Summary of the Study:

Infogroup has been helping its customers market their products and services since 1972 with high quality consumer and business data. We provide insights to customers to enable them to make the right marketing decisions. In an ongoing series of insights studies, Infogroup wanted to answer a question marketers often ask: “Where do Americans go to get away from it all?” The answer turned out to be quite simple.

“If you build it, they will come,” a line famously spoken by a mysterious voice in the 1989 film Field of Dreams to Ray Kinsella (Kevin Costner), who was a small town Iowa farmer. It turns out the reverse might be useful for finding small town vacation hotspots. To be clear, “small town” refers to a Census micropolitan region*, which can sometimes be many towns closely connected¹. For example, why would the small town of Sevierville, TN have 219 hotels with a population less than 100,000? It is unlikely that a small town like Sevierville could sustain that many hotels unless people were visiting on a regular basis.

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*Micropolitan Statistical Area—A Core Based Statistical Area associated with at least one urban cluster that has a population of at least 10,000, but less than 50,000. The Micropolitan Statistical Area comprises the Central County or counties containing the core, plus adjacent outlying counties having a high degree of social and economic integration with the central county or counties as measured through commuting. The Office of Management and Budget has identified 576 micropolitan areas.
Why are people visiting these places is another question entirely. It could be that a major industry makes its home in one of those small towns. In other words, hotels alone might not justify calling a town a vacation hotspot. To further investigate, Infogroup used its verified business database of more than 15 million records to observe key economic features of small towns with a high concentration of hotels per 10,000 residents (p/10k).

Here are the industries that showed a strong positive correlation:
1. Restaurants
2. Art Galleries & Dealers
3. Gift Shops
4. Candy & Confectionery Retail
5. Fishing Parties
6. Museums
7. Guide Services
8. Automated Teller Machines
9. T-Shirts – Retail
10. Bicycles – Renting

These industries paint the picture most people have in their heads of a tourist town. It appears measuring something as simple as the number of hotels p/10k might be able to identify which small towns Americans visit to get away.
Small Town Zip Code Clustering Analysis

There was still one more source of insight to consult: Infogroup’s own GeoDNA. GeoDNA is a segmentation tool designed to leverage Infogroup’s business and consumer data, along with U.S. Census data, to identify the genetic makeup of zip codes across the country. GeoDNA classifies all zip codes into 1 of 108 unique clusters. Each cluster is categorized as consumer-heavy, business-heavy, or a mix between the two. Since GeoDNA utilizes a large number of data elements, it can be helpful to describe each cluster with a short paragraph. For example, take the business-heavy cluster:

- **B18: Fresh Air and Fine Wine:** “Small towns near large parks with mostly small retail and service industry businesses, including a high presence of spas. Residents are doing well and earn relatively high incomes. They are heavy Internet users, investors, big travelers and early technology adopters.”

So, what did GeoDNA say about the top ten small towns with the highest concentration of hotels p/10k? For starters, they’re 12.5 times more likely to contain *Fresh Air and Fine Wine* than those outside the top ten. They’re also 3.6 times more likely to contain the mixed cluster:

- **A09: Gilded Getaways:** “Small towns in remote areas with high real-estate values and the above average presence of B&B’s, hotels & resorts, theaters, and attractions. Residents tend to be middle aged, self-employed or in construction. They enjoy wine, classical music, saltwater fishing, outdoor activities, golf and tennis.”

Given the high propensity of Fresh Air and Fine Wine and Gilded Getaways, hotels p/10k looks like a serviceable metric for classifying small towns as vacation hotspots. To find out for sure, Infogroup wanted to validate the metric with external sources to discover if their top ten hotel towns were actually great spots to vacation after all.
Additional Insights

For additional insight, Infogroup profiled each region in the top ten by examining demographic and psychographic features from its consumer database of more than 150 million records, and then identified key characteristics from its business database like major employers. All variables for this study were aggregated at the micropolitan level, and the full list includes:

- **Population** - U.S. Census population estimates for 2014
- **Employment Size** - Estimated number of employees for a firm
- **Sales Volume** - Estimated sales volume for an industry group
- **Marriage Rates** - Estimated percentage of households married
- **Home Ownership Rates** - Estimated percentage of home owners
- **Home Value** - Estimated average home value
- **Income** - Estimated average household income
- **TargetReady Models** - Average model score representing the region’s attitudes / behaviors
Concentration of Hotels Relative to Population

The US Map represents micropolitan regions. The redder the region, the higher the concentration of hotels relative to the population.
Concentration of Hotels Relative to Population

The bubble chart represents micropolitan region. The bluer and larger the bubble, the higher the concentration of hotels relative to the population.
Concentration of Hotels Relative to Population

The bubble chart represents percentage of all GeoDNA Clusters in the top ten hotel cities. The bluer and larger the bubble, the larger the percentage for that cluster.
No. 1: Sevierville, TN Micro Area

Positioned at the foot of Great Smoky Mountains National Park, this micro area offers pleasant mountain views and wholesome family fun. TargetReady models identify an affinity for freshwater fishing and animal companionship. Full time residents may find themselves working for Blalock & Sons Inc. or Westgate Resorts, the area's top two employers. Visitors can find a host of attractions in Pigeon Forge and Gatlinburg, two popular tourist towns, like Dollywood theme park, The Titanic Museum, and Ripley's Aquarium. Pigeon Forge, population 5,875, sees around 11 million visitors each year! Take it all in Sevierville; you're on top of the mountain as the number one small town vacation hotspot.

