

The Great Kiwi OE report

February 2025



AKL

Executive Summary

The Great Kiwi OE report - Rite of passage, but shorter and more adventurous

As the gateway for the Great Overseas Experience (OEs) since the 1960s, Auckland Airport recently commissioned research into the Kiwi rite of passage, which has revealed the past and future travel trends.

Sourced from a sample size of more than 1000 and conducted by Kantar on behalf of Auckland Airport in December 2024, the data shows the classic OE is getting a 2025 update.

Key trends revealed

Intrepid travellers

Defined as a longer experience than a typical holiday, the OE remains a popular tradition among New Zealanders. Half of those surveyed have already embarked on at least one OE, while two in five expressed intentions to do one in future. The study also found that for many intrepid Kiwis one overseas adventure simply wasn't enough – 43% had been on two or more and one in 10 had been on four or more OEs.

Older adventurers

The research identified overseas adventures are not just for those in their 20s and younger, when actually an increasing number of Kiwis are now having OEs later in life. More than half were planning an adventure after they turn 40 and one in five in their sixties or older.

Travelling far and wide

The report revealed UK and Europe were the most popular destinations for those who had done an OE – four out of 10 went to the UK or Europe. However, for those planning a future OE there was a noticeable shift towards more diverse and adventurous destinations, including Bengaluru, Yunnan and Navsari.

And while London remains a popular OE destination, it doesn't have the pull it once had – only 30% of Kiwis planning an OE intend to visit London compared with 39% who went there on a past OE. Instead cities such as Sydney, Melbourne, Vancouver, New York, California and Tokyo were gaining in popularity.

Longer holidays over longer stays

The report also highlighted more Kiwis preferring shorter OEs. The data found 42% had taken an OE of three months or less; and 60% were planning a future

OE for this same timeframe. Also, the number of Kiwis staying longer than a year dropped from 28% in the past (who had been on an OE) to 10% (intending on an OE for this timeframe).

Interestingly, for a third of those who have been on an OE in the past, not staying longer is their biggest regret while 30% wish they had visited more destinations.

Real life OE stories

Accompanying the research, Auckland Airport opened an outdoor exhibition at the international terminal with real life traveller photos of Kiwi OEs over the past six decades, and illustrating how the airport has and continues to evolve. These real life OE stories are included in this report, highlighting the important role AKL plays as the starting point for the OE tradition.

