOTE ON DEFINITIONS:**

**Would Consider -** those not currently doing or considering, but open to active holidays, the % who consider this activity
**Actively Considering -** those currently considering an active holiday, the % who are considering this activity
**Activities Done -** those doing active holidays in the UK (current market), the % doing this activity

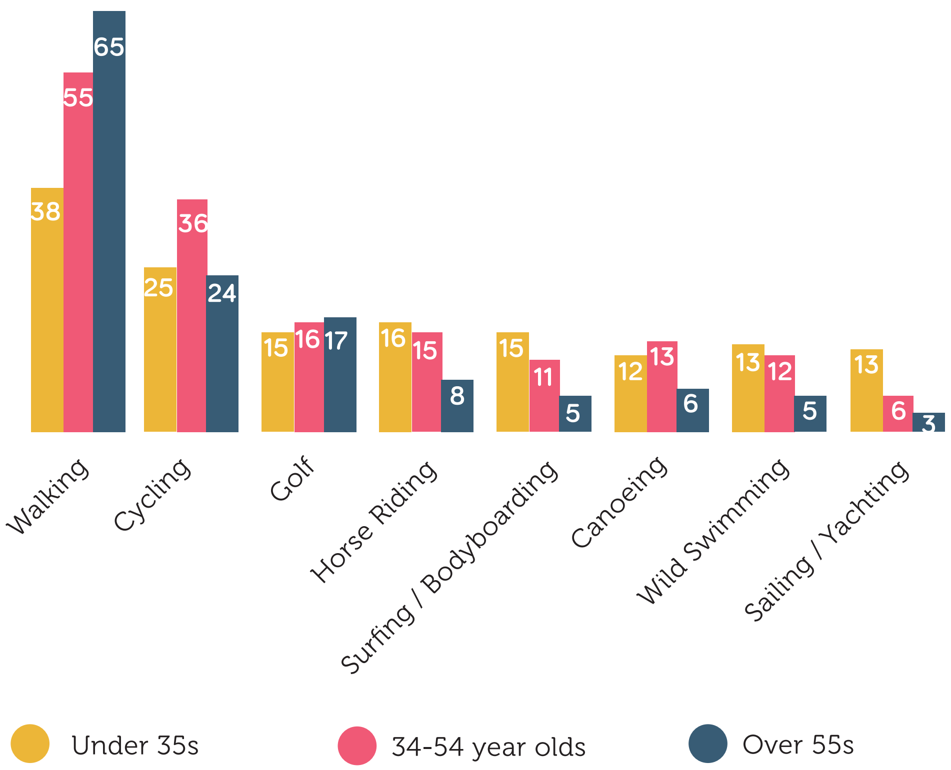
# How activity breaks vary by age

**All generations** would consider an activity holiday - but under 35s are the most likely to have taken one.

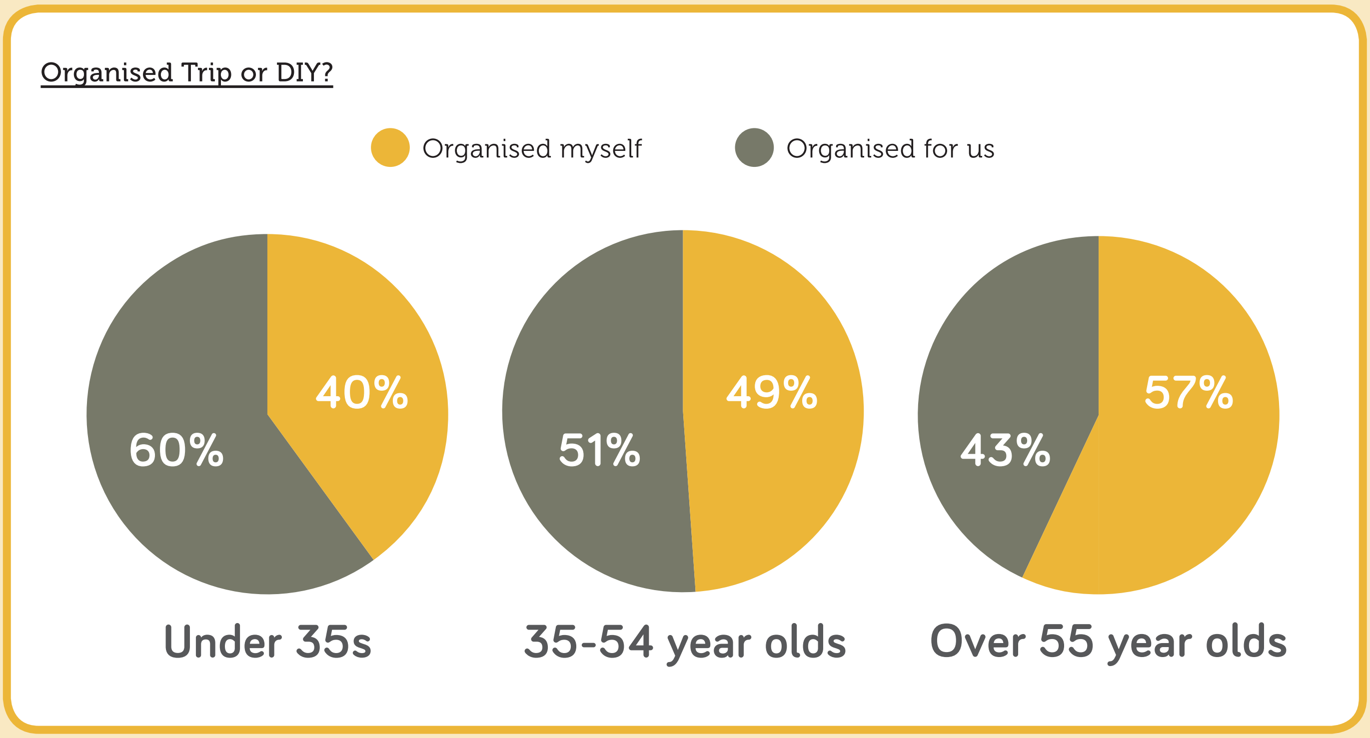
| 70% | 53% | 42% |
|---|---|---|
| Under 35s | 35 - 54 year olds | Over 55s |

