

Sustainable equine events and tourism in rural communities

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Introduction to me

Professor in the School of Events, Tourism and Hospitality Management at Leeds Beckett University, UK

Established researcher of equine tourism, events, sport and leisure

Director of social enterprise, Ride Yorkshire



Rural communities

Physical/Environmental characteristics

- Remote location
- Natural beauty
- Challenging terrain
- Wildlife



Social characteristics

- Small communities
- Ageing populations
- Skills shortages
- Sparse infrastructure



Rural communities – Equine opportunities

Physical/Environmental characteristics

- Remote location --- Space for horses
- Natural beauty --- Unique way to experience
- Challenging terrain --- Accessibility
- Wildlife --- Different encounters

Social characteristics

- Small communities --- Local knowledge
- Ageing populations --- Employment
- Skills shortages --- Development and training
- Sparse infrastructure --- Diversification

A photograph of two riders on horses in a lush green field. The rider on the left is wearing a blue and white checkered shirt and a black helmet, riding a dark horse. The rider on the right is wearing a light blue shirt and a dark helmet, riding a brown horse. The field is filled with tall grass and white wildflowers. The background shows a dense line of green trees.

Part One: Market Research

Characteristics of the horse industry in the UK

- There are 374,000 horse-owning households in the UK
- There are an estimated 847,000 horses
- Only 0.3% of the population own horses and/or ponies
- There are 27 million people who have expressed an interest in the equestrian industry
- 74% of UK riders are female
- The average UK horse rider rides 5 times a week

(BETA, 2023)

The market for equine tourism in the UK

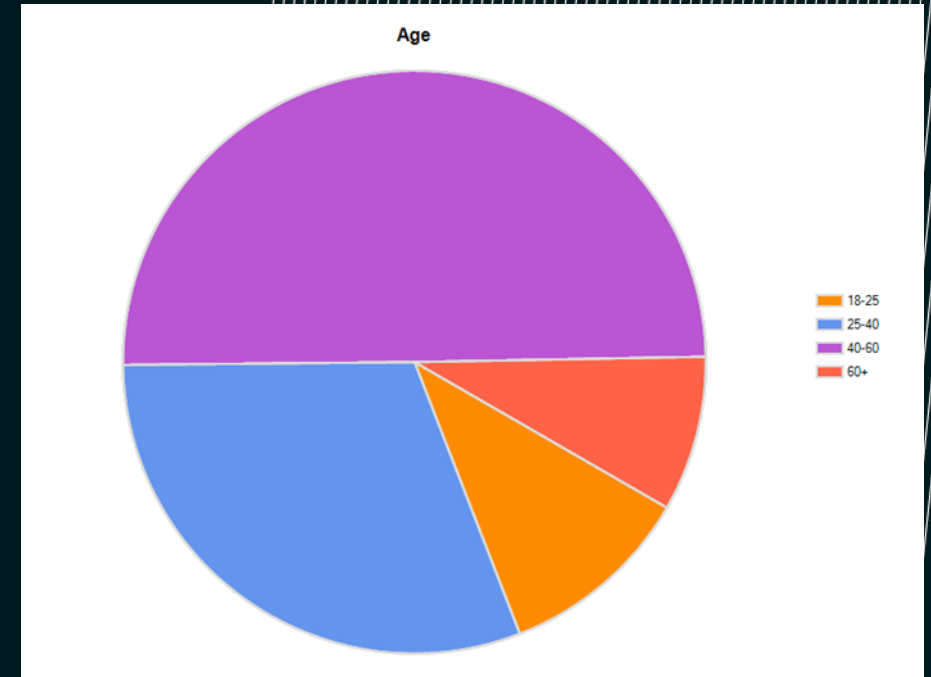
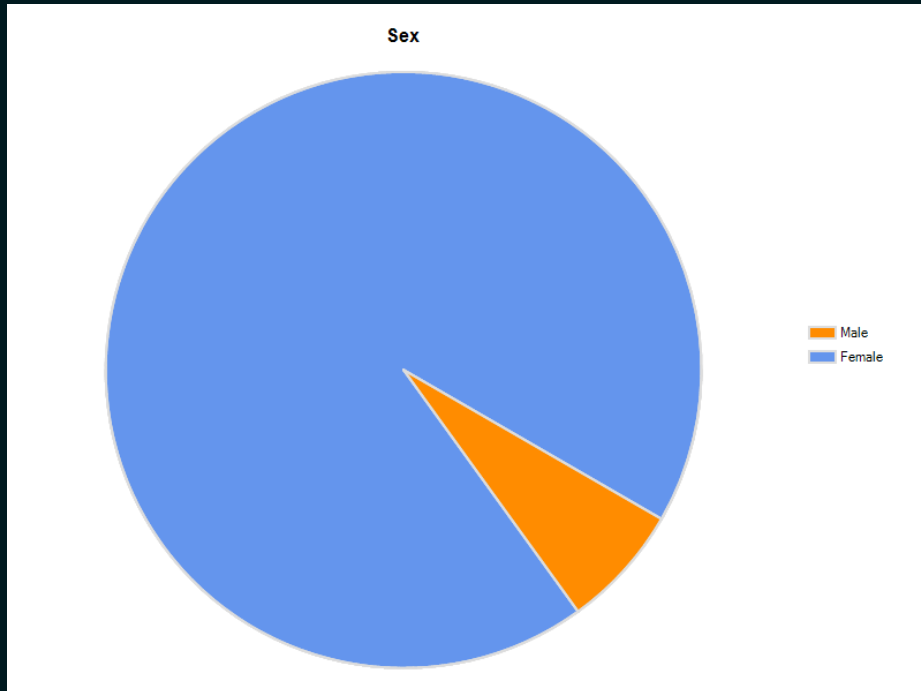
Rationale

- Is there a market for horse-based tourism in the UK?
- Do people want to take their horse on holiday?
- Do non-owners want a horse-based holiday?
- What do people want?