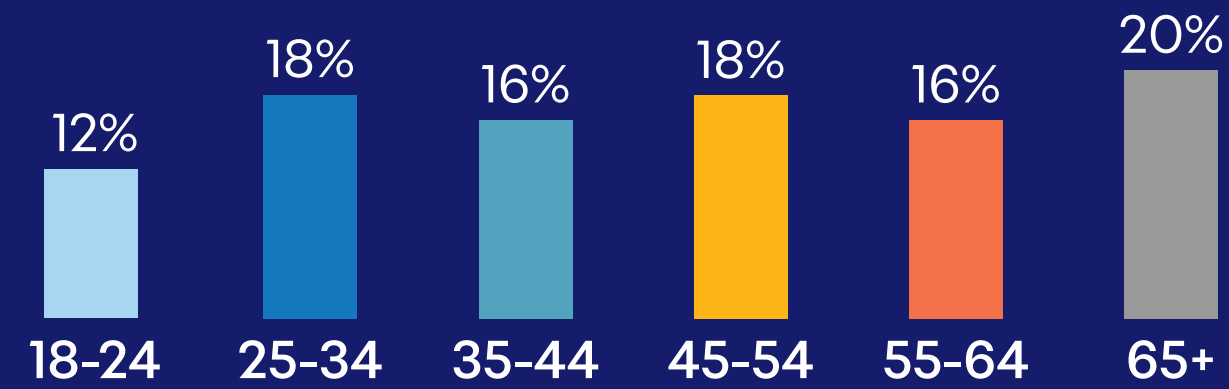
Profiles

Profile

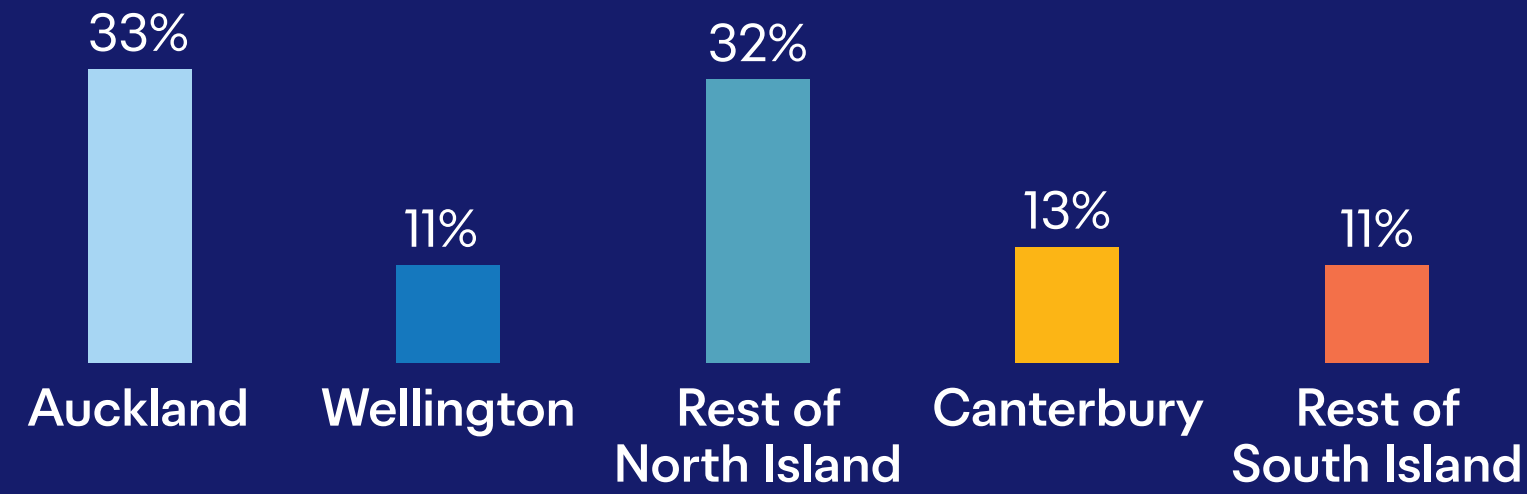


Profiles

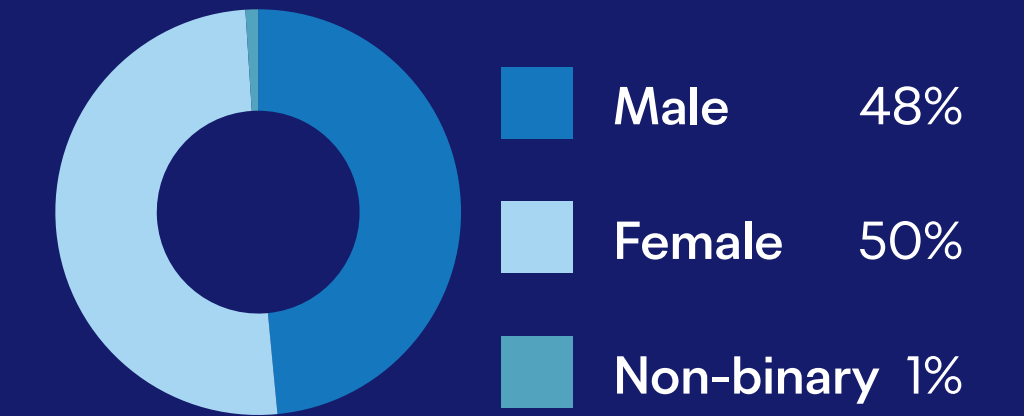
Age



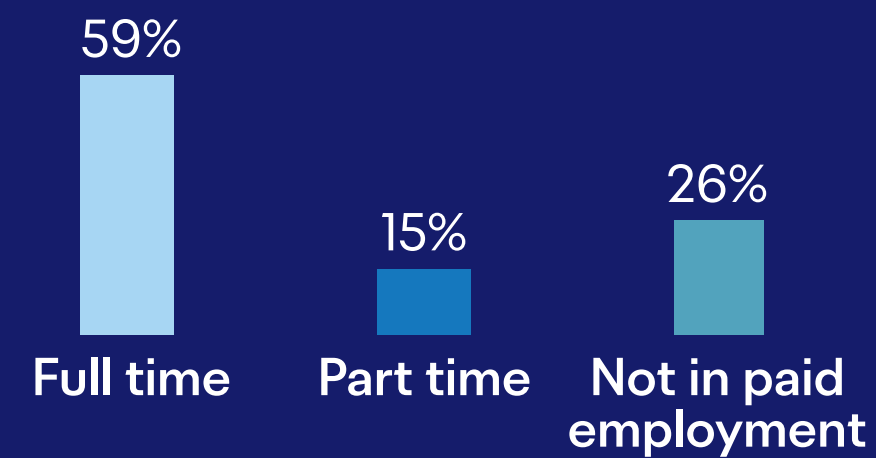
Region



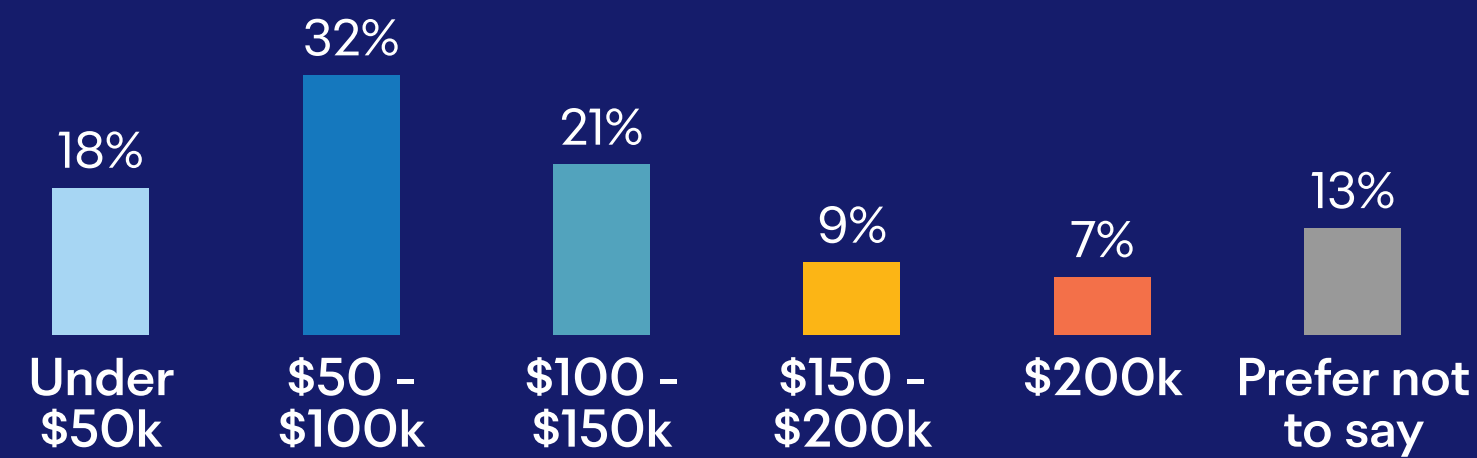
Gender



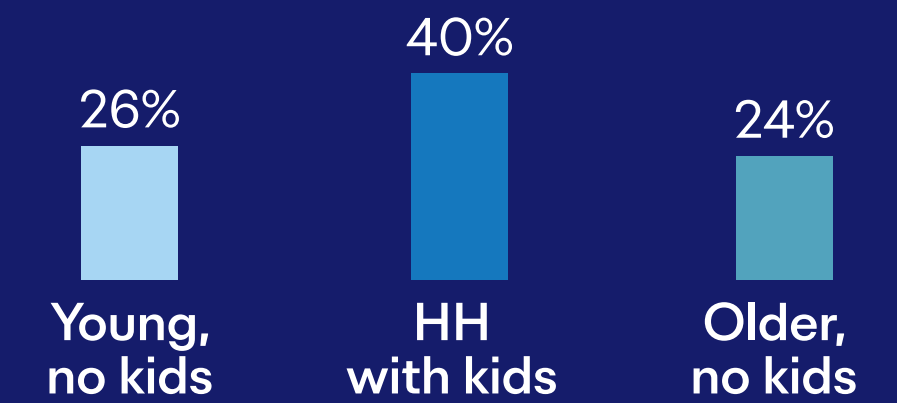
Employment



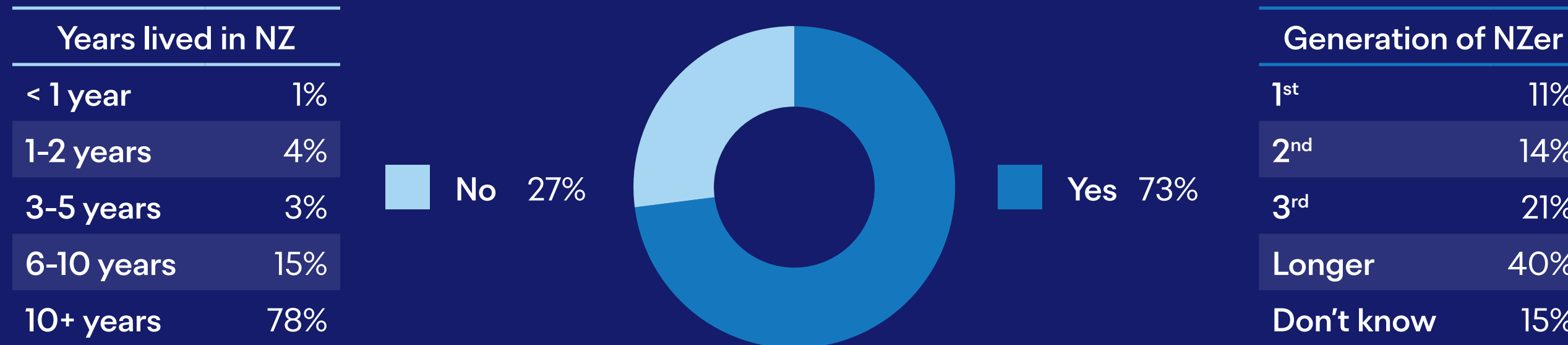
Income



Household



Born in NZ



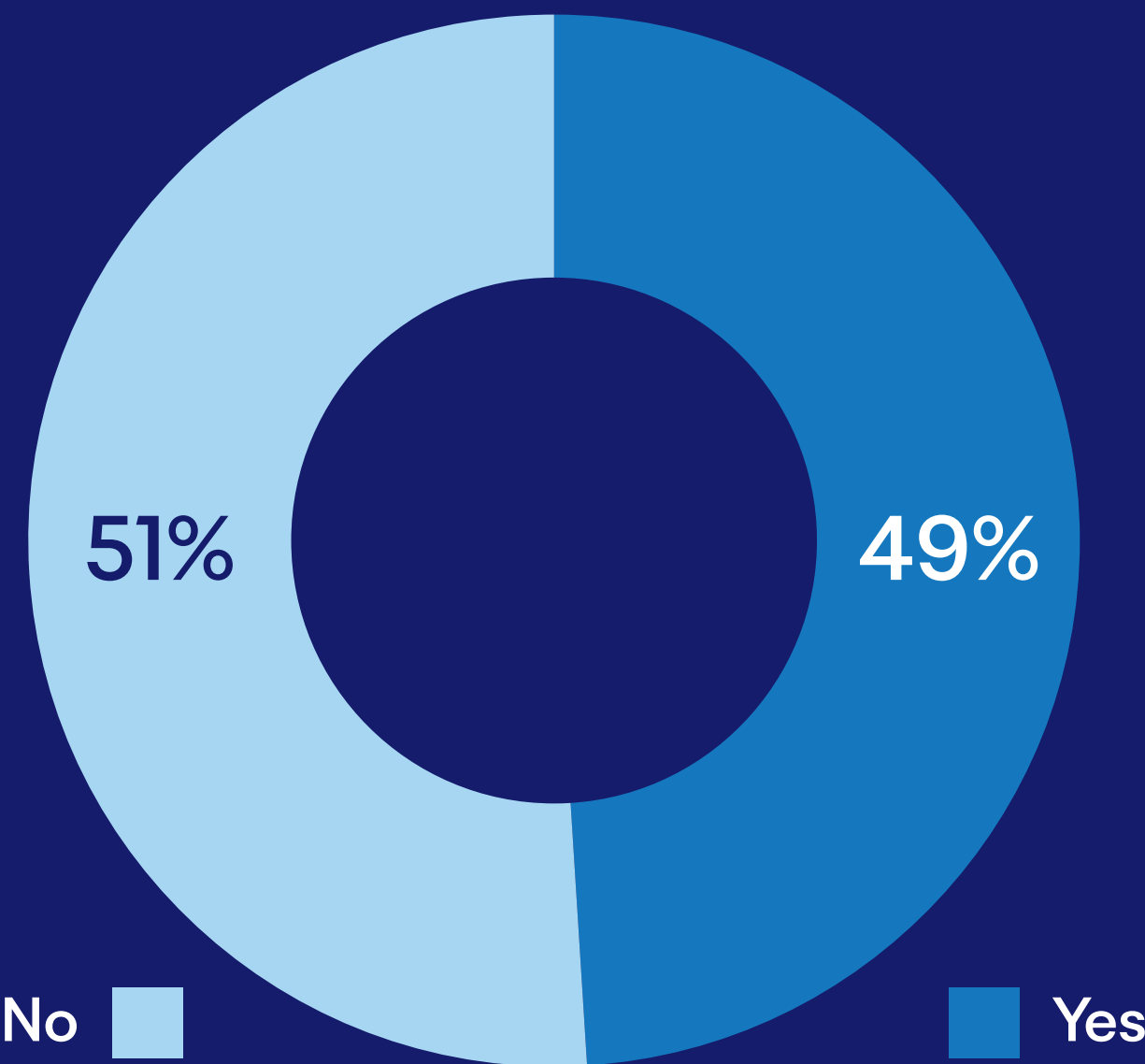
Years lived in NZ	
< 1 year	1%
1-2 years	4%
3-5 years	3%
6-10 years	15%
10+ years	78%

Generation of NZer	
1 st	11%
2 nd	14%
3 rd	21%
Longer	40%
Don't know	15%

Profiles - OE history & intent

Half of NZ'ers have been on an OE in the past, while 2 in 5 intend to go on one in the future