Although all respondents have taken part in a variety of activities, there are variations between the age groups. Empty Nesters and 35-54 year olds are much more likely to go walking and hiking than under 35s. Cycling is most popular for those aged 35 to 55 and participation rates in more active water sports seems to decrease with age. Though it is worth noting that all activities are undertaken by all age groups and that empty nesters are becoming increasingly more active.

Activities By Age



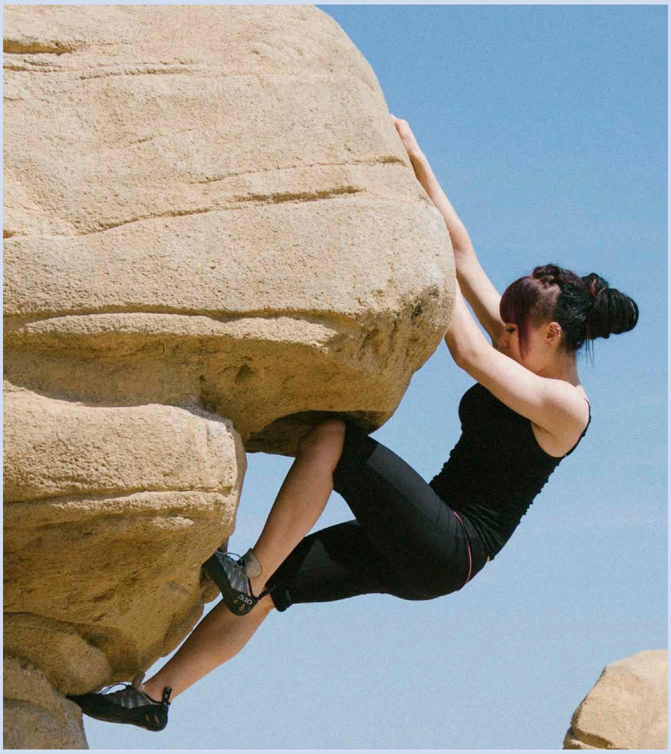
In terms of the level of organisation that different age groups prefer, the research showed some surprising differences. Under 35s are more likely to want to have their holidays organised for them – although this may be partly related to the fact that the types of activities they are undertaking are more likely to require forward planning.




In terms of additional features that consumers would like to find on an activity based holiday, under 35s are generally less demanding. They showed lower than average needs for local maps, food on site and washing/ drying facilities.

**The one exception is that under 35s placed a much higher level of importance and value on the need for photographers to capture the activity.**