Survey

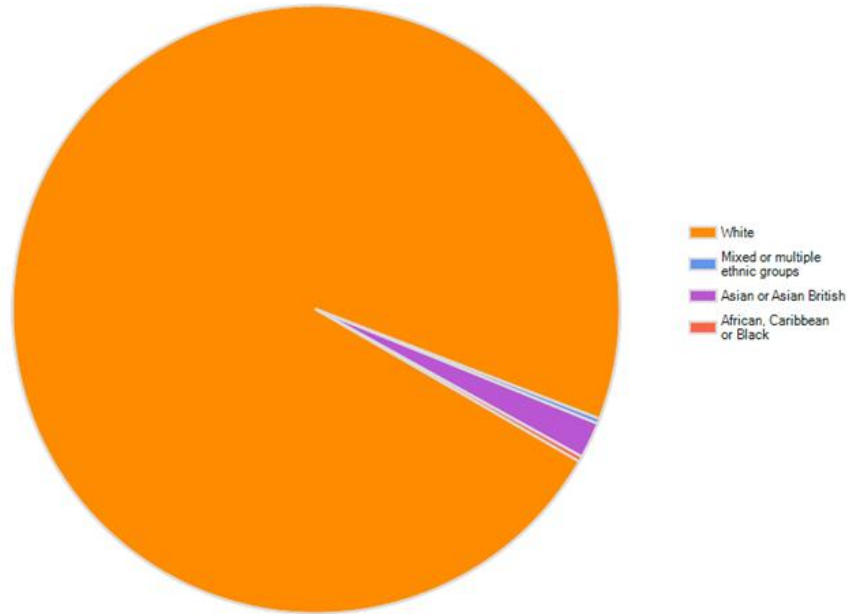
- Online
- Sent out via BHS, Facebook, networks, hunts

Who responded?

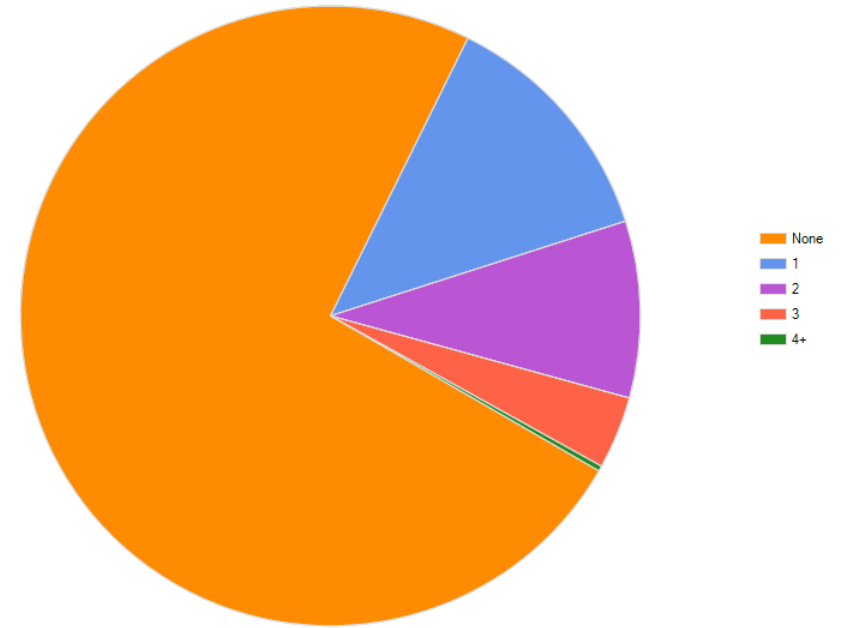


Who responded?