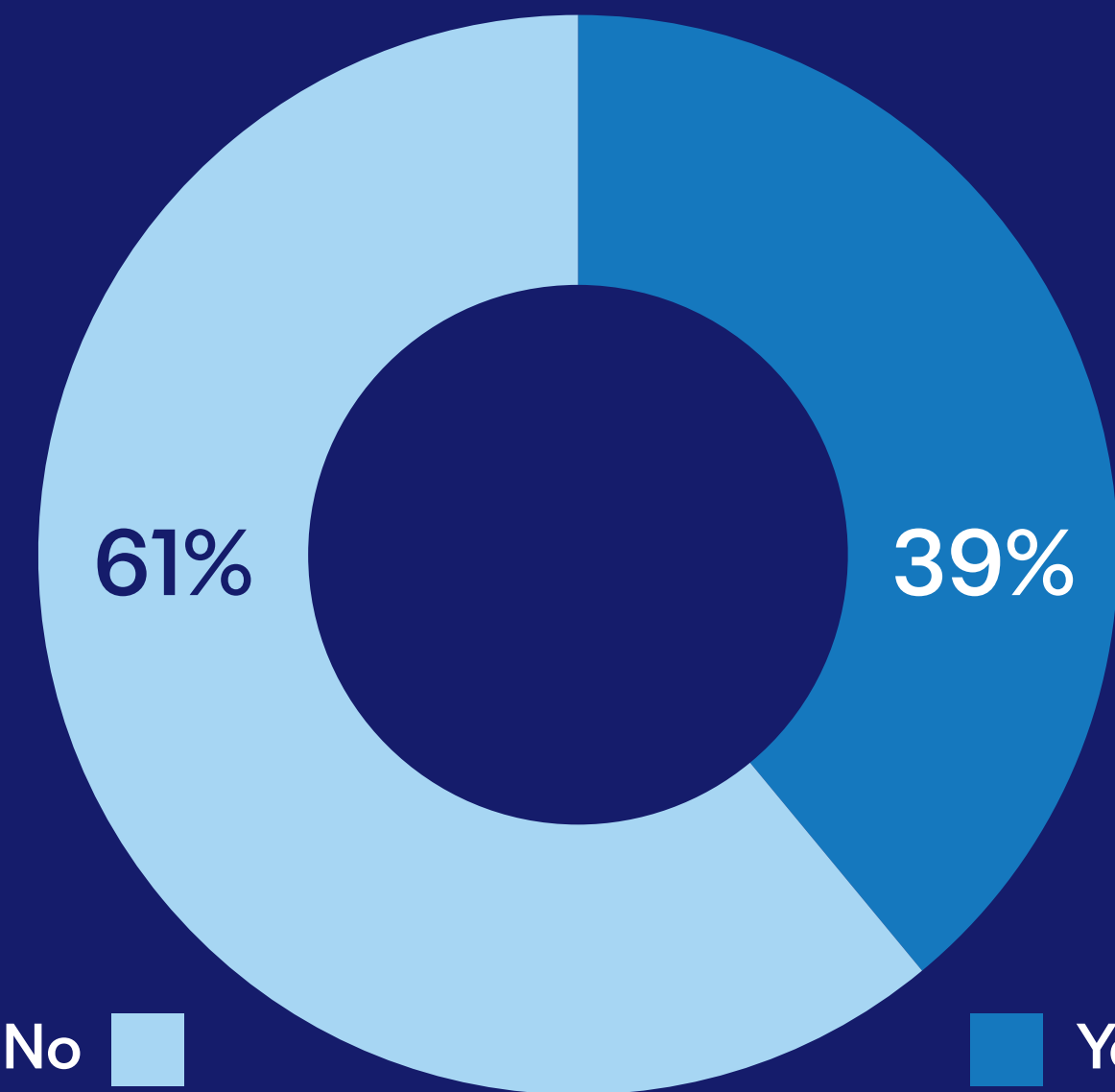
Ever been on an OE



No ■
Sig higher among:
Women (56%)
18-34 (63%)

■ **Yes**
Sig higher among:
Men (55%)
35-54 (57%)
& 55+ (53%)

Intent to go on future OE



No ■
Sig higher among:
55+ (73%)
Not in paid employment (76%)
Older, no kids (70%)

■ **Yes**
Sig higher among:
18-34 (58%)
Aucklanders (44%)
Part-time employee (51%)
Young, no kids (52%)

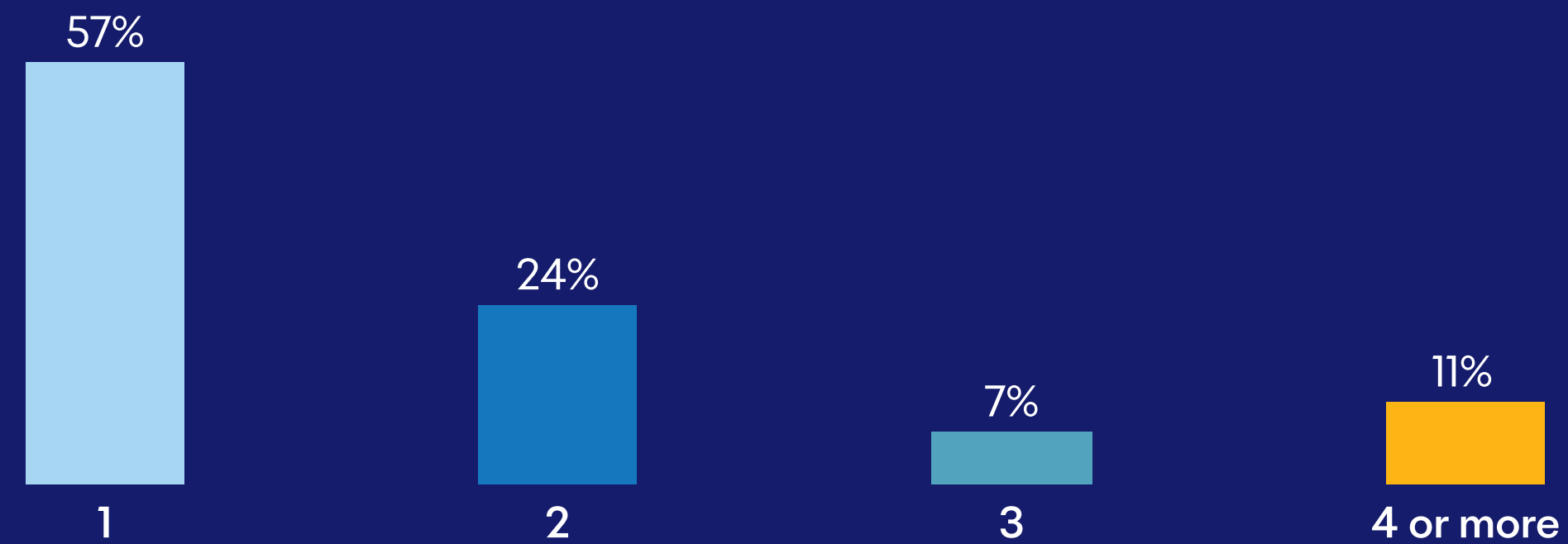
Previous OE



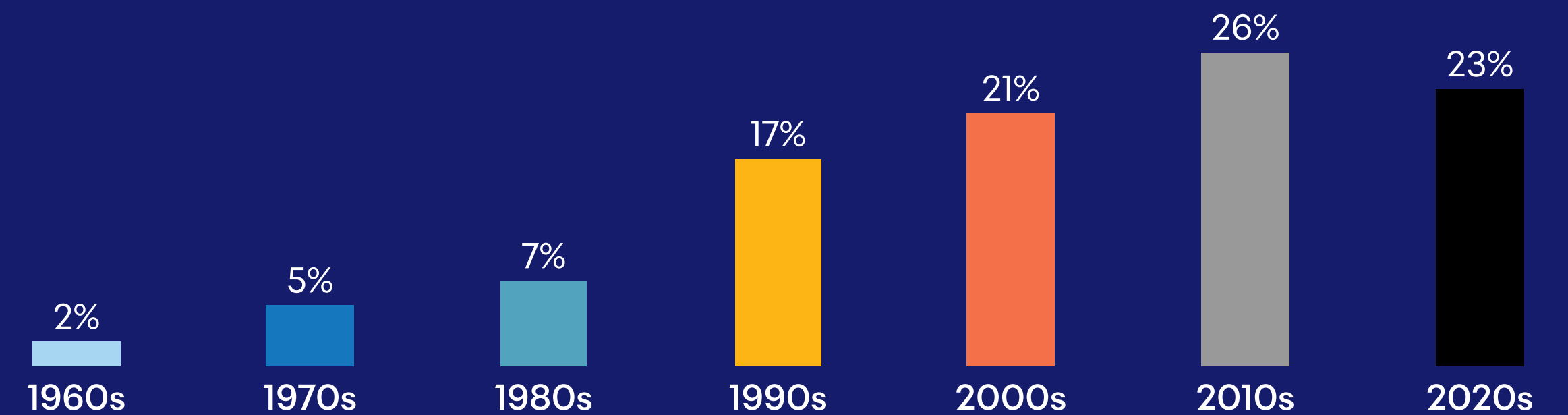
Previous OE - Details 1

The majority of those who have been on an OE have only been on one, with almost half going between the age 21 and 30 – the most common length of OE was 2-3 months