# The ideal activity holiday

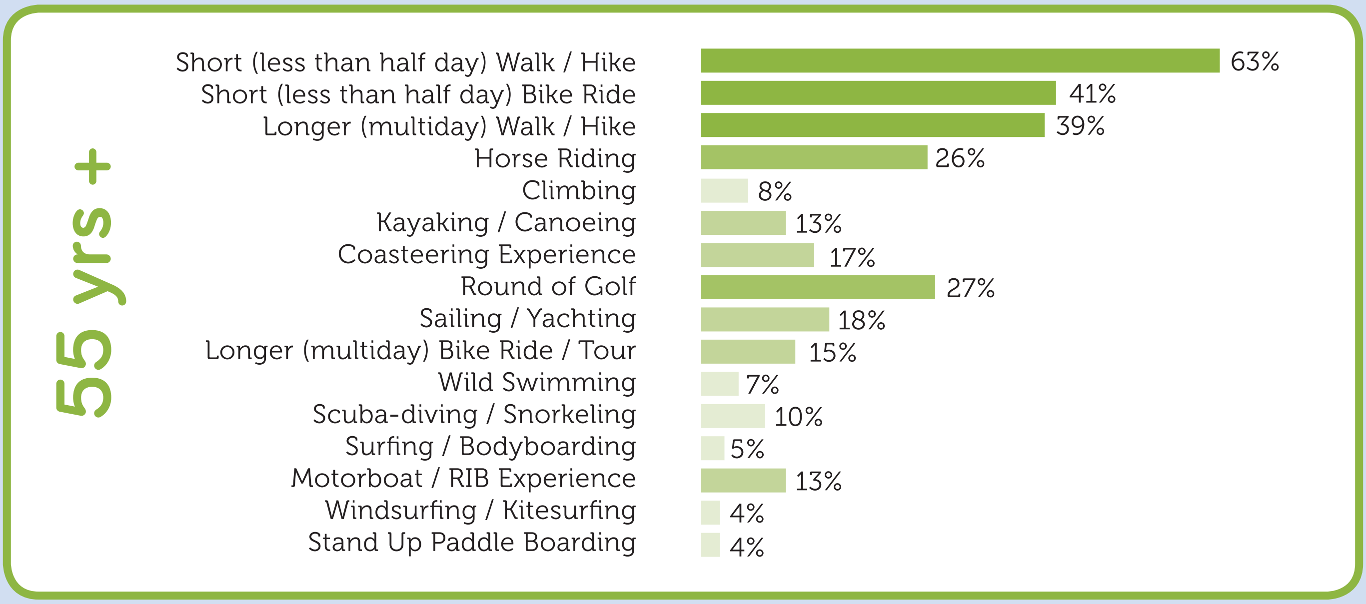


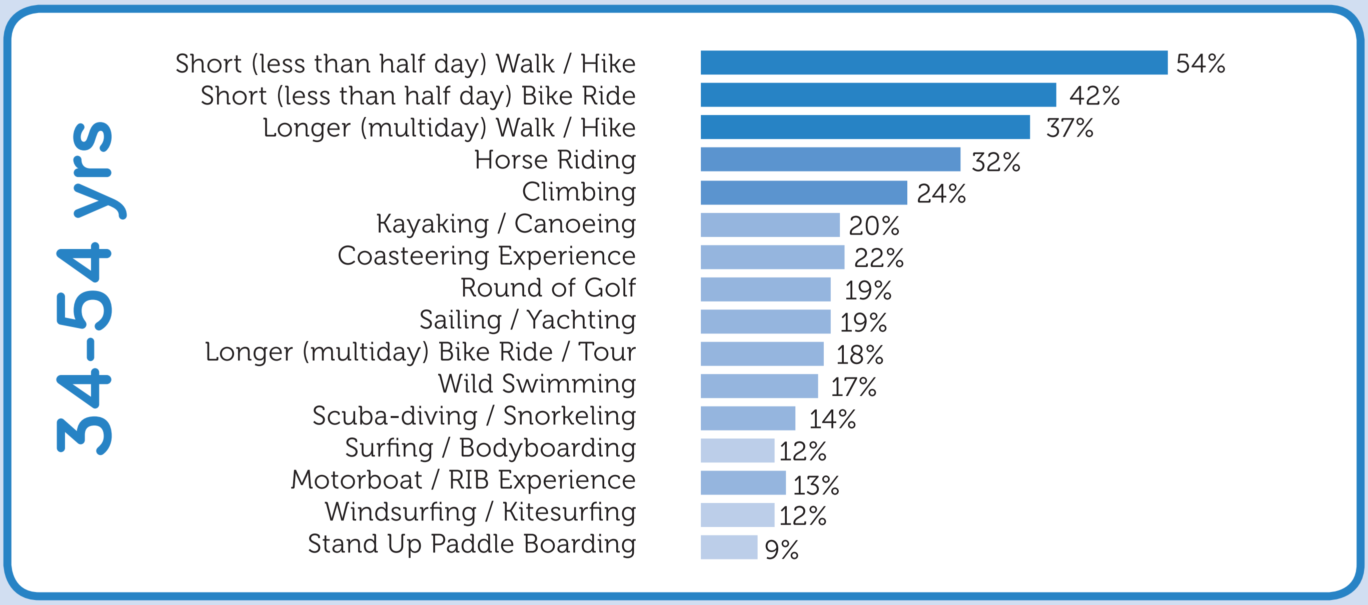
Consumers like to 'pick and mix' their activities to create their own personal activity holidays, as well as combining these active experiences with other general holiday pursuits such as visiting historic sights, shopping and entertainment.