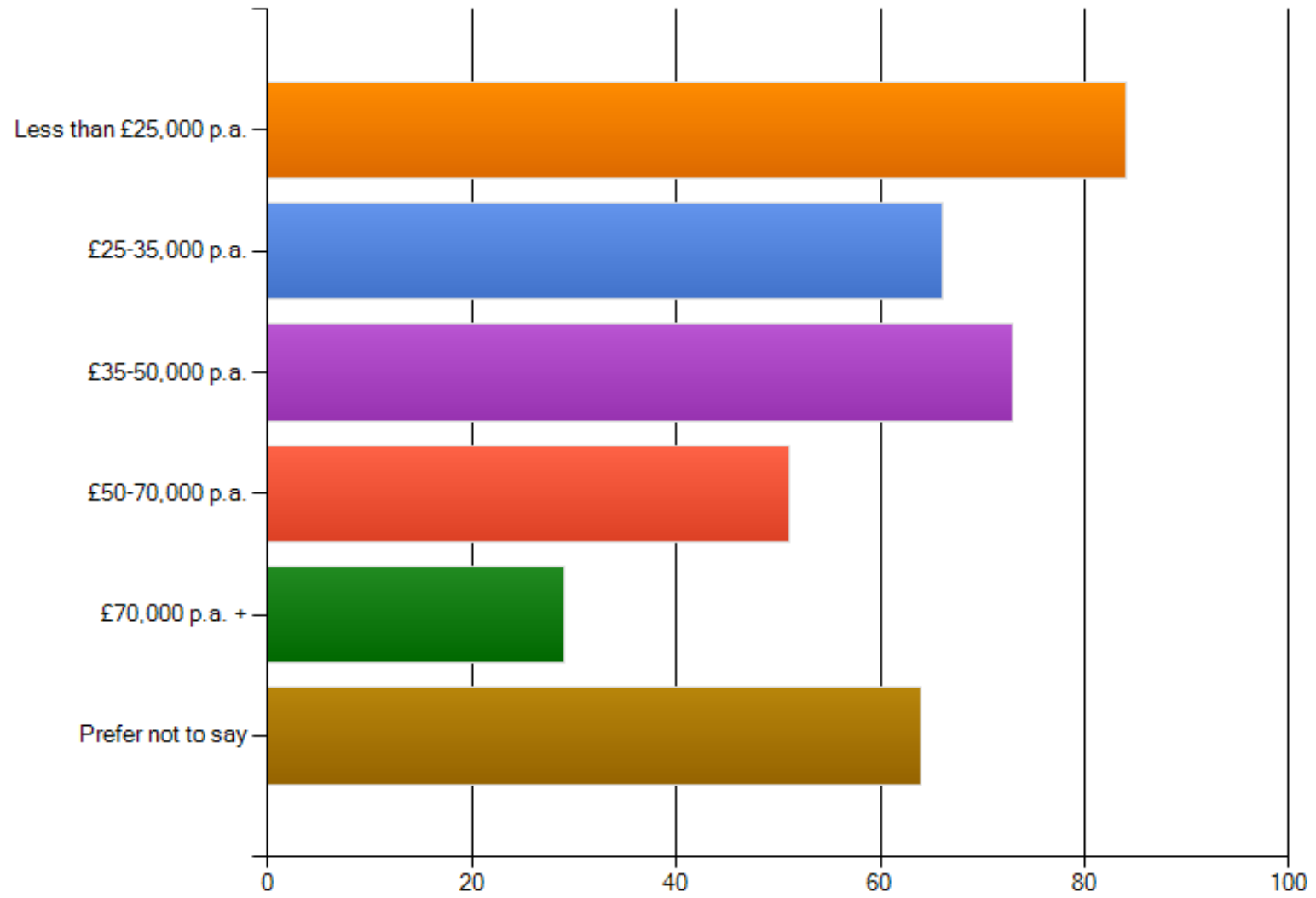
What is your ethnic group?



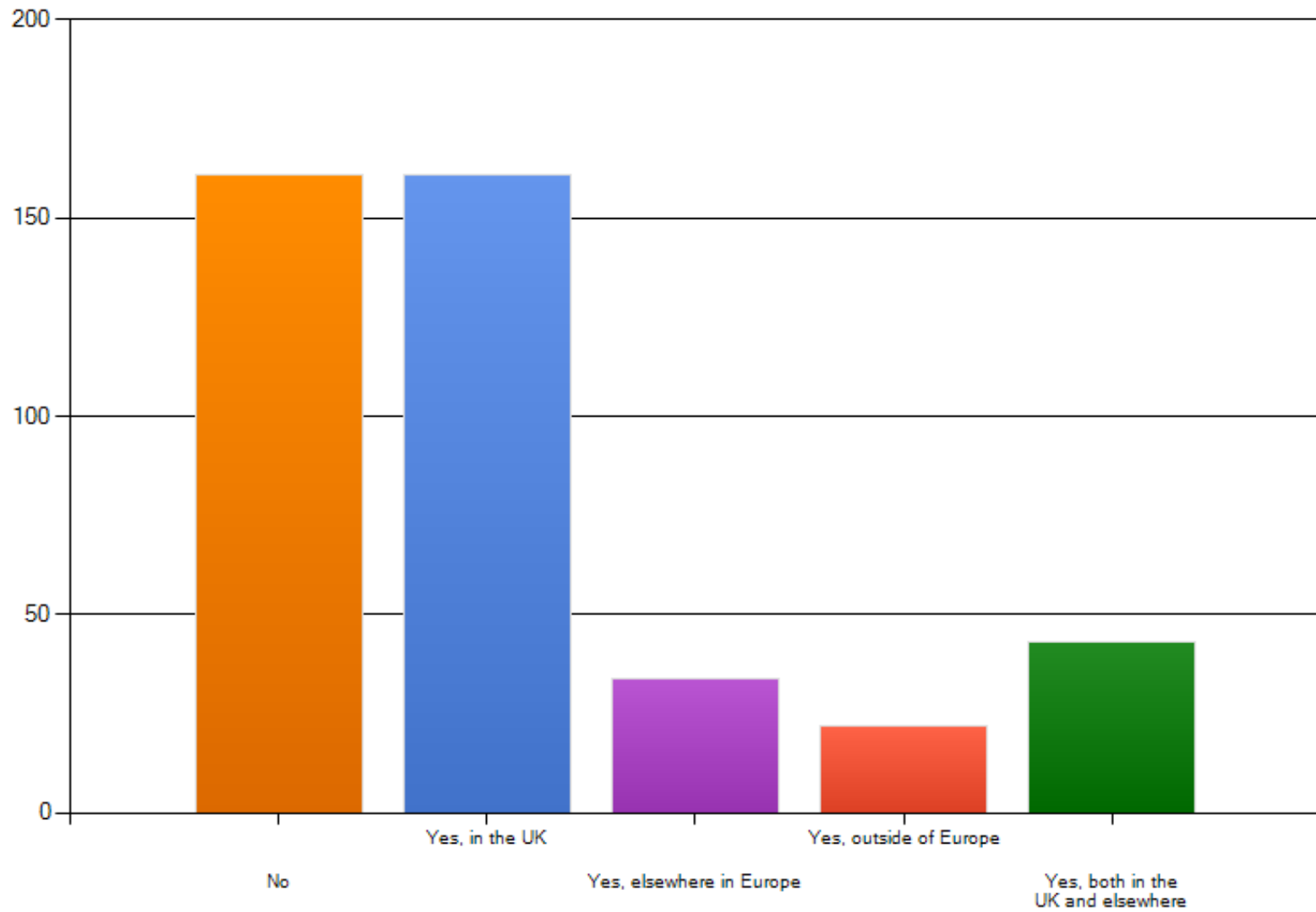
Number of children under 18 in household