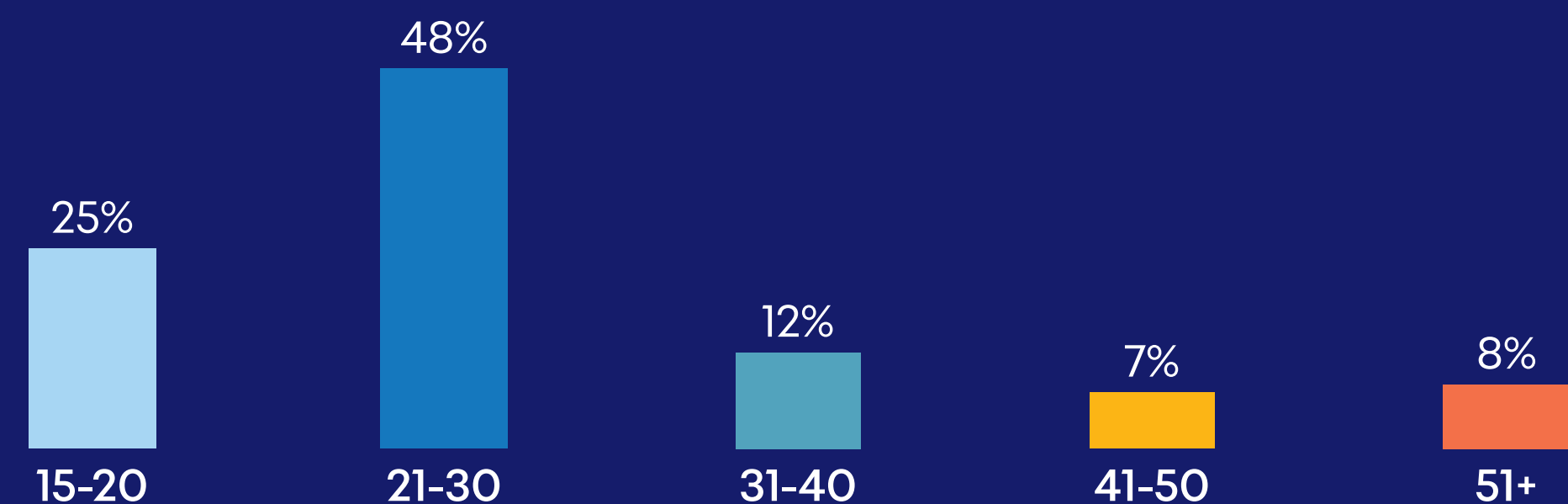
Number of OEs



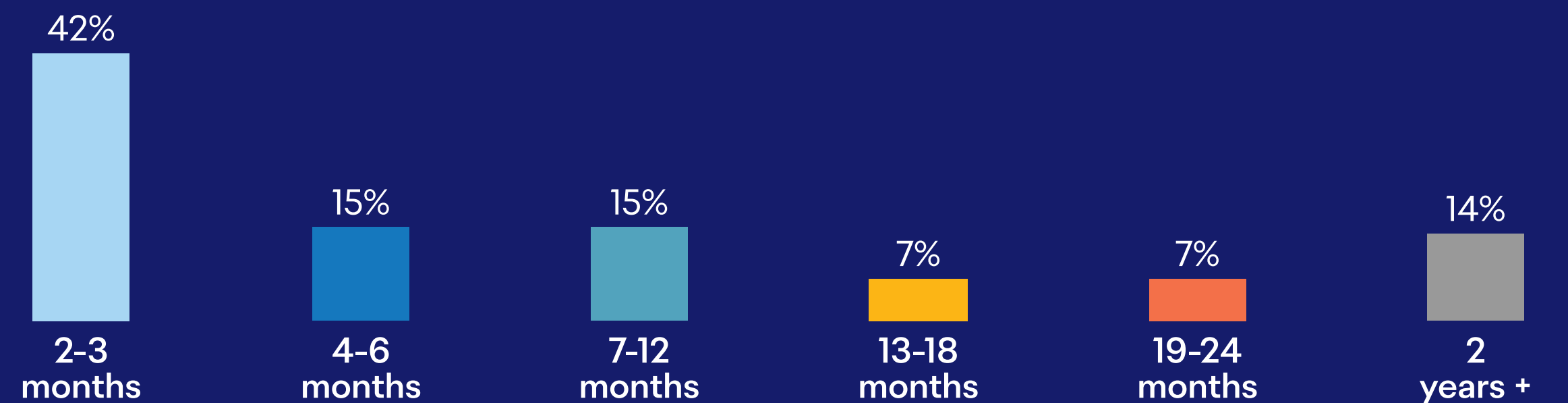
Decade of OE



Age on OE



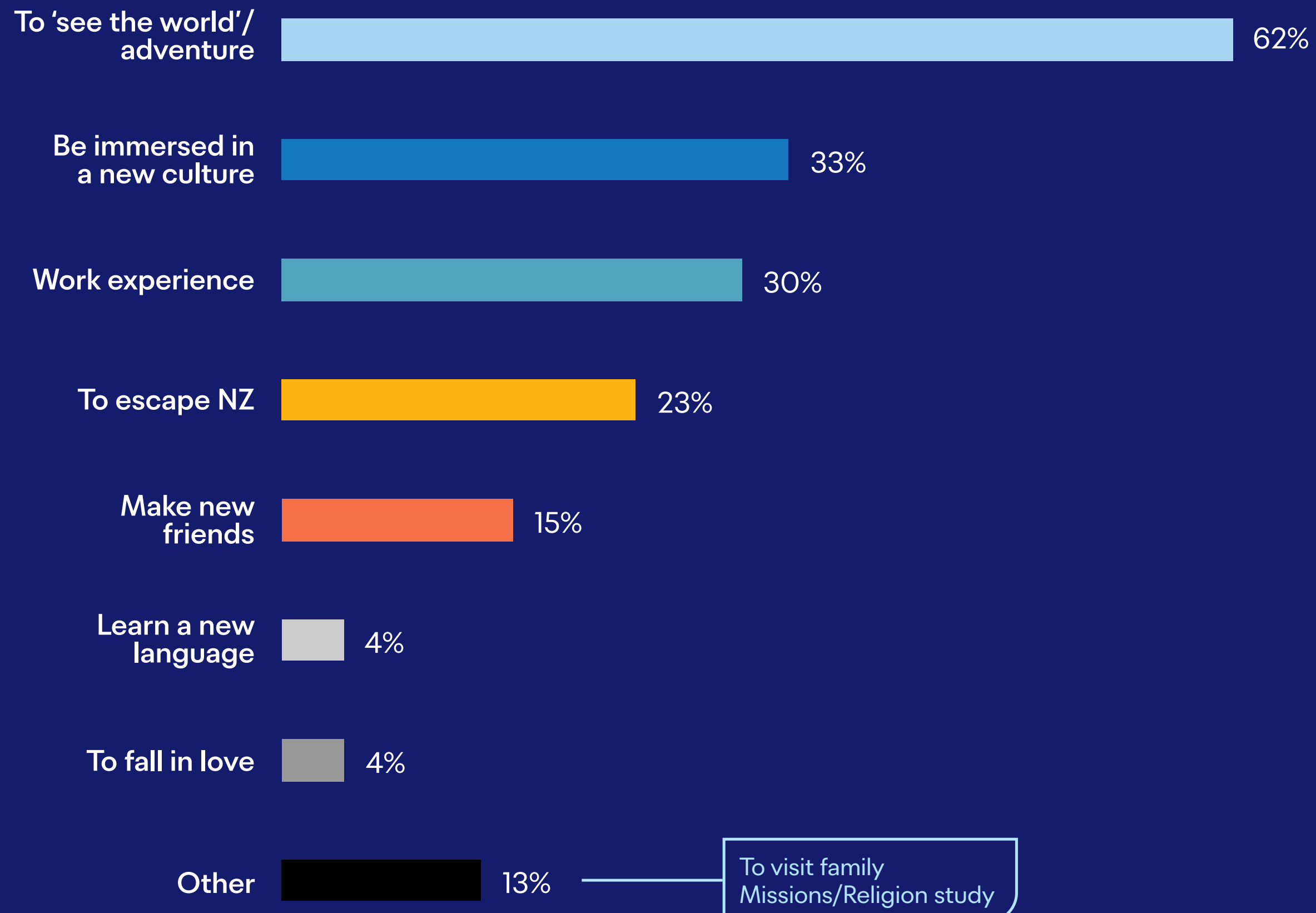
Length of OE



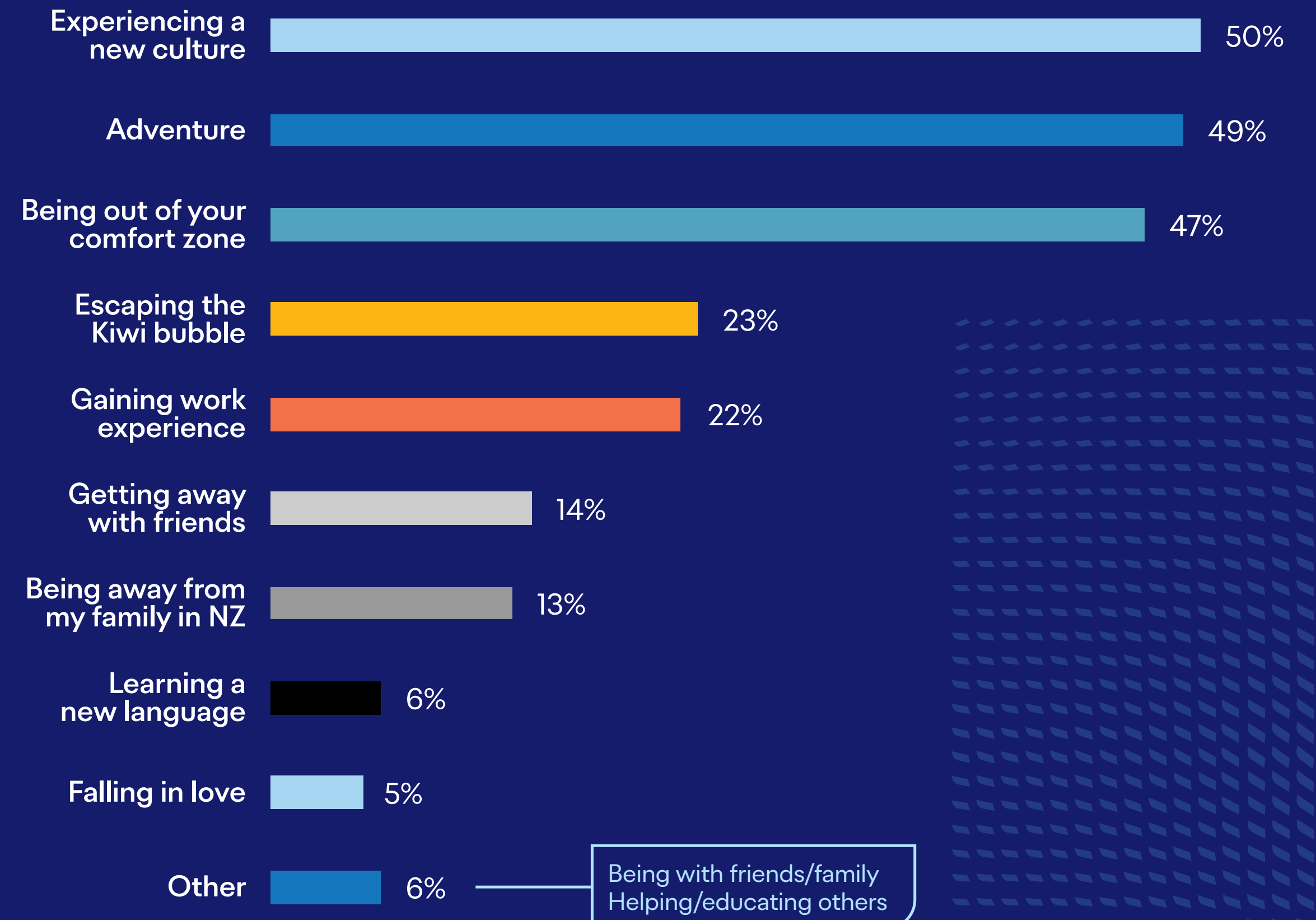
Previous OE - Reasons for OE & impactful experiences

3 in 5 said the main reason for their OE was to see the world, while the most impactful