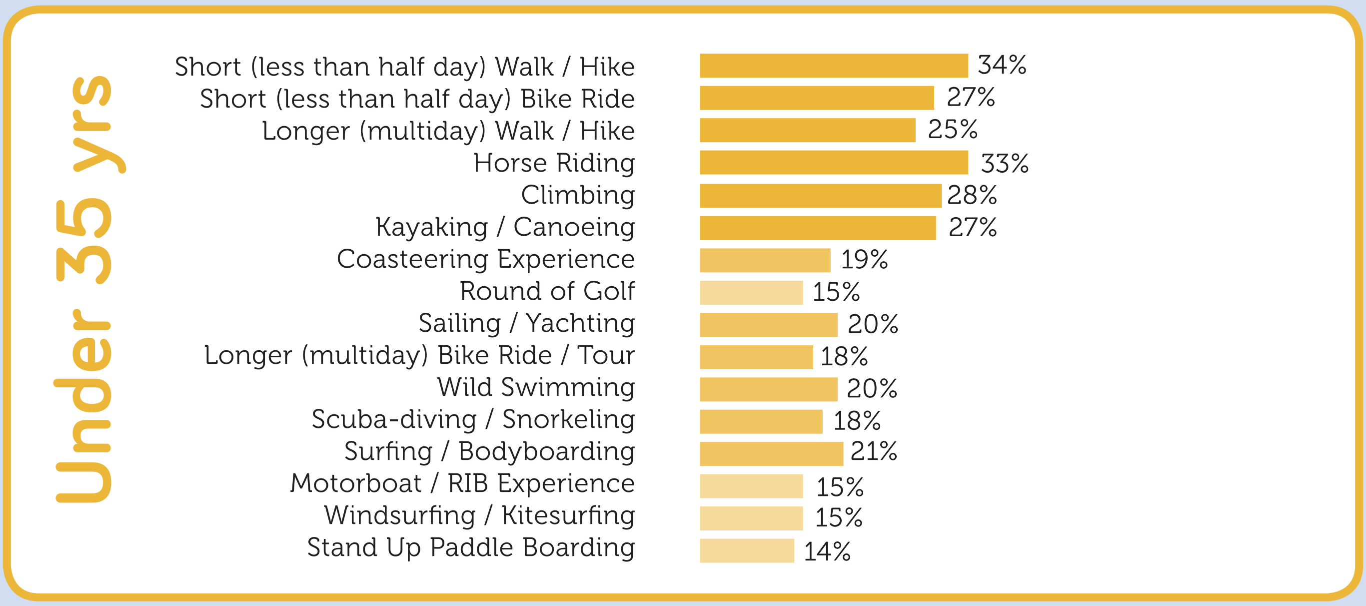
This presents a problem for the consumer – most activity providers set their business up because of a personal passion for a single particular activity and often offer just this one, or a limited number of similar activities. That is therefore a key challenge for activity providers, destinations and other businesses to make it easy for holidaymakers to find out about and book a variety of activities.

**The ideal activity based holiday will involve at least <u>three</u> different activities.**

**The charts below show the mix of activities and their relative appeal by age group**



Understanding that consumers want to experience a range of activities, it's important that providers work with each other to provide linkages for the consumer. Referrals between different types of businesses could make consumer booking significantly easier as well as improving conversions from simply interest to actual bookings in advance of the holiday.

# Understanding the activity holiday market


When asked to describe how they felt on an activity holiday, consumers are generally very positive – as indicated in the above word map.

However, neither providers or holiday makers feel that 'Activity Holidays' describes the genre well, yet when 'Active holidays' or 'Active Experience Holidays' were suggested as an alternative, these were seen even less favourably. So for now, with no stand out alternative it feels that 'Activity Holiday is still the most appropriate term for the industry to unite around, though perhaps only to define the sector rather than be used with consumers.

> *"Activity Holiday" is the most appropriate term for this sector of the industry!*

# Successful Holidays are not just about the activity

Both providers and holidaymakers agree that the "Local Feel" is an important contribution to the holiday.

**The love of 'local' is common ground for people taking activity holidays on the English coast.**

In terms of accommodation all generations agree that a **cottage** is the preferred form of accommodation followed by an **independent B&B**.