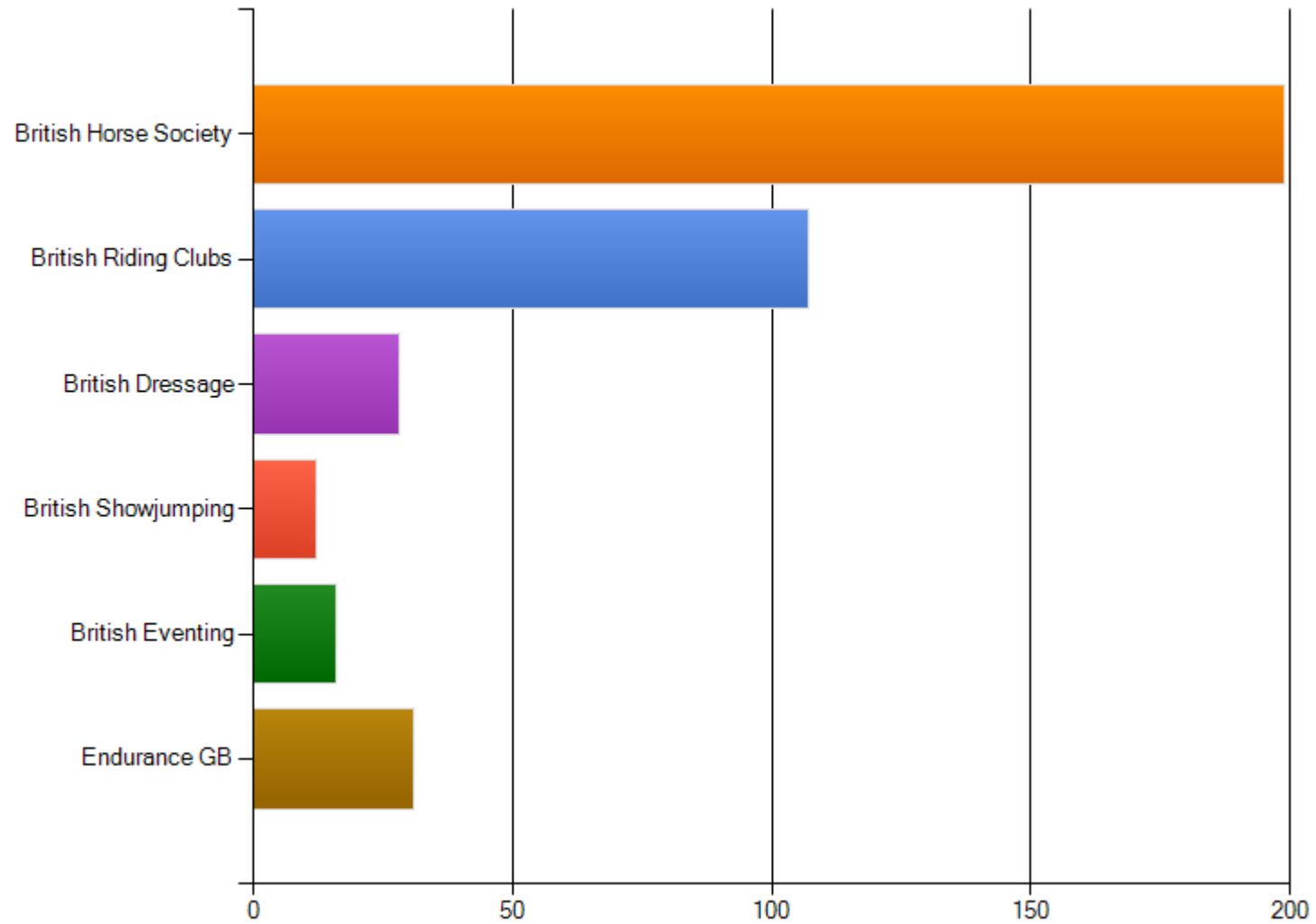
Household income



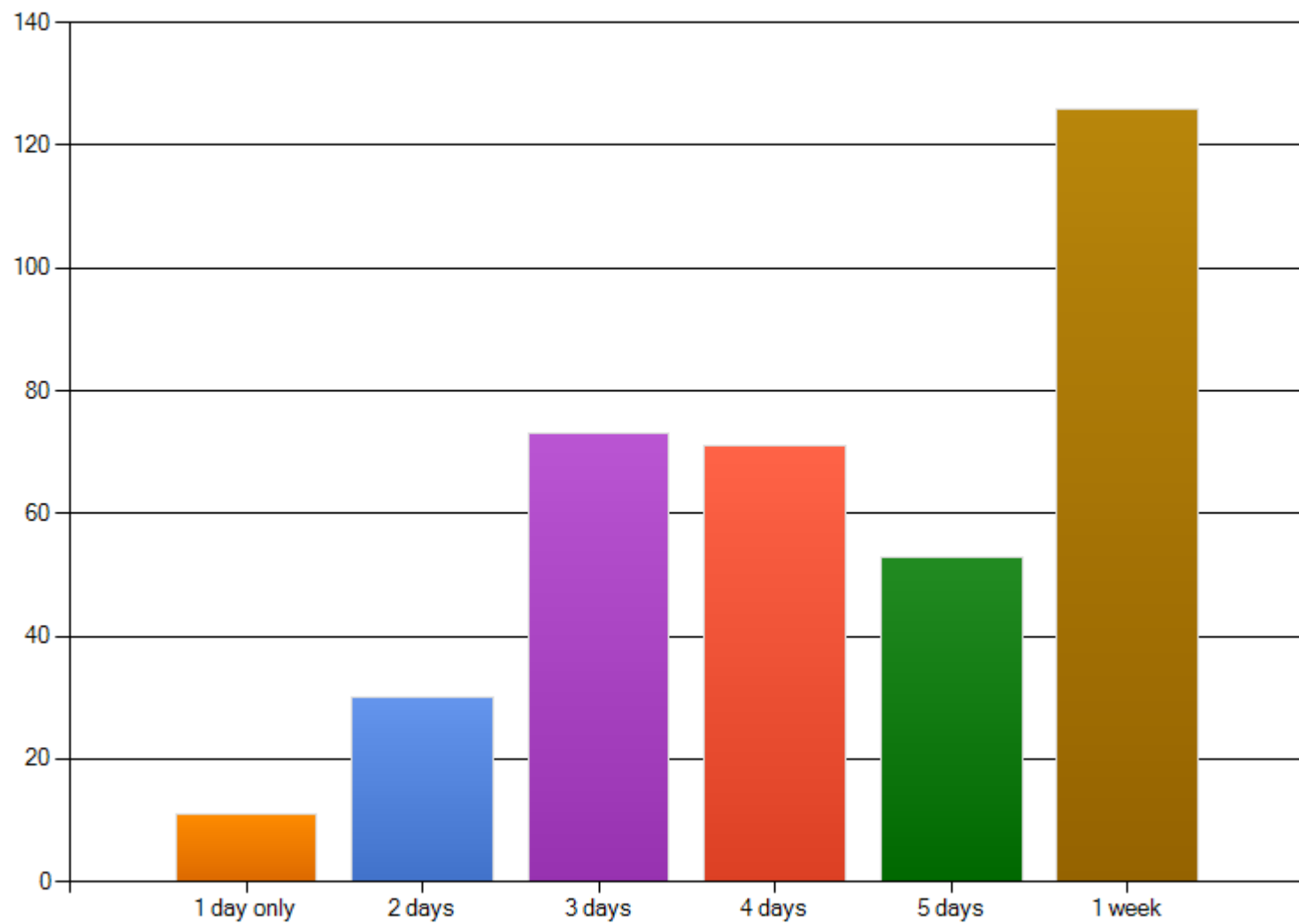
Have you ever been on a riding holiday before?