experiences were driven by experiencing a new culture & adventure

Main reasons for OE

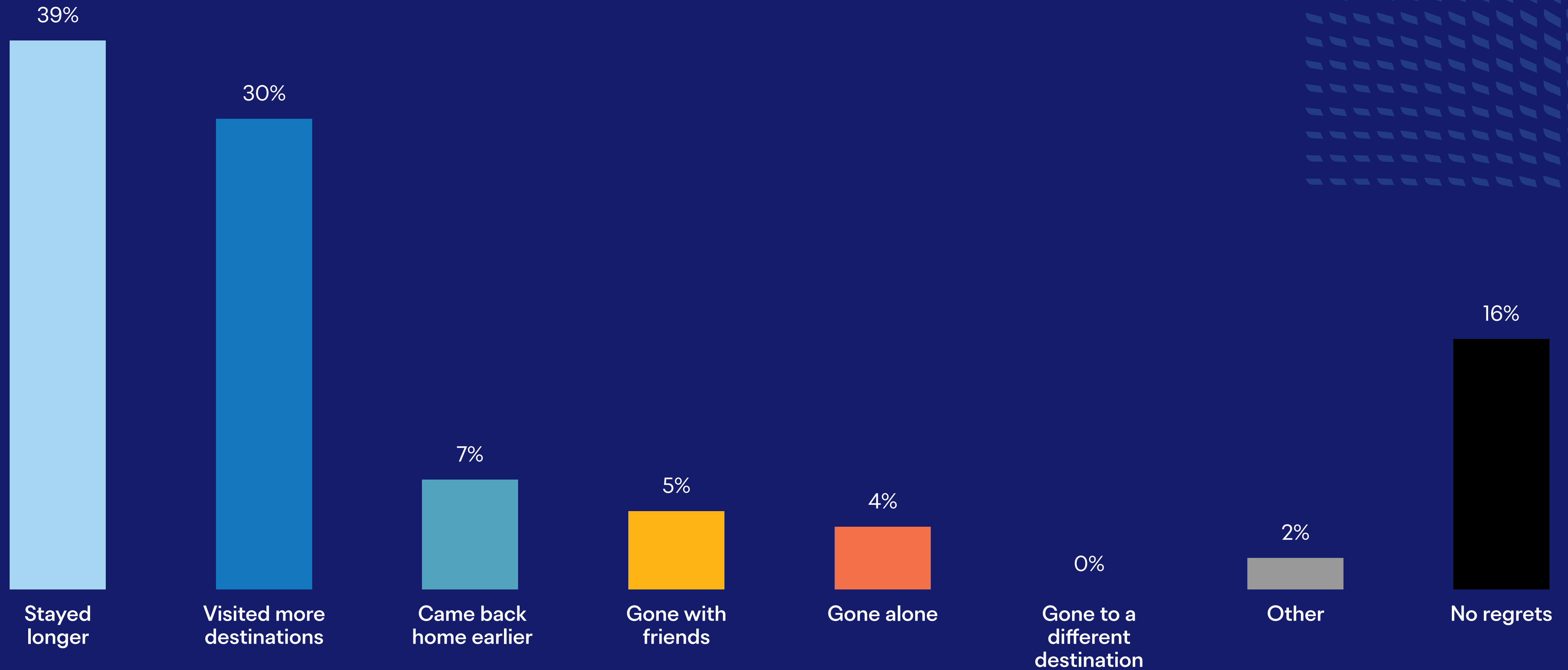


Most memorable/impactful experiences



Previous OE - OE biggest regret "I wish I had"

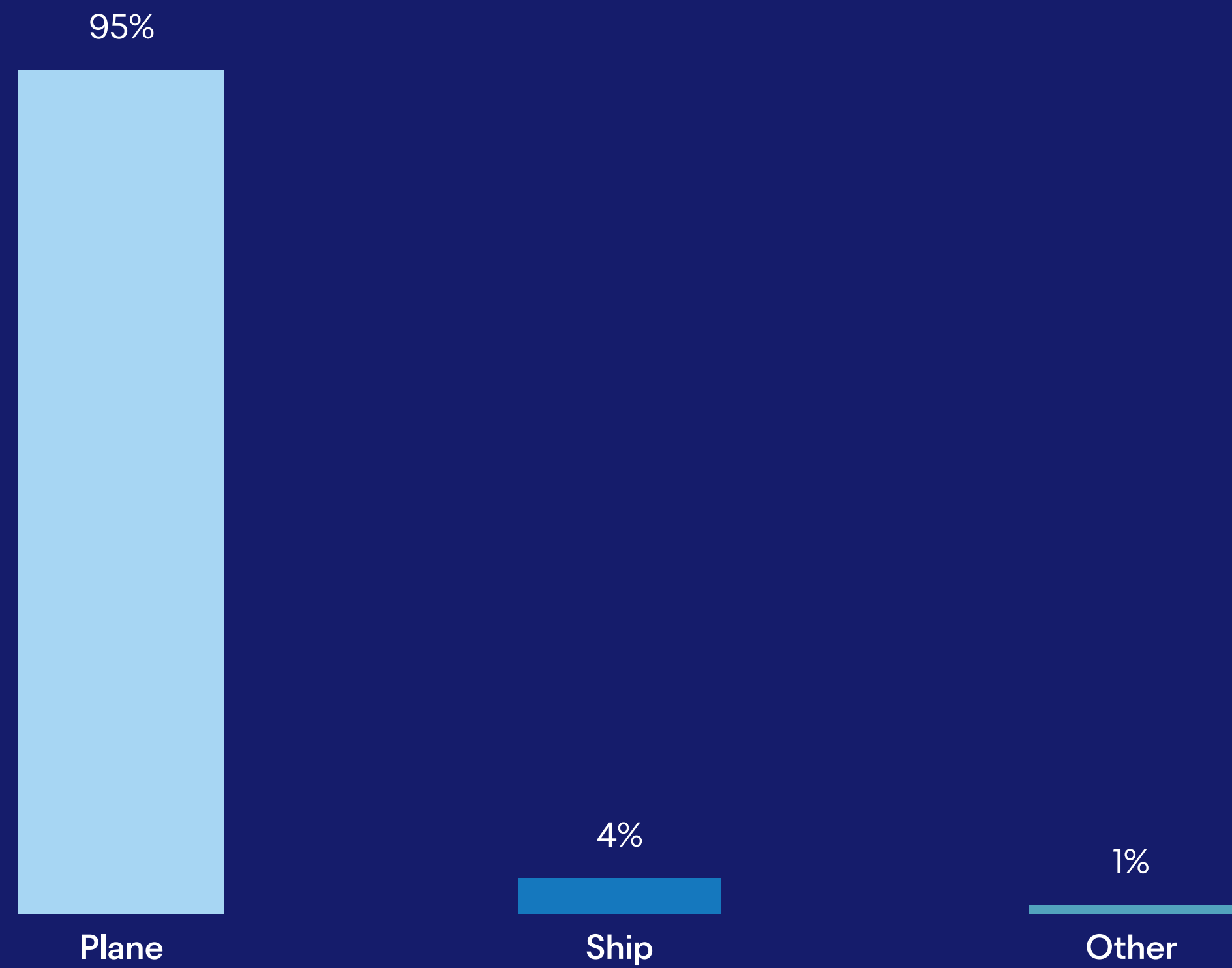
For a third of those who have been on an OE in the past, not staying longer is their biggest regret



