

Southern California Beach Surveys

A supplement to “Access for All: A New Generation’s Challenges on the California Coast,” by Jon Christensen, UCLA, and Philip King, San Francisco State University

Over the summer of 2016, we conducted surveys on 11 beaches in Ventura, Los Angeles, and Orange Counties in Southern California. We surveyed 1,146 beachgoers. This supplement to our full report summarizes the findings of those surveys.

Of the people we surveyed, most were visiting the beach from their homes within the region, but others came from throughout the state, including the Central Valley, from other states, and other countries.

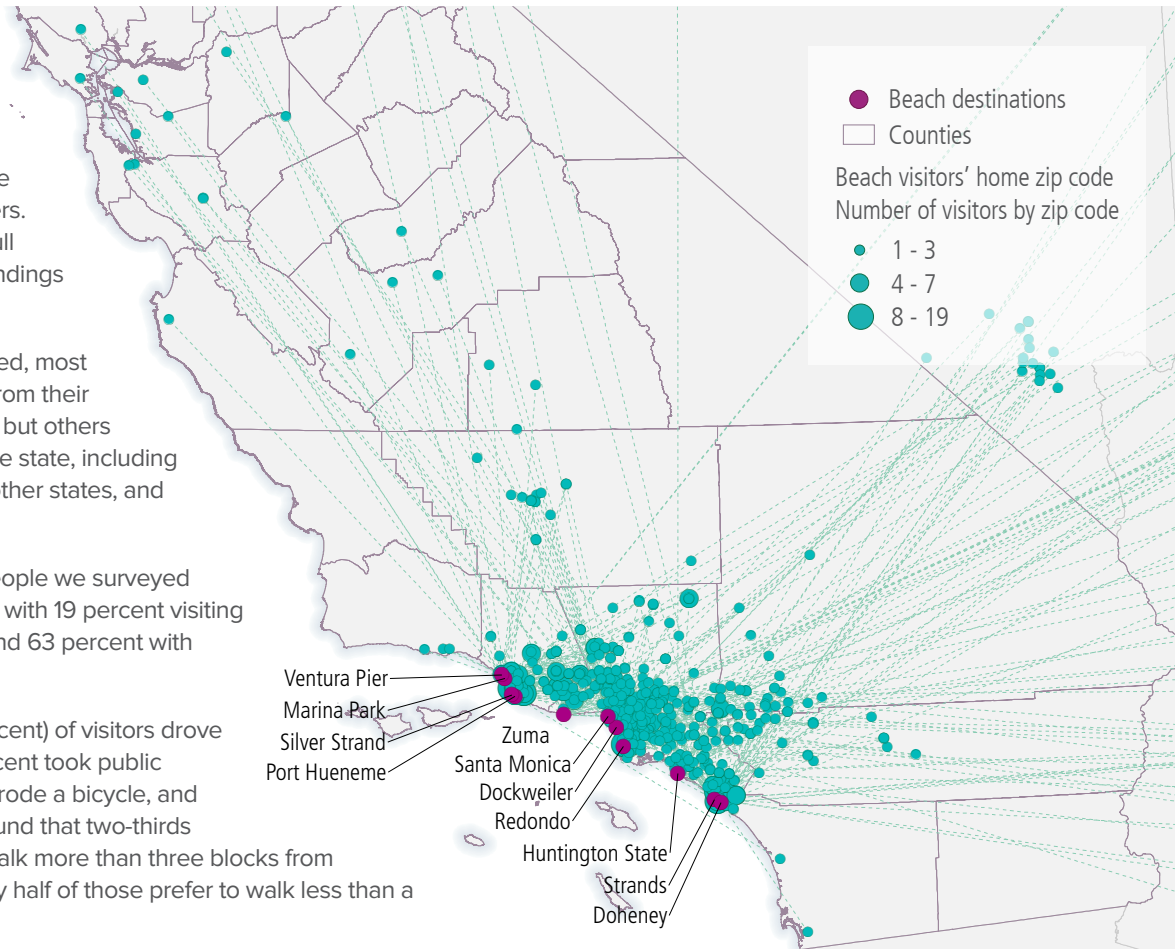
Only 18 percent of the people we surveyed were at the beach alone, with 19 percent visiting with one other person, and 63 percent with three or more people.

The vast majority (90 percent) of visitors drove to the beach. Only 3 percent took public transportation, 1 percent rode a bicycle, and 5 percent walked. We found that two-thirds of visitors prefer not to walk more than three blocks from transportation, and nearly half of those prefer to walk less than a block.

We found that most visitors would spend two to four hours at the beach (43 percent) or more (45 percent). Only 12 percent would stay less than two hours. For just 16 percent this was their first visit of the year to the beach, while 43 percent had visited two to four times, and 41 percent five times or more.

Most beachgoers were daytrippers (77 percent), but 21 percent were staying overnight. Just over half of those staying overnight—54 percent—stayed in a hotel, motel, or short-term rental; 29 percent were staying with family or friends; 10 percent were camping or staying in an RV or boat; and 4 percent had a second residence or long-term rental.