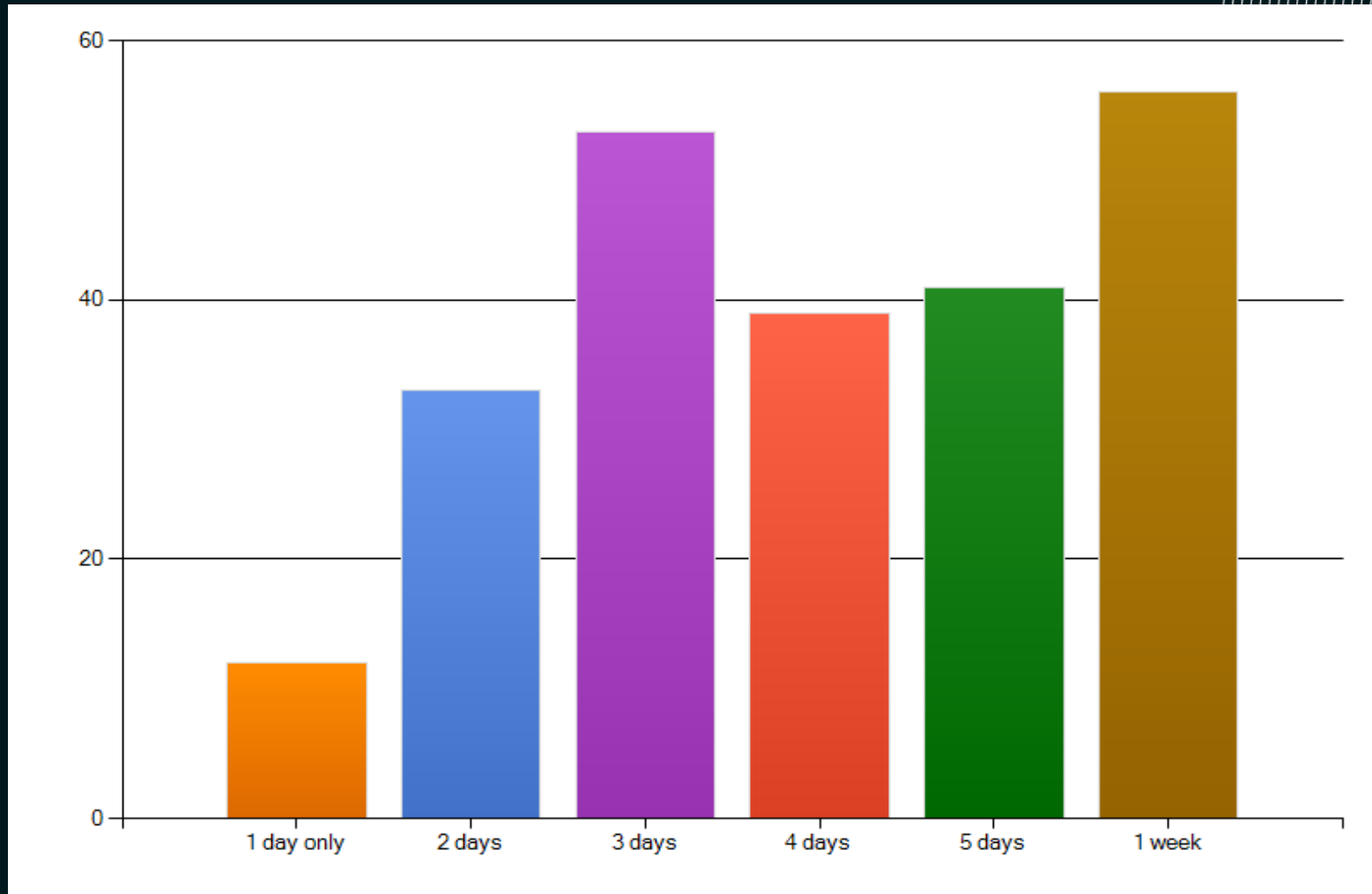
Are you a member of any of the following groups? Select as many as apply