Hotels [p/10K]: 23
Home Ownership [%]: 70
Population [1000's]: 95
Home Value [$1,000s]: 152
Married [%]: 52
Income [$1000's]: 53
A quick visit to Branson's tourism website is the quickest way to find out what Branson is all about: live music! The main page is inundated with upcoming shows and vacation package offers. In 1991, "60 Minutes" named Branson the "live music capital of the Universe." At the time it had 22 theatres in operation, and more than twice that as of 2012³. Music isn't the only thing Branson has going for it: Silver Dollar City, one of the area's largest employers, is also a massive theme park. When summer rolls around the largest employer becomes Kanakuk Kamps, a summer camp program offering camps for Survival, Scuba Diving, and Aviation⁴. Put it all together and Branson shows high sales volume in the Hotels Rooming Houses & Camps industry along with Amusement & Recreation Services.

Picture Courtesy of Branson CVB: [www.explorebranson.com](http://www.explorebranson.com)

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### Demographics

- **Hotels [p/10K]:** 21
- **Home Ownership [%]:** 64
- **Population [1000’s]:** 85
- **Home Value [$1,000s]:** 111
- **Married [%]:** 54
- **Income [$1000’s]:** 49
"Heyyy youuu guyyyys!" That's right; Astoria was home to the 1980's classic The Goonies and a host of other films such as Kindergarten Cop, Free Willy 1 & 2, and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles III. That makes Astoria the perfect spot for the Oregon Film Museum, celebrating the great state's film heritage. Astoria's roots go back much further than any film though; Astoria was the first permanent settlement on the Pacific Coast, and many tourist attractions such as Fort Clatsop and Fort Astoria remain as historical landmarks. A modern Astoria thrives off Health Services and Paper & Allied Products Manufacturing; paper products manufacturer Georgia-Pacific tops the list of major employers, while spots three through five are all hospitals. Finally, TargetReady models Wine Lover, Cook from Scratch, and Camping rank inside the top five.

**Hotels [p/10K]: 20**

**Population [1000's]: 37**

**Married [%]: 43**

**Home Ownership [%]: 55**

**Home Value [$1,000s]: 201**

**Income [$1000's]: 46**
No. 4: Newport, OR Micro Area

There are several reasons why Newport might need so many hotels, but not one big one, like some of the other top ten hotspots. For one, the Hatfield Marine Science Center shows up as one of its top five employers. It turns out Newport does a lot of aquatic research. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) own website shows Newport operating three NOAA centers or laboratories tied to the Hatfield Center.

Newport is also home to the Oregon Coast Aquarium where Keiko, the orca whale that starred in Free Willy was housed while shooting the film. But, the focus isn't all science; the number one employer in the micro area is Chinook Winds Casino Resort.

Newport also possesses six beautiful beaches including historic Nye Beach, established in 1866, where art lovers have flocked for more than a century. Whether you're drawn to Newport for work or play, you'll have a place to stay and plenty of ways to pass the time, even if it seems like an unlikely vacation hotspot.

Photo Courtesy of City of Newport, Oregon: www.discovernewport.com

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No. 5: Jackson, WY-ID Micro Area

Jackson could be considered the king of all small town vacation hotspots. For starters, the micro area is home to America's first national park, Yellowstone, and below that sits Grand Teton National Park. The combination of the two along with the surrounding national forests covers nearly 18,000,000 acres! Hiking anyone? Residents love the great outdoors; TargetReady Outdoors Activities and Camping make the top five. And don't forget skiing, Jackson sits in close proximity to many skiing hotspots like Snow King Resort, Jackson Hole Mountain Resort, and Grand Targhee Resort. As expected, lodging is big business; three of its top five employers are from that industry with Grand Teton Lodge Co. taking the top spot. The Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City hosts its annual economic policy symposium at Jackson Lake Lodge. The spot was said to be picked because then federal chair Paul Volcker was a keen fly-fisherman and Jackson is also known for its excellent trout fishing.