Accommodation Preferences by Age Group

### 55 yrs +

- 59% Cottage
- 45% Independent B&B
- 38% Traditional independent seaside hotel
- 32% Pub / Restaurant with rooms
- 31% Family hotel
- 38% Houseboat / Riverboat

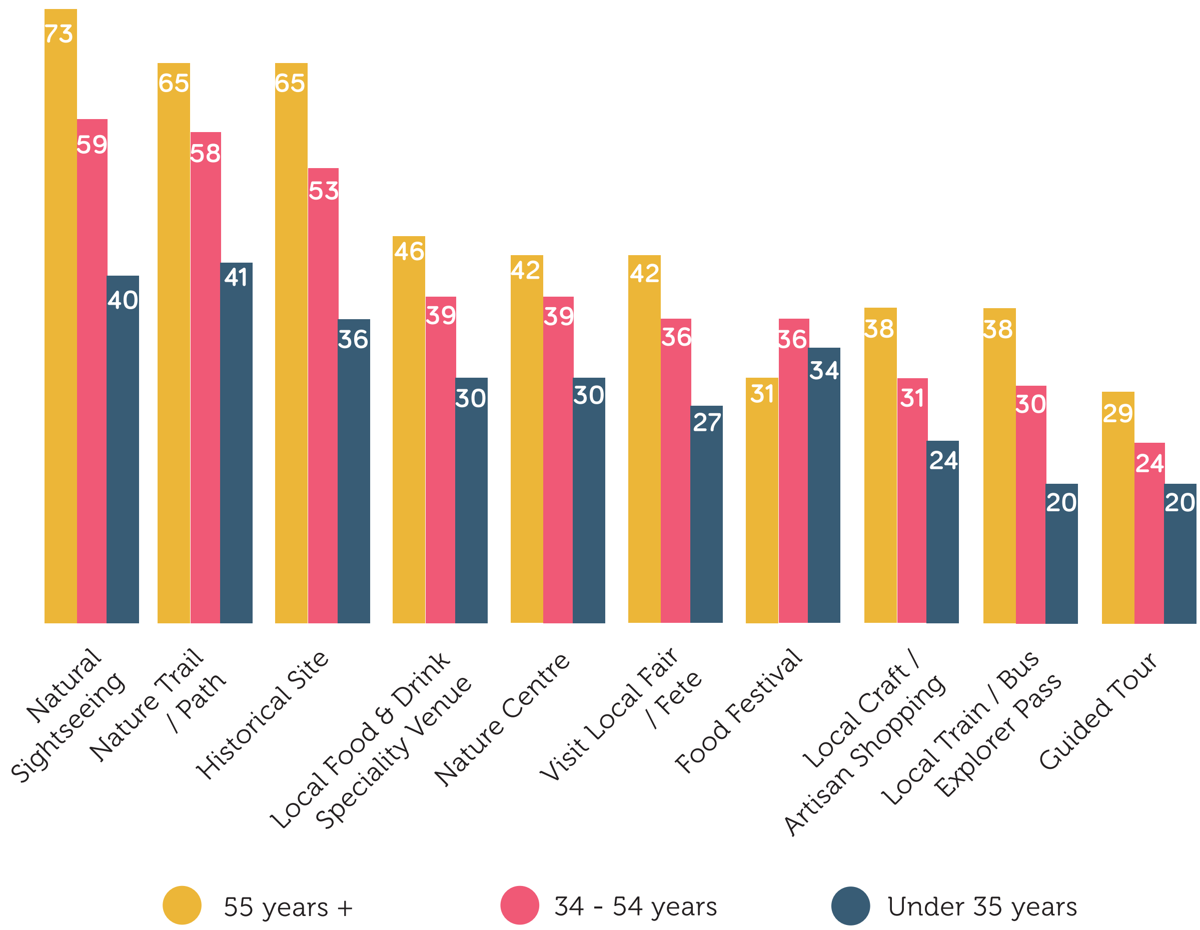
### 34-54 yrs

- 54% Cottage
- 38% Independent B&B
- 35% Holiday Park
- 34% Family Hotel
- 31% Glamping / Luxury Camping / Cabins
- 30% Static Caravan

### Under 35 yrs

- 38% Cottage
- 32% Family Hotel
- 30% Holiday Park
- 29% Independent B&B
- 29% Private Apartment
- 27% Glamping / Luxury Camping / Cabins