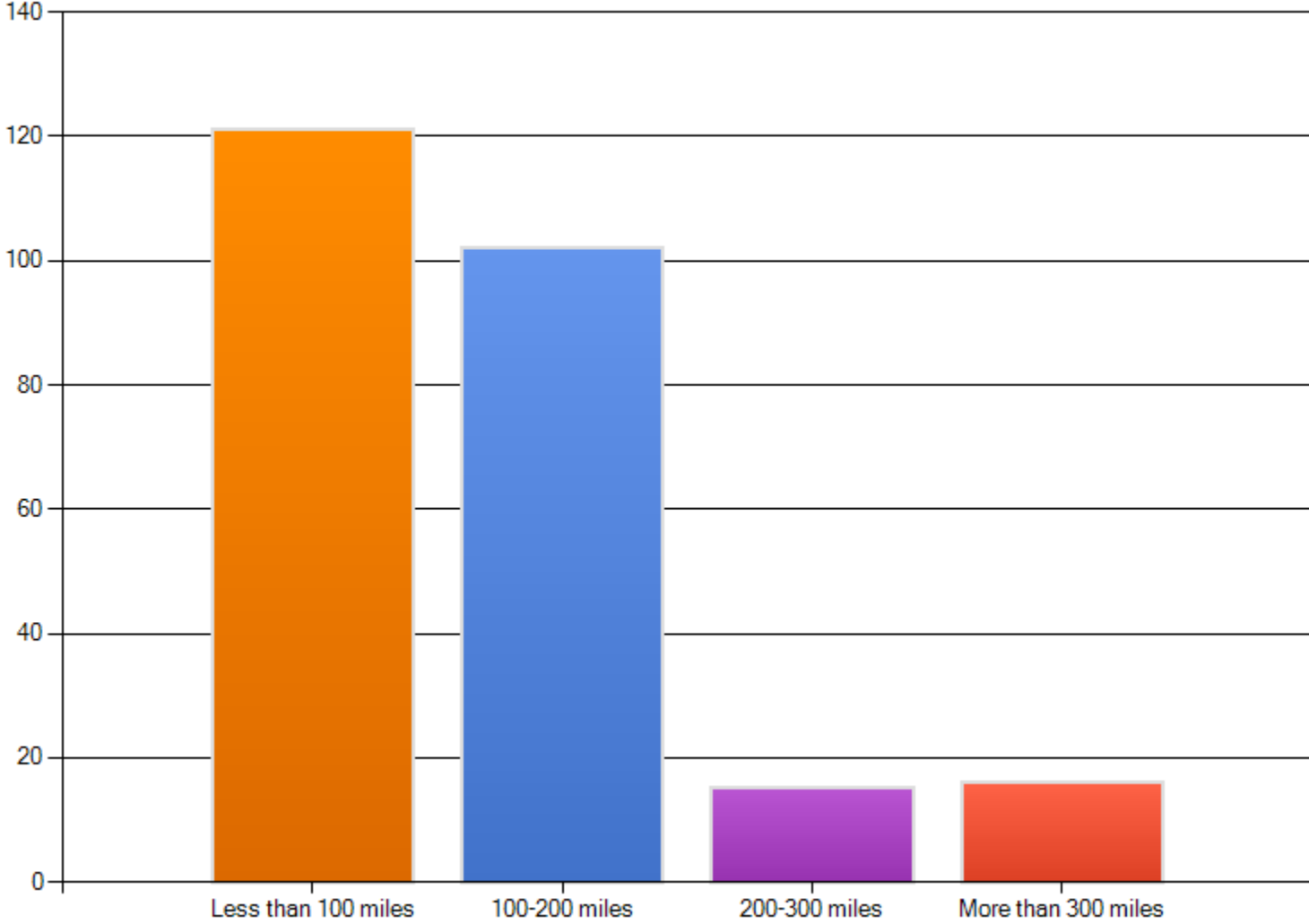
How long would you take your horse on a riding holiday for?



