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## New Jerseyans say gambling is only a small part of Atlantic City's fun

November 10, 2014

It may take a crystal ball to see the future of Atlantic City's casino industry, but New Jerseyans who have visited the resort town say gambling is only a small part of the fun there, according to the latest Rutgers-Eagleton Poll. While nearly half of visitors gamble at least occasionally, a majority says they stay away from the casino floor entirely, taking advantage of other activities in the shore community. A third of visitors report they are equally or more likely to engage in non-gambling activities as they are to visit the casinos.

Spending time on the famed Atlantic City Boardwalk is named most often as a non-gaming activity, followed by dining out. Attending some type of show, concert, or other form of entertainment, as well as shopping and the beach, are among other popular things visitors do there.

"Most New Jerseyans take a dim view of Atlantic City's gaming future and think the city has failed to become a major resort destination," said Ashley Koning, manager of Rutgers-Eagleton Poll at the Eagleton Center for Public Interest Polling. "Yet visitors are more likely to focus on non-gambling activities than they are to roll the dice. This disconnect may be making it difficult for Atlantic City to effectively promote its wide range of activities that don't require setting foot on a gaming floor."

Almost all New Jersey adults have been to Atlantic City at some point in their lives. Forty-three percent say they have visited within the last year, and over a third plan a visit in the coming year.

Visitors name Borgata the top casino, with just over one in ten saying they spend the most time there, followed closely by Tropicana and the Trump Taj Mahal. Among those planning a visit in the next year, Borgata's lead is even greater: 17 percent spend the most time there, while 14 percent name Tropicana and 12 percent focus on the Taj Mahal. Koning noted that the question did not focus specifically on gambling, so responses would likely include visits to restaurants and shows as well.

Results are from a statewide poll of 842 residents contacted by live callers on both landlines and cell phones from Sept. 29 to Oct. 5, 2014. The margin of error is +/- 4.4 percentage points.

### **Not everyone gambles; lower priority for many who do**

More than half of those who have ever visited Atlantic City say they do not gamble there. Among those who do, casino games do not take up most of their time. Seventy-eight percent of occasional gamblers spend more time on other activities; 34 percent of frequent gamblers say the same.

The likelihood of gambling does not differ by gender, but does by race: whites are 12 points more likely than non-whites to say they gamble some or most of the time, and more than twice as likely to spend more time on gambling than non-gambling activities.

Millennial visitors are least likely to say they gamble: more than six in ten spend all of their time on non-gambling activities. About a quarter do some gambling but spend more time on other activities. Only 7 percent of Millennials spend more time gambling than visiting outside of the casinos. Despite the grey-haired gambler stereotype, 55 percent of visitors age 50 and over say they do not gamble at all.

Gambling is more frequent among the more affluent. Those living in households with incomes between \$100,000 and \$150,000 are the most likely to say they gamble on at least some visits – more than half do so – but only 10 percent actually dedicate most of their trip to it, as opposed to other activities. Those making more than \$150,000 are the most frequent gamblers, with over a quarter saying they gamble on most visits; 20 percent says they spend more time gambling than on other things.

## **Non-gambling activities named by Atlantic City visitors**

©Rutgers-Eagleton Poll, October 2014

### **Visitors name wide range of non-gambling activities**

As Atlantic City campaigns tirelessly to promote non-gambling activities, many visitors already look beyond the casinos for things to do. Spending time on the Boardwalk – the first in the United States when it opened in 1870 – tops the mentions of main activities, at 35 percent. Dining out is named by 30 percent, while 25 percent mention entertainment like a show, concert, or movie. One in five spends time shopping at places such as the Outlets, while a similar number focuses on the city's free beach.



Visitors also mention – though to a much lesser degree – nightlife activities like clubbing or dancing, walking around seeing the sights, and visiting for a professional meeting. Just a few mention visiting for some type of wellness treatment or relaxation or for a sporting event. “It seems like many visitors are ‘doing AC’ the way promotional campaigns have hoped, and visitors’ responses highlight the array of activities the city offers beyond gambling,” said Koning. “But there is some distance to go to build bigger and consistently loyal crowds.”

Affinity for the Boardwalk increases with age: 24 percent of Millennials name it as a main activity, compared to 42 percent of seniors 65 and older. Rather than the boardwalk, the top activities for Millennials are the beach and shopping. Visitors aged 30-49 are most likely to name dining out, at 36 percent. Those under 50 are much more likely to say something about Atlantic City's nightlife: one in six talks about going out, compared to almost no visitors 50 or older. Older visitors are most likely to mention the boardwalk and more likely than younger visitors to mention viewing some type of show.

### **Older, more affluent, and close by are most frequent visitors**

While nine in ten New Jerseyans have visited Atlantic City at one point or another, younger residents (79 percent) and those in households making under \$50,000 per year (87 percent) are less likely to report having been there. Those living in urban or exurban counties are also less likely to have ever visited Atlantic City, compared to those closer to the resort town.

Just over four in ten New Jersey residents have been to Atlantic City within the past year. Age has the reverse effect among this group: younger New Jerseyans are much more likely to have visited in the past year compared to older New Jerseyans. Poll manager Koning suggested that older residents may see less of a need to come back as the lure of gambling declines. “Given that Millennials are least likely to gamble, they may instead see growing nightlife and getaway opportunities awaiting them in Atlantic City beyond the casino floors,” she added.

Income matters: about half of those in households making \$100,000 or more have gone to Atlantic City recently, versus just 36 percent of those making under \$50,000. Garden Staters living in closer proximity to the resort city are more likely to have visited within the past twelve months.

Planned visits over the next 12 months are down: just 35 percent say they will visit soon, eight points fewer than said they visited in the past year. The decline cuts across all groups. While Millennials still dominate as future visitors, the 44 percent who say they will visit is 11 points lower than visited in the past year. Just 23 percent of seniors say they plan a visit in the near future.

In a worrisome result, those closest to Atlantic City show the largest drop in likely visits: while 56 percent of Shore county residents visited last year, 43 percent say they have a visit planned. Results are similar in South Jersey: 45 percent plan to visit, versus the 60 percent who visited in the last year.

### **Borgata is #1, but not for everyone**

The luxurious Las Vegas-esque casino, Borgata, reigns as the number one spot for Atlantic City visitors, with 11 percent identifying it as the casino hotel in which they spend most of their time, relatively similar to the 9 percent naming Tropicana and 8 percent saying Trump Taj Mahal. The Caesar's Entertainment casinos – Caesar's, Bally's, Harrah's, and the recently closed Showboat – are each named by 4 to 5 percent. The shuttered Trump Plaza was named by 3 percent, and the massive failure that was Revel got just 2 percent. All others get 2 percent or less, and 38 percent of visitors say they never go to any casino at all while in Atlantic City.

Casino preferences vary by age. Among millennials, almost one in five say Tropicana is number one for them, perhaps because of the bustling nightlife and entertainment choices against the lively Havana-themed backdrop. Borgata is most popular among the 30-49 crowd, at 14 percent – also the age group who frequents casinos the most.

The Borgata not only has a richer feel to it, but also has a richer clientele. One in five visitors in households making \$100,000 or more prefer Borgata; while this is the top choice among those making \$50,000 to less than \$100,000, it is in a virtual tie with Tropicana. Visitors in the lowest income bracket are more than twice as likely to prefer boardwalk casinos Tropicana and the Taj Mahal to Borgata.

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