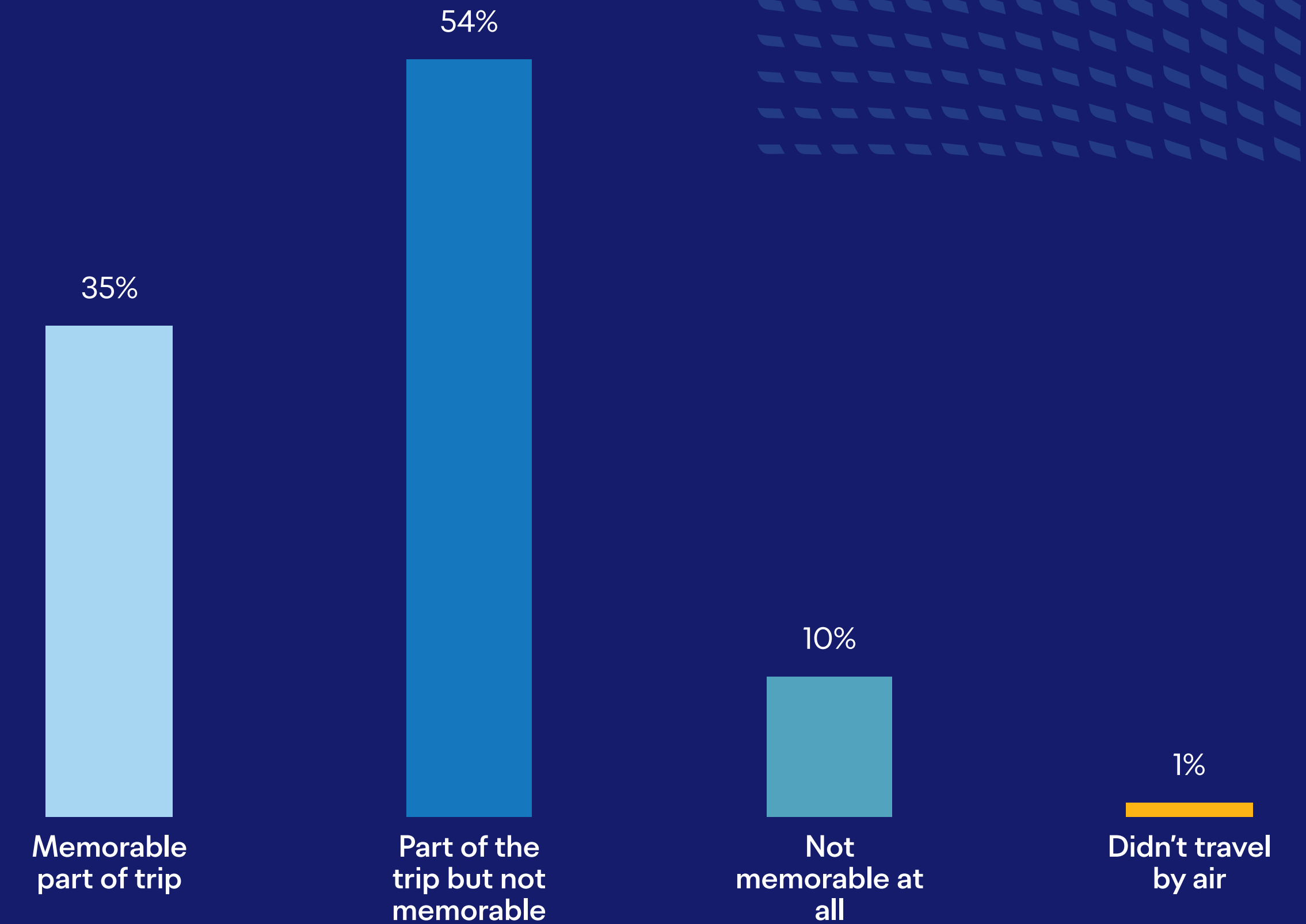
Previous OE - Travel method

Almost all travelled to their main destination by plane, but over half said air travel was not a memorable part of their trip