Hotels [p/10K]: 18

Population [1000's]: 33

Married [%]: 42

Home Ownership [%]: 36

Home Value [$1,000s]: 359

Income [$1000's]: 64
If Jackson doesn't sound like your perfect vacation destination, then Key West will. Beautiful beaches and warm weather make it the perfect spot for some good old fashion relaxation. Attractions such as the Winter White House, where Harry Truman spent 175 days of his presidency, and the Ernest Hemingway House, where Hemingway worked on classics such as Farewell to Arms and For Whom the Bell Tolls, are now historical landmarks and open to the public. TargetReady model Country Club Member ranks number 1 out of all 130 models. That's no surprise, one of the most exclusive clubs in America, the Ocean Reef Yacht Club in northern Key Largo, ranks as one of the top five employers. Civilians aren't the only ones with boats as the US Navy and the US Coast Guard account for thousands of jobs in the Keys. So, if hiking and skiing sound like bad idea number one and two, then Jimmy invites you to start your vacation "wastin' away again in Margaritaville,"...literally; Key West is where he built the first Margaritaville.

Hotels [p/10K]: 17
Population [1000's]: 77
Married [%]: 34
Home Ownership [%]: 58
Home Value [$1,000s]: 412
Income [$1000's]: 73
No. 7: Kill Devil Hills, NC Micro Area

Kill Devil Hills is a place for firsts, even though it wasn't first on Infogroup's list for vacation hotspots. Roanoke Colony was established in 1587 as the first English settlement in the new world. It was the spot of America's first outdoor drama, The Lost Colony, about the disappearance of the Roanoke settlement. It is also where the Wright Brothers made their first mechanical airplane flight, one of the most important firsts of all time. All these "firsts" make for some good site seeing as many of them have been turned into national historical sites. Kill Devil Hills was also the first small town in the top ten that actually seemed like a small town. The folks who make their home in Kill Devil Hills are likely to be conservative, enjoy saltwater fishing, and cooking from scratch. The top employers are regular places like the grocery store, a bar and grille, and a cleaning service. It's not hyping world class hiking trails, or home to a big government operation; A great small town to take the family and learn something important about America.

Hotels [p/10K]: 17
Population [1000's]: 39
Married [%]: 47
Home Ownership [%]: 66
Home Value [$1,000s]: 251
Income [$1000's]: 61
Most people probably haven't heard of Spearfish, SD, but might recognize the name of a small town that resides in the micro area, Deadwood. The popular HBO series was set in and named after the town which has its roots buried in the history of the Black Hills gold rush. The citizens of Deadwood have fought hard to keep the feel of the old west alive. The entire town (within city limits) is listed on the National Historic Register, preserving many of the original buildings. Major employers include Cadillac Jack's Gaming Resort and Hickok House Casino. Consequently, the Amusement & Recreation Services industry sees the highest sales volume. Gambling isn't the only thing going on though; the region's number one employer is Black Hills State University, and TargetReady model Adult Education identifies residents are likely to participate in adult education programs. But, even with all the tourism from Deadwood, that's an awful lot of hotels. Oh, there is a small town 20 minutes east of Spearfish called Sturgis. Anyone know what goes on there?

Picture Courtesy of www.visitspearfish.com

- Hotels [p/10k]: 16
- Population [1000's]: 25
- Married [%]: 52
- Home Ownership [%]: 55
- Home Value [$1,000s]: 117
- Income [$1000's]: 51
Bennington is a small town that enjoys small things; it even has a bylaw preventing retail stores from being too large. In fact, analysis of Infogroup's business data revealed that 91% of Bennington's hotels are single location (not chains). That's way up from the micropolitan average of 51%. Further analysis of hotel employment size showed Bennington's hotels averaged just 5 employees, down from the micropolitan average of 14. This had analysts worried that Bennington might not be a booming vacation hotspot, but actually more like an average small town, with a lot of small hotels; it was far from the truth. The micro area encompasses most of Green Mountain National Forest, one of the closest national forests for Boston and New York City residents. Plus, dozens of ski towns dot the region as Bennington serves as a popular winter getaway. The Battle of Bennington Monument is a towering 300ft and a site to see. The obelisk commemorates the Battle of Bennington that took place during the Revolutionary War.
Rounding out the top ten is Vineyard Haven, located on the island of Martha's Vineyard, just south of Cape Cod. Vineyard Haven is also the main entry point to the island of Martha's Vineyard. The area possess the highest average home value in the top ten and third highest of all micropolitan areas, and is also one of the least populated. The island has a reputation for being an affluent summer getaway where the population swells to nearly 100,000\(^\text{18}\). The top TargetReady models include Specialty Organic Stores, Impulse Buyers, Leaning Liberal, and Foreign Travel – a significant departure from the behaviors of other towns in the top ten. Finally, major employers include Martha's Vineyard Hospital, Stop & Shop Supermarkets, and Mid-Cape Home Center. While there are few tourist attractions, Vineyard Haven proves to be one of the hottest vacation spots in the top ten.

**Hotels [p/10K]: 15**

**Home Ownership [%]: 41**

**Population [1000’s]: 17**

**Home Value [$1,000s]: 447**

**Married [%]: 37**

**Income [$1000’s]: 67**
Previous Data Studies and References

Previous Data Studies:

Coffee and Brown Go Together: A Study on Coffee Shops and Green Cities
Beer and Pizza Study: Pizza-Loving Cities Also Have the Greatest Number of Bars

References:
18. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martha%27s_Vineyard
Thank You

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