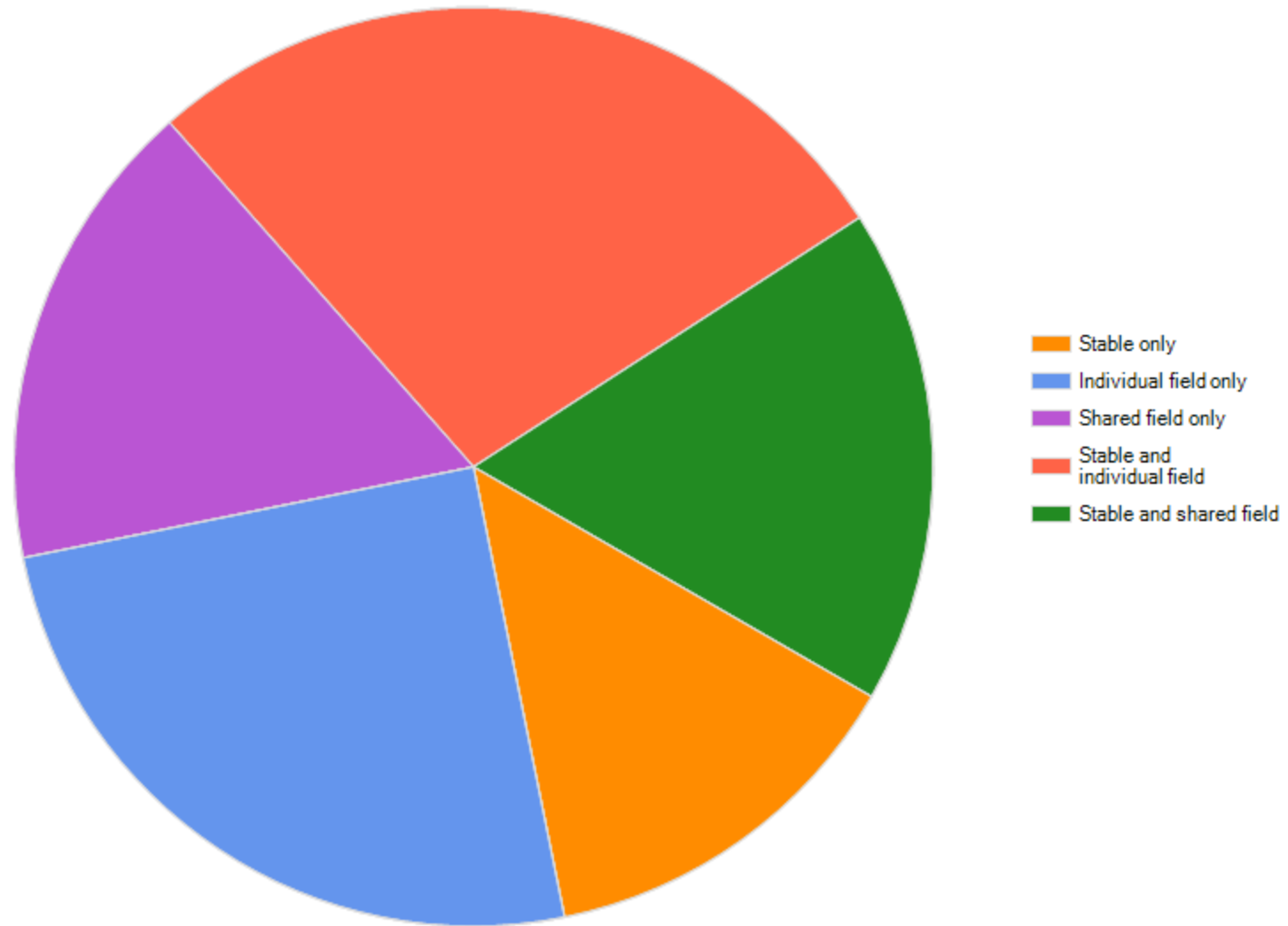
Preferred length of holiday (without own horse)



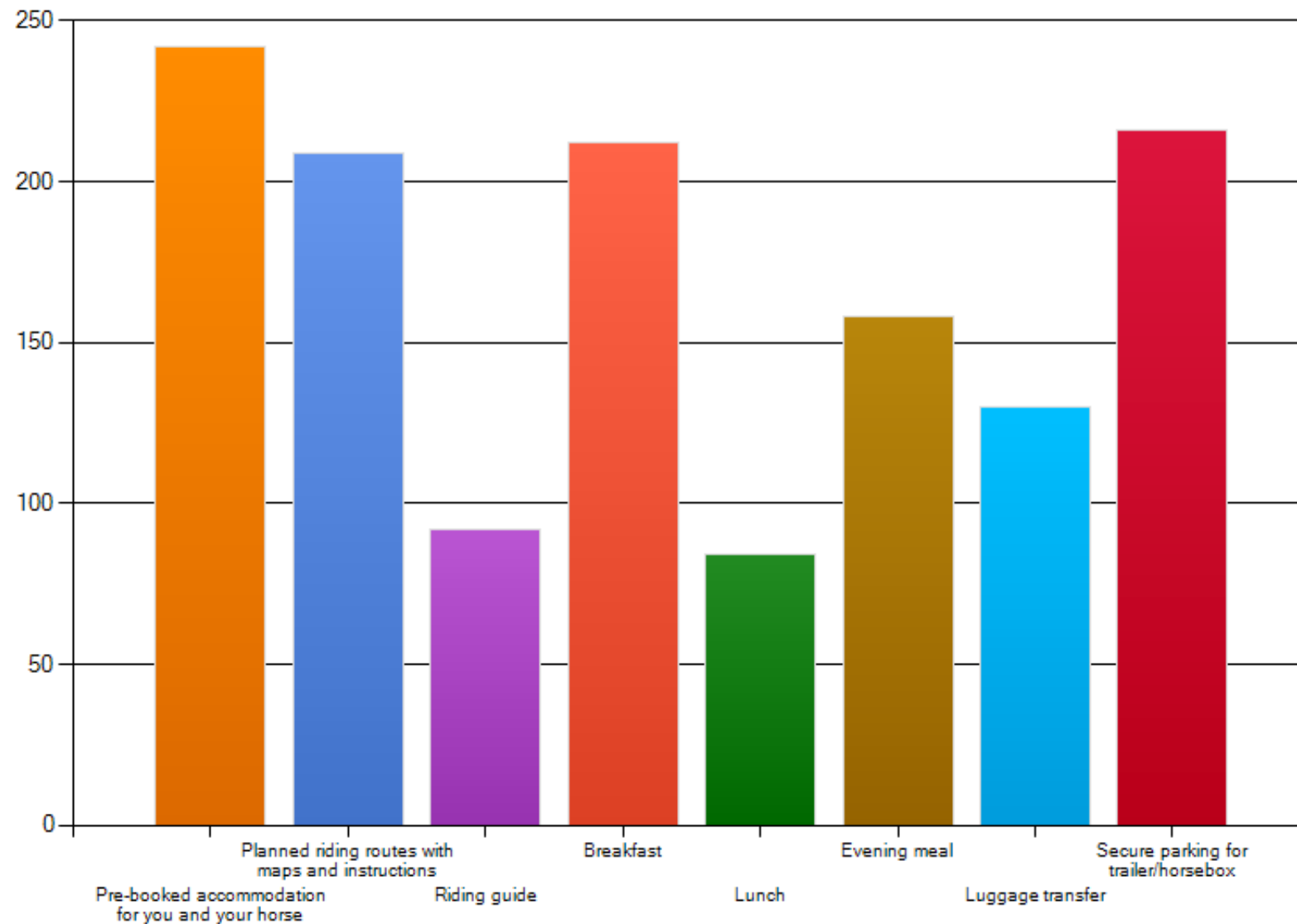
How far would you travel to take your horse for a riding holiday?