'Extra-curricular' activities preferred as part of activity holiday



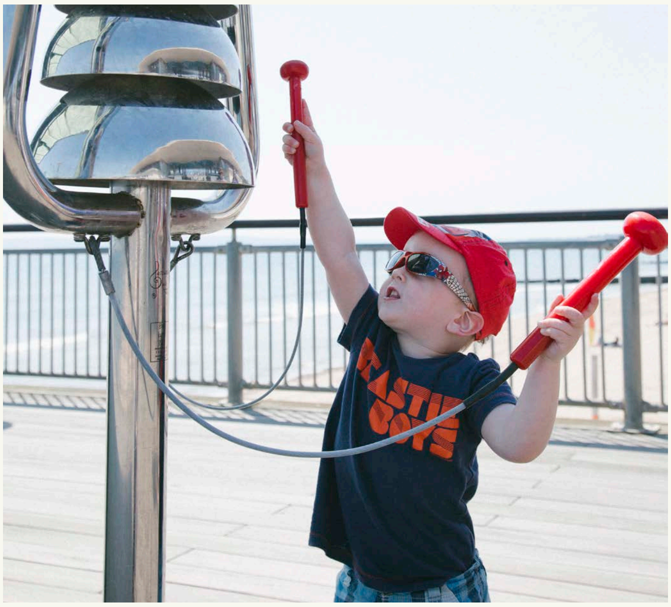

The ideal activity holiday will include a number of other elements with Empty Nesters being the most enthusiastic about '**extra curricular**' activities.

All are interested in natural sightseeing and nature trails but there is some variation in other activities and features required.

# How to make an activity holiday better

Holiday makers would like a range of additional facilities and features to make their activity holiday better, including:

Local maps and guidance (61%)
Free WiFi access (57%)



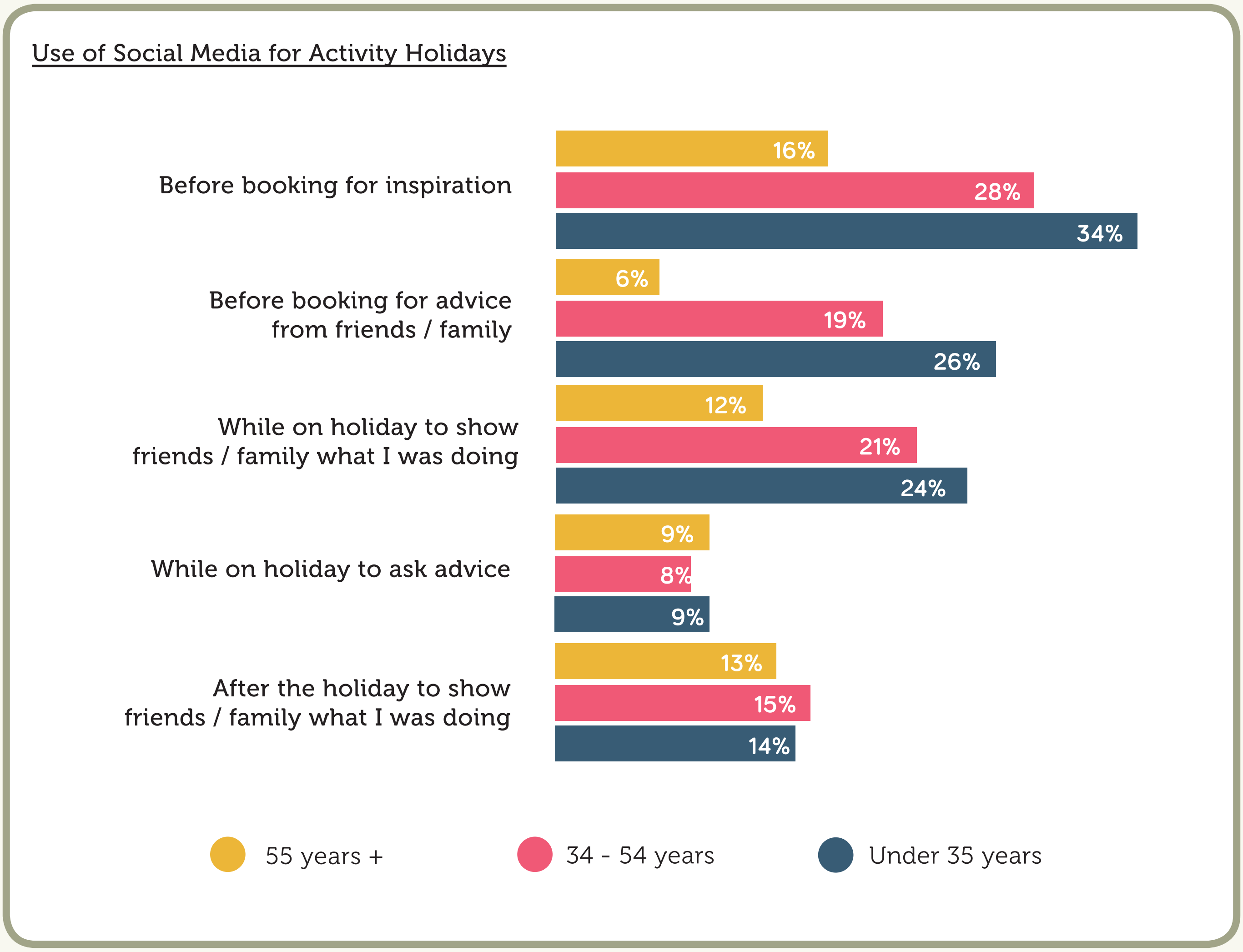
## Accommodation specific:

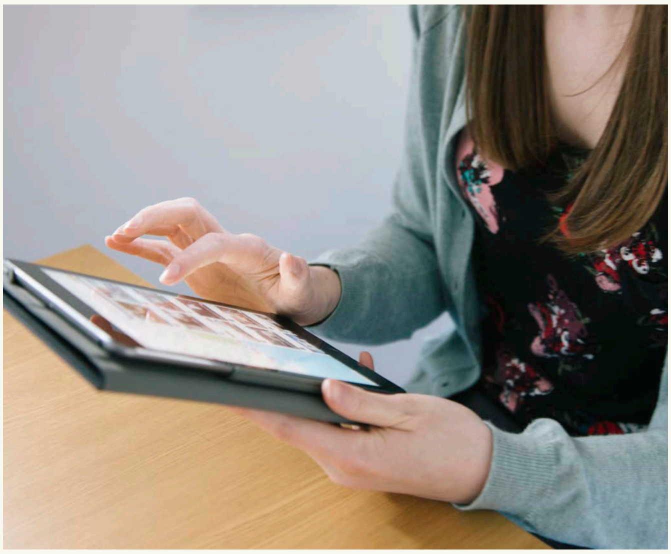
Clothes washing and drying facilities (49%)
Packed lunches available (32%)
Storage facilities for activity equipment (30%)
BBQ / Outdoor eating equipment for hire (29%)

## Activity provider specific:

Food on site (57%) or local food and drink recommendations (53%)
Showers at the activity venue (54%)
Equipment for hire (47%)
Transport between locations / activities (48%)
Social time to get to know other participants (29%)
Activities for children (26%)
Souvenirs / Mementos (23%)
Photographers (14%) – n.b.: this rises significantly for horse riding, motor sports, climbing and watersports activities

All generations use social media in relation to activity holidays, with one third of under 35s using social media as a source of inspiration before booking.



A generic internet search was the first port of call for information on booking a holiday (e.g. surfing holiday), this is followed by accommodation providers websites, the activity provider featured much lower on the list for many consumers.

So for activity providers it's important to make sure that your website is optimised to appear high on search engine results and to work with local accommodation providers to make sure they are aware of your business and if possible provide a link from their website to yours.