Travel to/from main destination



Air travel importance



Future OE

K

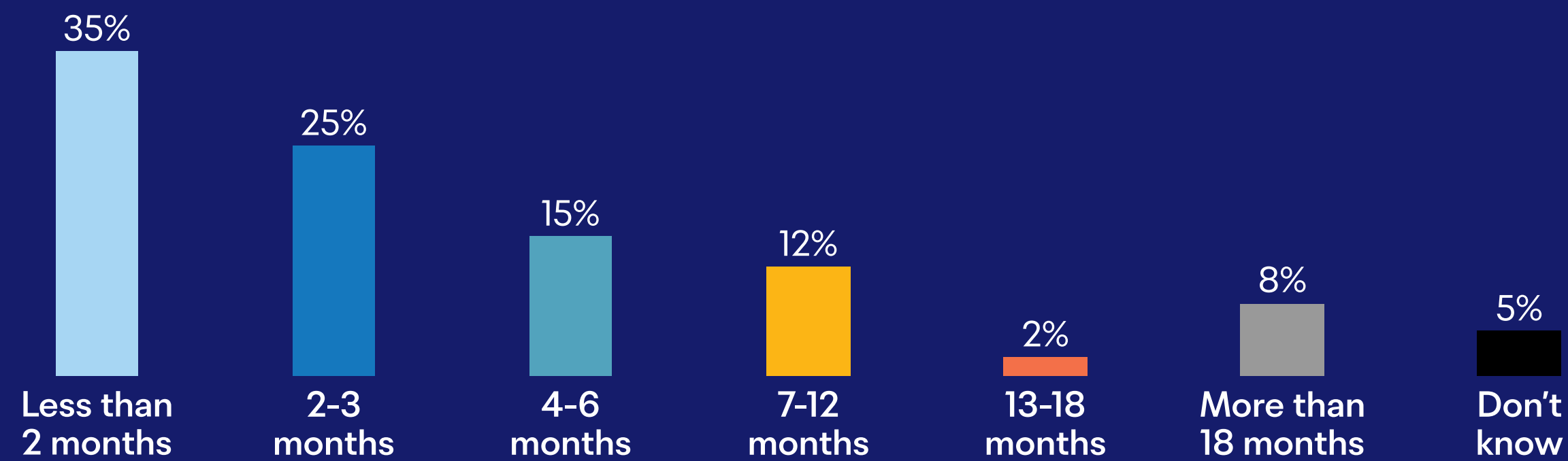
U



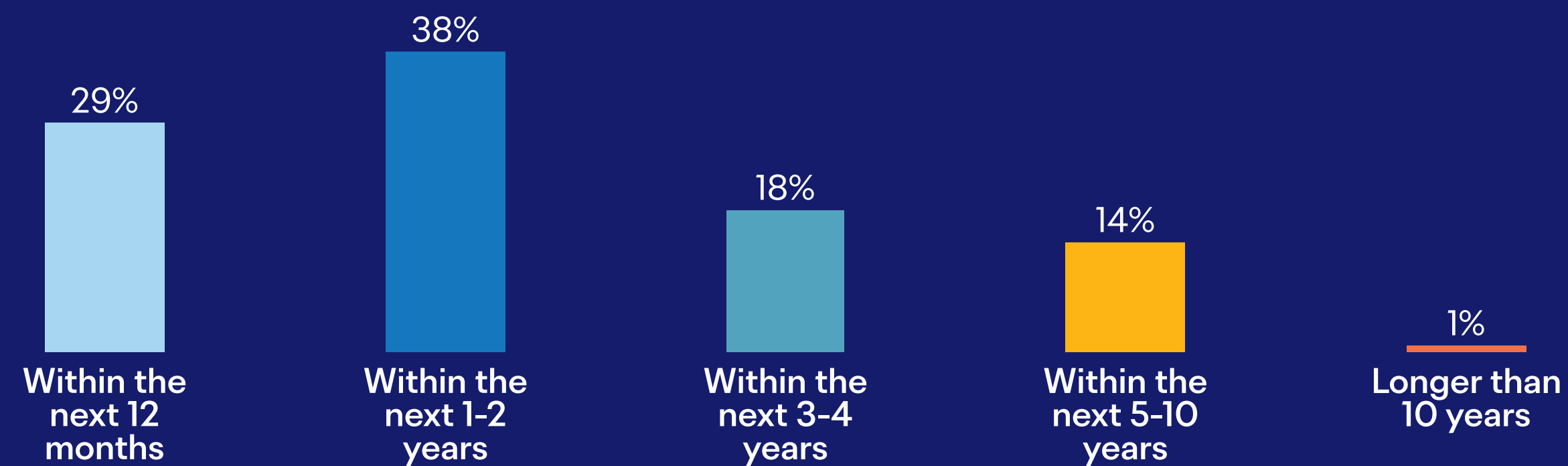
Future OE - Details 2

The kiwi OE is getting shorter in length, more like an extended holiday

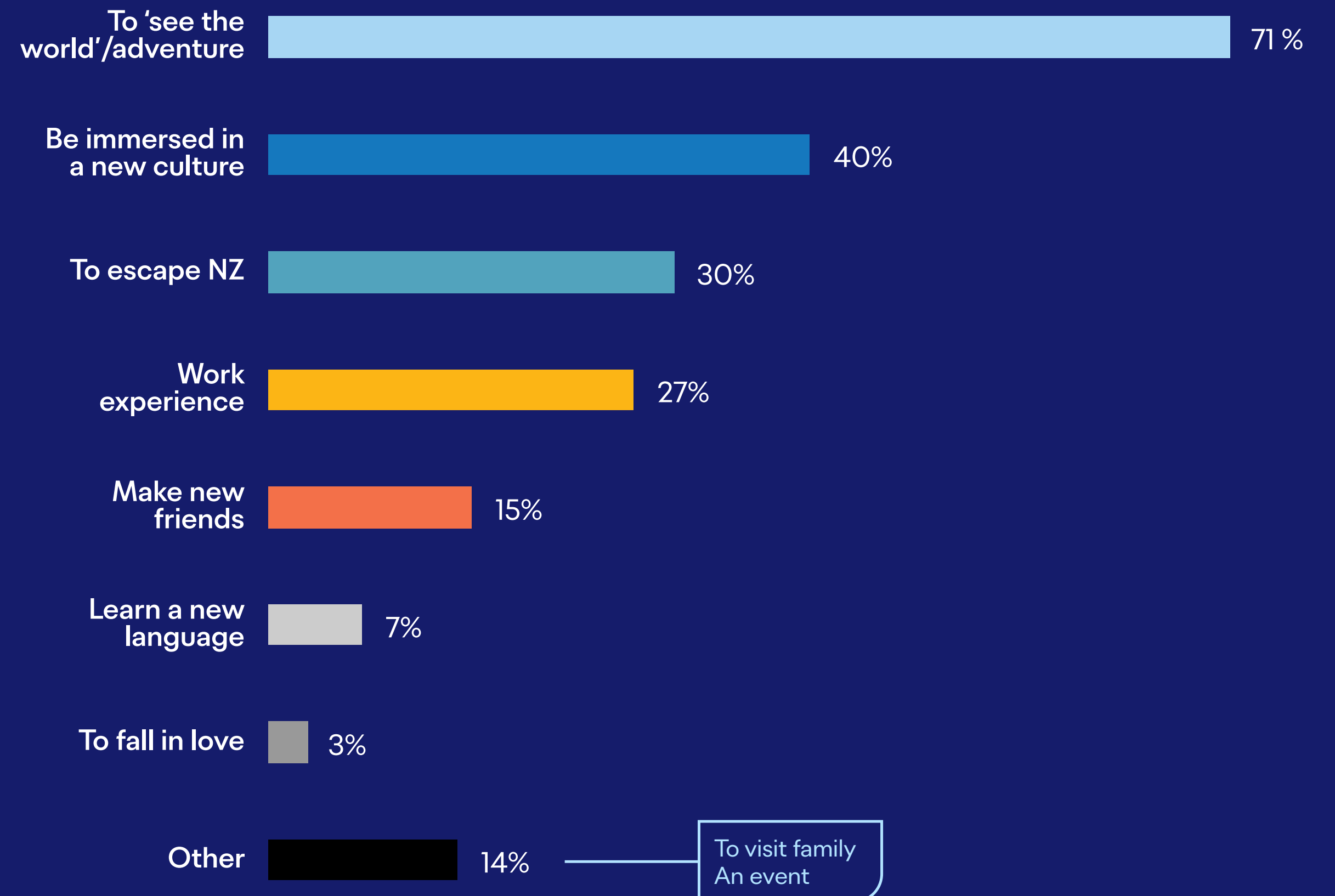
Intended length



When intending to go

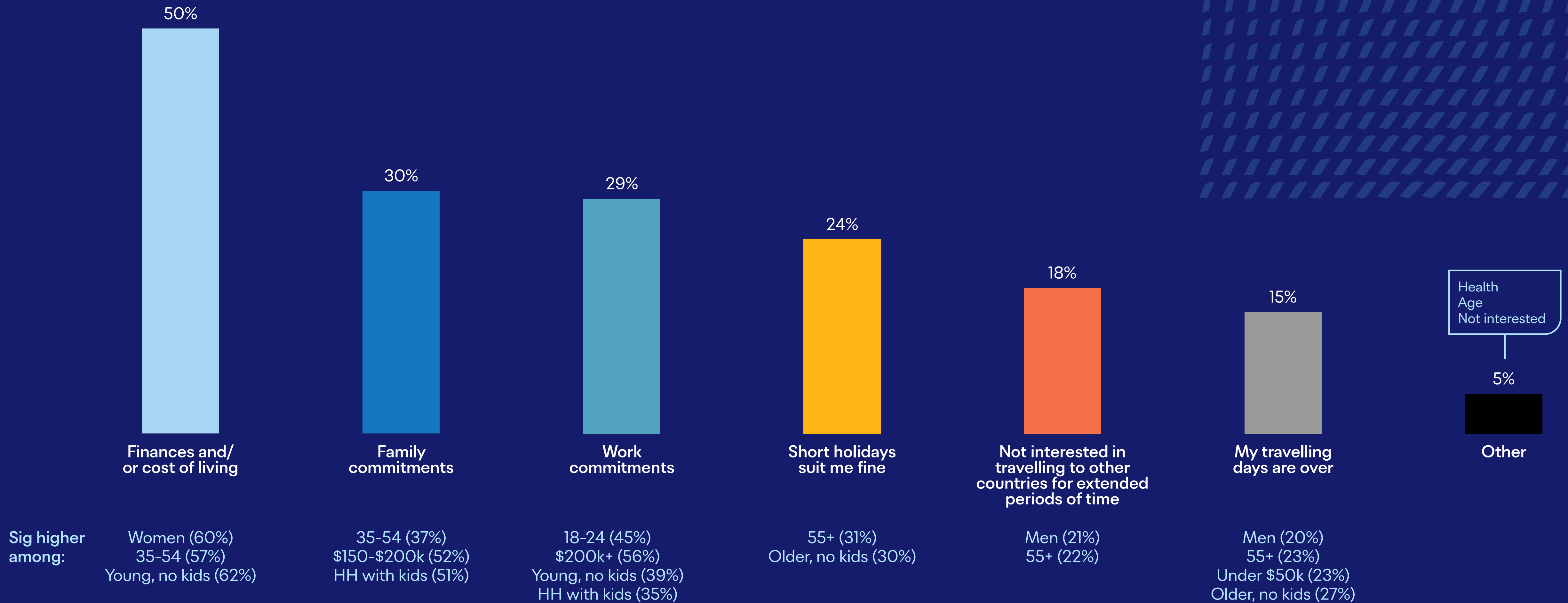


Main reasons for future OE



Future OE - Reasons for not planning a future OE

Among those who are not intending to go on an OE in the future, the main barrier is finances / cost of living along with (to a lesser extent) family and work commitments



Sig higher among:
Women (60%)
35-54 (57%)
Young, no kids (62%)

35-54 (37%)
\$150-\$200k (52%)
HH with kids (51%)

18-24 (45%)
\$200k+ (56%)
Young, no kids (39%)
HH with kids (35%)

55+ (31%)
Older, no kids (30%)

Men (21%)
55+ (22%)

Men (20%)
55+ (23%)
Under \$50k (23%)
Older, no kids (27%)

Case Studies



Case Studies

Auckland Airport recently held a Great OE competition, encouraging Kiwis to take a walk down memory lane for a chance to win a travel voucher towards their next OE.

Snippets of the winners' stories and the photos they included in their entry are featured on an 80 metre outdoor exhibition in front of the international terminal. The exhibition showcases Auckland Airport's history over the past six decades as the airport looks back at how it has evolved over time and looks forward at how it is changing as part of its upgrades for future.

Here are our winners' OE stories – their special memories highlight the important part the Auckland Airport plays in the iconic Kiwi tradition.



Case Studies – Kay Clarke

Waikato resident Kay Clarke embarked on her Big OE in 1979.

Instead of finishing her seventh-form year, Kay decided it was time to see the world, and as a fresh-faced 16-year-old, she left New Zealand on her big OE.

While most of her friends chose to do their OEs in London, Kay went against the grain and instead spent a year travelling the west coast of the USA. With a base in Northern California, Kay visited Nevada, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and a brief detour to Canada.

Reflecting on her experience, Kay recalls joining a marching band and says this was a highlight of her trip.