The primary reasons that people come to the coast are widely shared across all demographic groups. We found remarkable consensus across age, income, and ethnic groups when we asked why people visit the beach and what they do there. Across all of California’s diverse demographic groups, people come



to the beach to relax and enjoy the scenery, and to give their children a place to play. They come to walk, wade, swim, and surf. They come to celebrate or have a party with a barbecue or picnic. When they arrive at the beach, they want clean sand and water, and they expect basic amenities such as trash cans, restrooms, and parking.

We found that some of the beaches more closely reflected the demographic diversity of California and surrounding communities than others. For example, beachgoers at Santa Monica Beach fairly closely reflect the demographics of California, while also drawing visitors from other states and countries. A little farther south, Dockweiler State Beach, under the flight paths of airliners departing from Los Angeles International Airport, attracts more Latinos, African Americans, and families with lower household incomes than Santa Monica Beach, while farther south, Doheney State Beach in Dana Point in Orange County attracts more white

visitors from families with higher household incomes. These patterns are likely the result of a complex combination of factors, including self-sorting, or people choosing beaches where they will feel welcome; availability of amenities, such as the fire rings at Dockweiler; historical patterns of visitation and discrimination; and the proximity of different communities to each of the beaches.

Like the California voters we surveyed in a statewide poll, the Southern California beachgoers we surveyed were concerned about the cost of visiting the coast and parking. Our beach surveys also enabled us to use a “travel cost model,” a standard tool used in economics, to estimate the demand for beach visits and the value of trips based on how much it costs people to travel to the coast. The travel cost model gives us information about how much visitors actually value a visit to the coast. It is a useful approximate indicator of the value of a trip to the beach based on people’s observed behavior.

In our surveys of beachgoers, we calculated that the average value of a daytrip to the beach based on the total economic demand for daytrips is \$36.74 and that the average cost of traveling to the beach and home again—not including the costs of parking, food, and activities—is \$22.09. The difference of \$14.65 is the “surplus value” generated by the average daytrip. This figure helps us understand how additional costs could deter additional visits: if the average trip were to cost just \$15 more, many visitors might elect not to visit the beach. This finding helps explain why beachgoers are particularly sensitive to the costs of parking and day use fees, which can exceed \$15 in many locations.

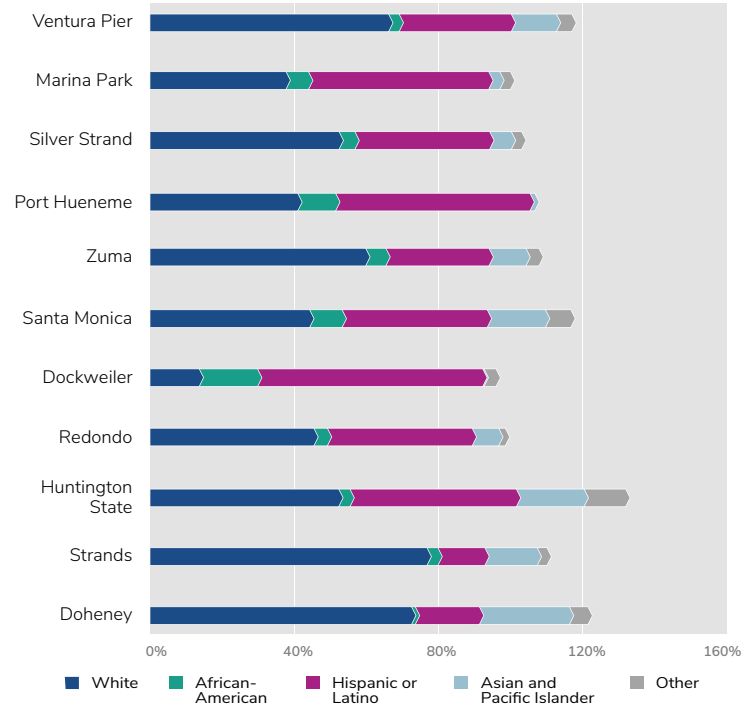
For overnight visitors, we calculated that the average value of a multi-day trip to the coast is \$605.05, with roundtrip travel costing on average \$194.41—not including the price of overnight stays—leaving a surplus value of \$410.64. With overnight visitors staying an average of four nights on the coast, the surplus value left over for accommodations is just \$102.66 per day. Given the difficulty of finding a place to spend the night on the coast for that amount, it is easy to see why Californians might decide not to visit. For example, the California Coastal Commission found that the average economy room rate in Santa Monica in the summer of 2016 was \$135 a night. And according to the Commission, only 5 percent of hotel and motel rooms available in California’s coastal areas are economy rooms.

Southern California beaches are an iconic attraction for people from around the world, but they are also an important part of the region’s system of parks and open spaces and a recreational resource for people who live in the region. The California Coastal Act promises “access for all.” In our full report we make recommendations for fulfilling that promise now and in the future.

For a copy of our full report and an interactive online version of the report, with recommendations as well as data and sources, see ioes.ucla.edu/coastal-access. For more information, contact jonchristensen@ioes.ucla.edu.

ETHNICITY OF BEACH VISITORS

As with the U.S. Census, survey respondents could check more than one box for their ethnic identity or none if they preferred, so the totals do not add up to 100 percent.



HOUSEHOLD INCOME OF BEACH VISITORS