# Activity Holidays in Coastal Destinations

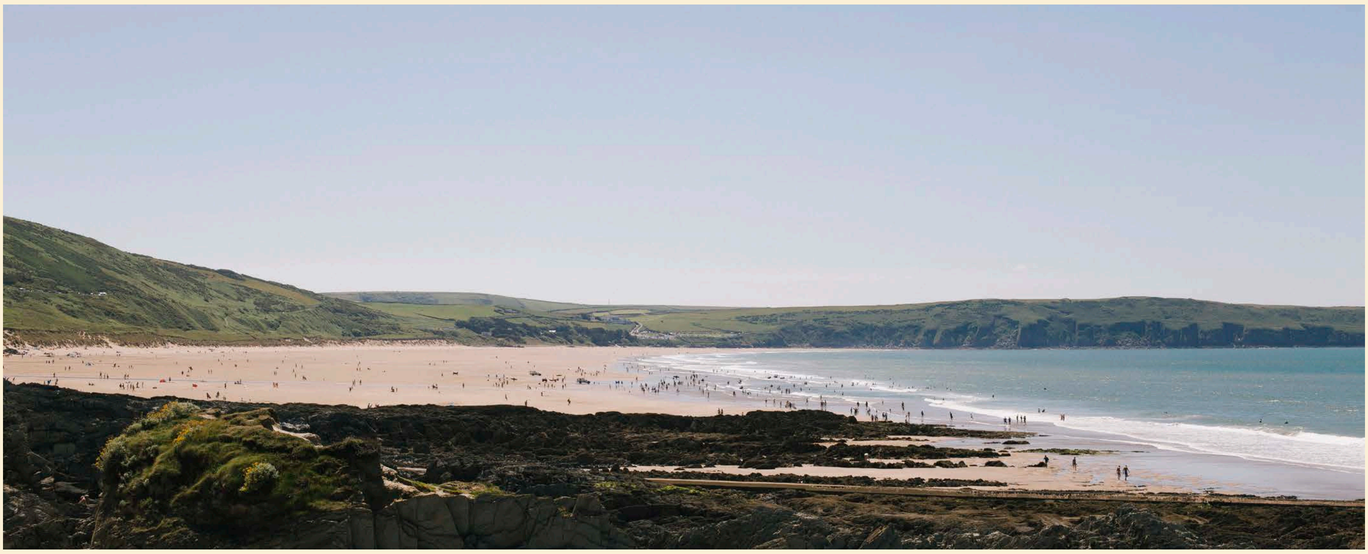

When compared to other types of destination, **37%** of respondents would prefer a coastal destination for an activity holiday. The coast is perceived as satisfying important customer needs for beautiful natural landscapes, good places to eat including pubs and cafés, a feel for local life and a welcoming environment for tourists.

However, there are other features important to customers which the English coast is not perceived to deliver as well:

- **Pleasant weather**
- **Easy transport / access**
- **Things for adults to do**
- **Things to do all year round**
- **Easy to find options for active outdoors**
- **Ease of coordination**
- **Something out of the ordinary**
- **Activities for newcomers / enthusiasts**
- **Characterful accommodation**

Many of these are consumer perceptions that do not necessarily reflect the product available, and therefore can be addressed through packaging and marketing.

# Key growth opportunities and recommendations



The activity holiday market in England is significant with **35% of those interviewed seriously considering an activity holiday.**

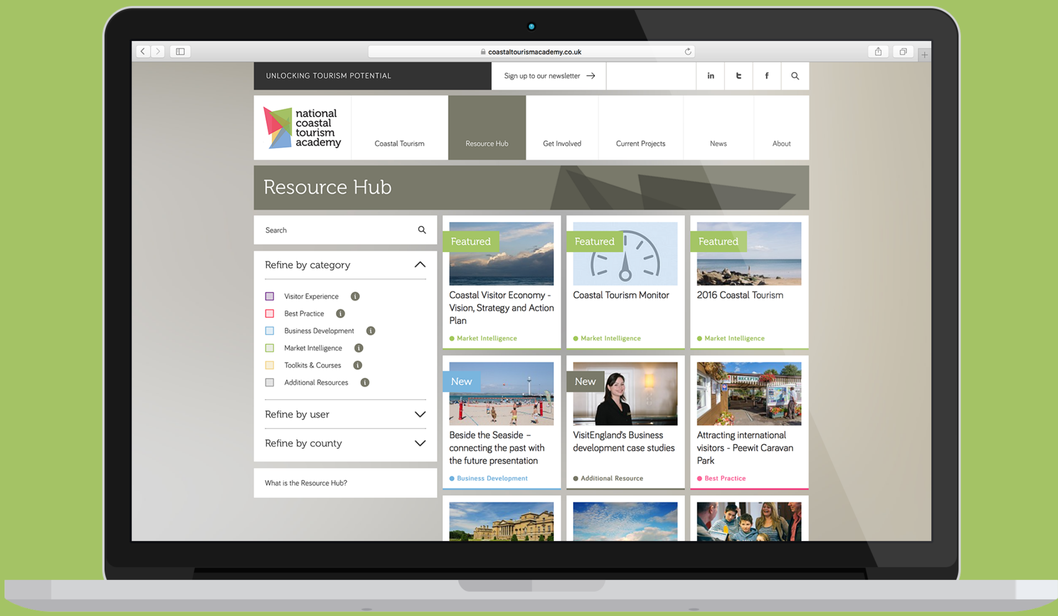
Activity breaks are seen in a positive light by consumers and the coast is generally seen as a good fit for the market with **37%** preferring a coastal setting. Crucially though, there is a perception issue that could unlock further growth. Greater communication of what activities are available, explaining how a holiday maker can build their own bespoke trip, availability of the activities and accommodation year round would overcome barriers associated with the coast.

Activity holidays also present a unique opportunity to showcase the coast in a different light. This is particularly important for the under 35s market, where the activity holiday changes their perception of the coast significantly and presents an opportunity to engage this market. Considering the lifetime potential of under 35s, this is particularly important for the future of coastal destinations.

Working together with other types of activity providers to recommend and refer consumers could present a significant growth opportunity. Consumers are finding it difficult to book all the elements of the trip in advance because of a lack of joined-up product. Working with local accommodation providers is also important.

Offering as much information in advance as possible is also important. Consumers are struggling to find information in advance and due to the lack of WiFi and mobile signal in many rural and coastal areas, are resorting to traditional leaflets and recommendations from their accommodation provider.

# Visit our Resource Hub

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**For more contact Jo Edom**
jo.edom@coastaltourismacademy.co.uk
01202 962 572

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