“Luckily I packed my flute in my luggage, and while I could never profess to being musical, my flute gave me the opportunity to join a marching band. We travelled widely and had great success in statewide competitions. On Thanksgiving Day 1979 my Band buddies and I marched in the Disneyland Parade, with Disney characters joining us on Main Street, while happy families looked on. This was definitely a “pinch me” moment and a highlight of my OE.”

Kay says she loved every moment of her American OE, which sparked her passion for travel and set her on a career path within the tourism industry. The travel gene was passed on to her two sons who have both gone on overseas adventures, one even followed her footsteps to the USA.

While Kay’s travelled extensively, to this day she still has not made it to the UK and says if she gets to embark on another OE, that’s where she will be going.

The picture shows Kay at Auckland Airport in 1980, having just arriving home from her OE. “I was laden with oversized luggage, treasured mementos, my 10 speed bike in a box, and freshly permed hair,” she recalls.

The Great
OE



Case Studies - Jenn Hooper

"Travel is my gig," says Jenn Hooper who left on her OE in 1997, along with her childhood sweetheart who she had been with since they were 14 years old (and they're still married!).

The pair travelled far and wide, ticking off an incredible 35+ countries, from Indonesia to Tanzania, while they based themselves in London.

It was six years before Jenn and her husband returned to New Zealand to start a family, and in that time she says they made countless incredible memories.

"The people in Indonesia and Malawi were probably the friendliest. The snorkelling in Turkey was amazing - as was the Turkish man that gave me a traditional "bath". The food in France was incredible. Everything in Africa was mind blowing - from the pyramids to sand boarding in Namibia to patting a real life Cheetah. I loved travelling with my childhood sweetheart too - we'd been together since we were 14 and had been married 5 years when we left NZ (still are now!)."

For Jenn, travel is not only about seeing the world - in her words, it's about "making sure that the world is still out there."

Jenn and her husband now have three children, one of whom is severely disabled. As the founder and spokesperson of Action to Improve Maternity (AIM) and the founder of Changing Places, a charity which provides fully accessible bathrooms for the disabled, Jenn doesn't have a lot of leisure time.

However, for her next OE she would like to go to Geneva, Switzerland. Her goal is to visit the United Nations and World Health Organisation in Geneva to share her daughter Charley's story, and raise awareness of her work campaigning for changes to New Zealand's maternity care system.

The picture shows Jenn and her husband at Auckland Airport in 1997, preparing to embark on the trip of a lifetime. She recalls: "My darling dad (who passed 20 years ago now) said there was "too much dust in this damned place" in an effort to explain his weeping eyes. Right there on that tarmac, we were asked how long we think we'd be away. I said anything from 6 months to 6 years. Dad said, "Don't let pride keep you from coming home if you think you've made a mistake". We were gone 6 years and 24 days."



The Great
OE



Case Studies – Kaleb Kelly

In their early 20s, Kaleb Kelly and his wife set off from Auckland Airport on their Big OE. They had tickets for flights around the world and spent a whirlwind 5 ½ months living out of their backpacks. They travelled to 19 destinations, stopping at America, Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Egypt, England, France, Germany, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Laos, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, The Netherlands and Vietnam.

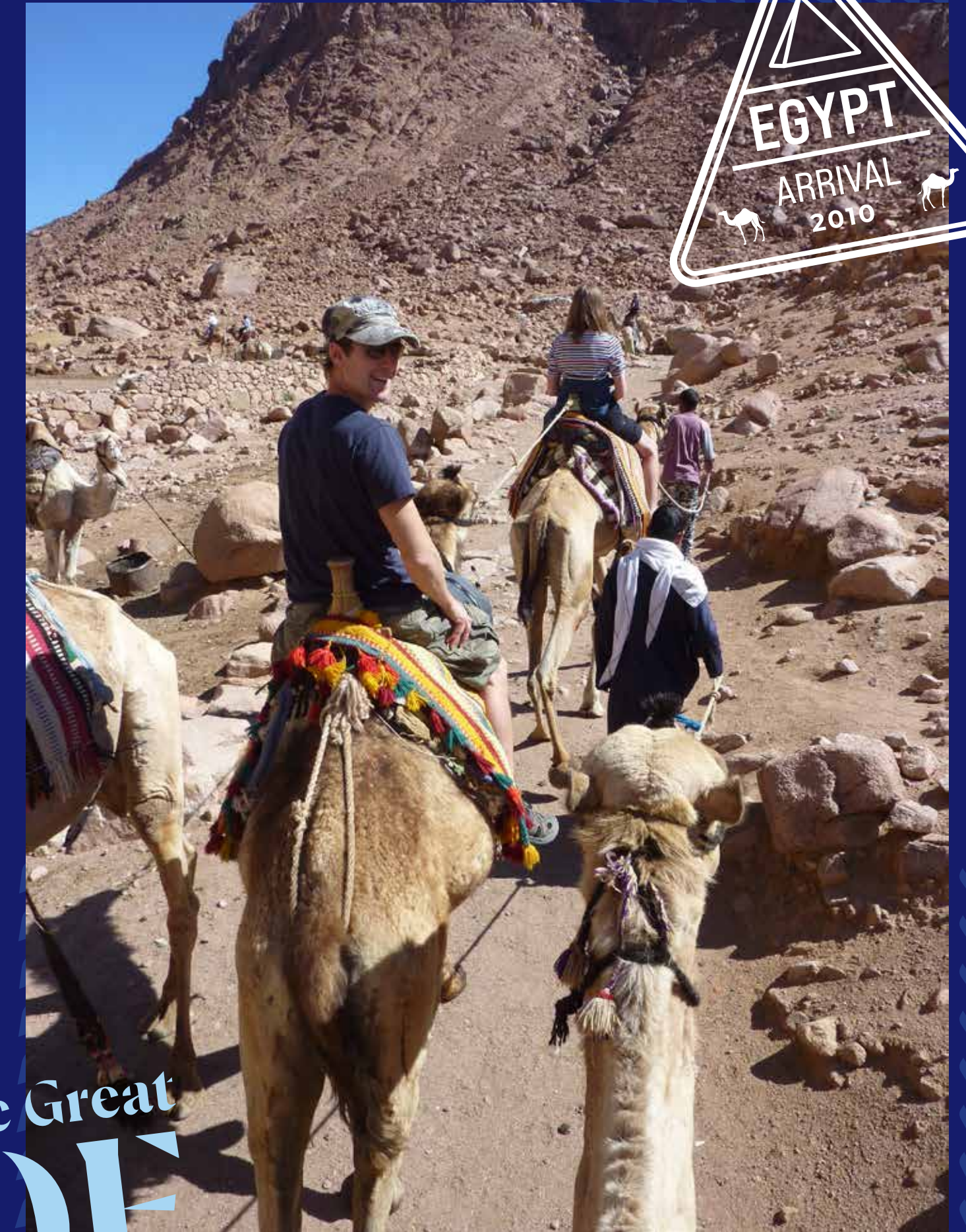
Kaleb says one of the highlights of the OE was traveling through Egypt, not just exploring Cairo and the pyramids but also exploring more of Egypt and heading out through the desert on a tour, as shown in his picture.

“We drove through the desert and through a mountainous range that was so amazing it looked like a picture! We went to climb Mount Sinai and at the bottom of the mountain we paid to ride camels halfway up. It was such a cool, if uncomfortable, experience to ride a camel for the first time. We had a bedouin guide who led us up the mountain and bedouin camel boy who made sure the camel did what it was supposed to do, but my camel boy just put me on the camel and left!” he recalls.

While the trip was an incredible experience, Kaleb says that if he were to do it all over again, he would spend longer at each destination.

“I would take my time to relax and enjoy the atmosphere just as much as the sights, instead of rushing from one place to the next and try and fit everything into a short period of time.”

Kaleb and his wife have since had children so aside from some small trips, they haven't been able to go on another OE. For his next adventure, Kaleb says he would take his family to the Netherlands to visit his brother who lives there with his wife and kids.



The Great
OE

Case Studies - Elliot Grossmith

Inspired by the Mongol Rally, Elliot Grossmith and his two friends, Josh and Liam, decided to create their own overland adventure when they took off on their OE in 2023.

Their goal was to start in the UK and drive all the way to Singapore. By the end of it, they managed to visit 27 countries, 45 cities and four islands, covering a distance of roughly 30,000km.

They did most of it in a tiny 1999 Nissan Micra with a 1000cc engine that they purchased for £600 in the UK.

When reminiscing on the experience, Elliot says the highlight was feeling an incredible sense of freedom and adventure.

"It was something I hadn't really felt before. We didn't have any set route or plan, we just knew our end goal and had a few pre booked events but ultimately everything in between was up for debate, which was very liberating."

For Elliot, the one thing he would do differently would be to spend some more time in one place to explore. "I found it was easy to keep moving in the spirit of the trip, but we'd often come across posts or hear about something cool and realise we'd missed the opportunity to experience it."

The picture shows Josh and his friends at Cappadocia, Turkey with their prized possession, the Nissan Micra.

Travelling across the world in a tiny vehicle did nothing to deter Elliot and his friends from having another overseas adventure. The trio are currently dreaming up their next trip – this time, they'd like to start in Alaska and travel the Pan-American Highway to Chile.



Methodology



5-minute online survey using Kantar's panel



Sample size of n=1,069

- Nationally Representative
- Questions were focussed on previous OE's and intent to take a future OE

Fieldwork dates:

- 9th – 15th December 2024



Thank
you