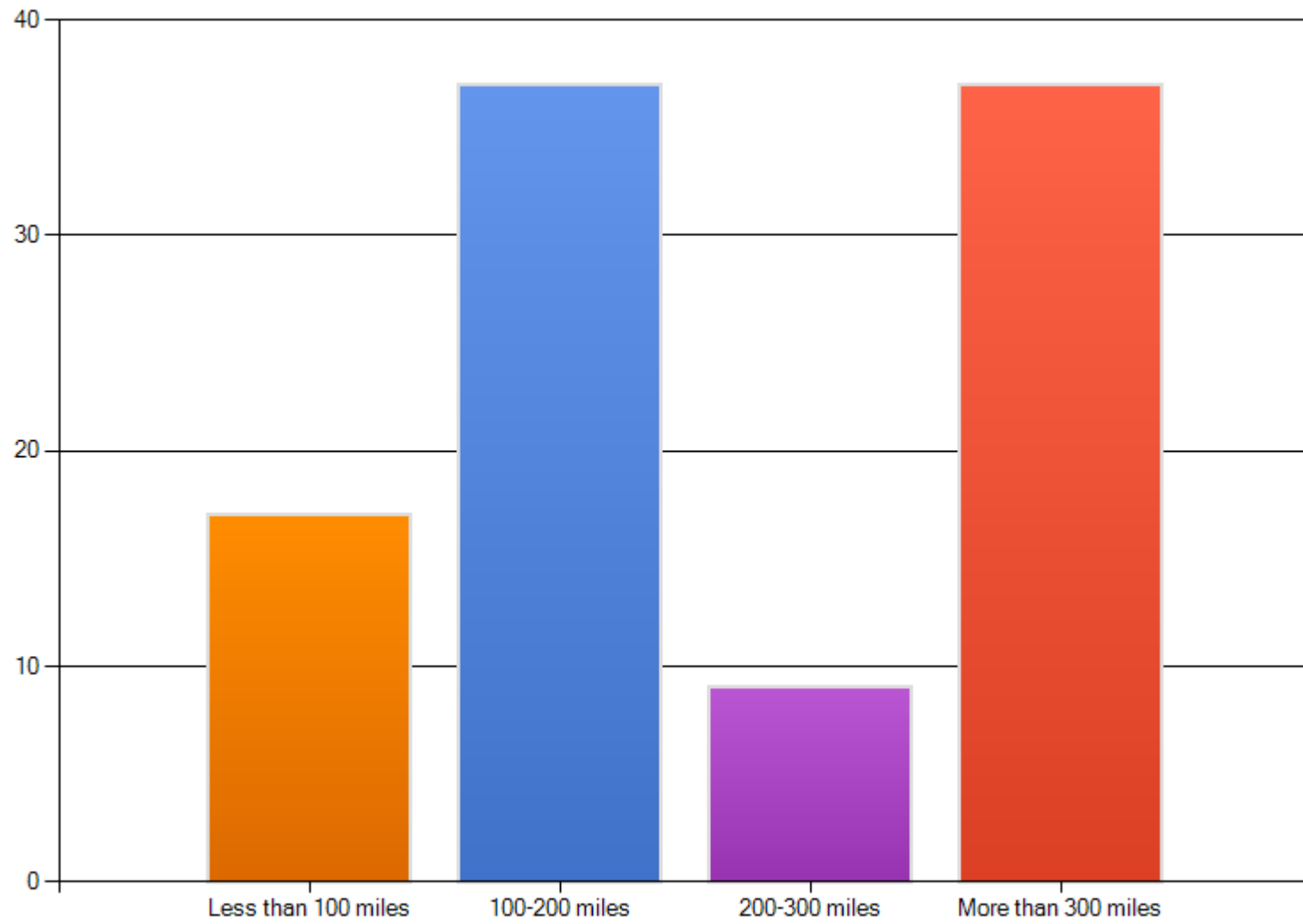
What kind of accommodation would you require for your horse?



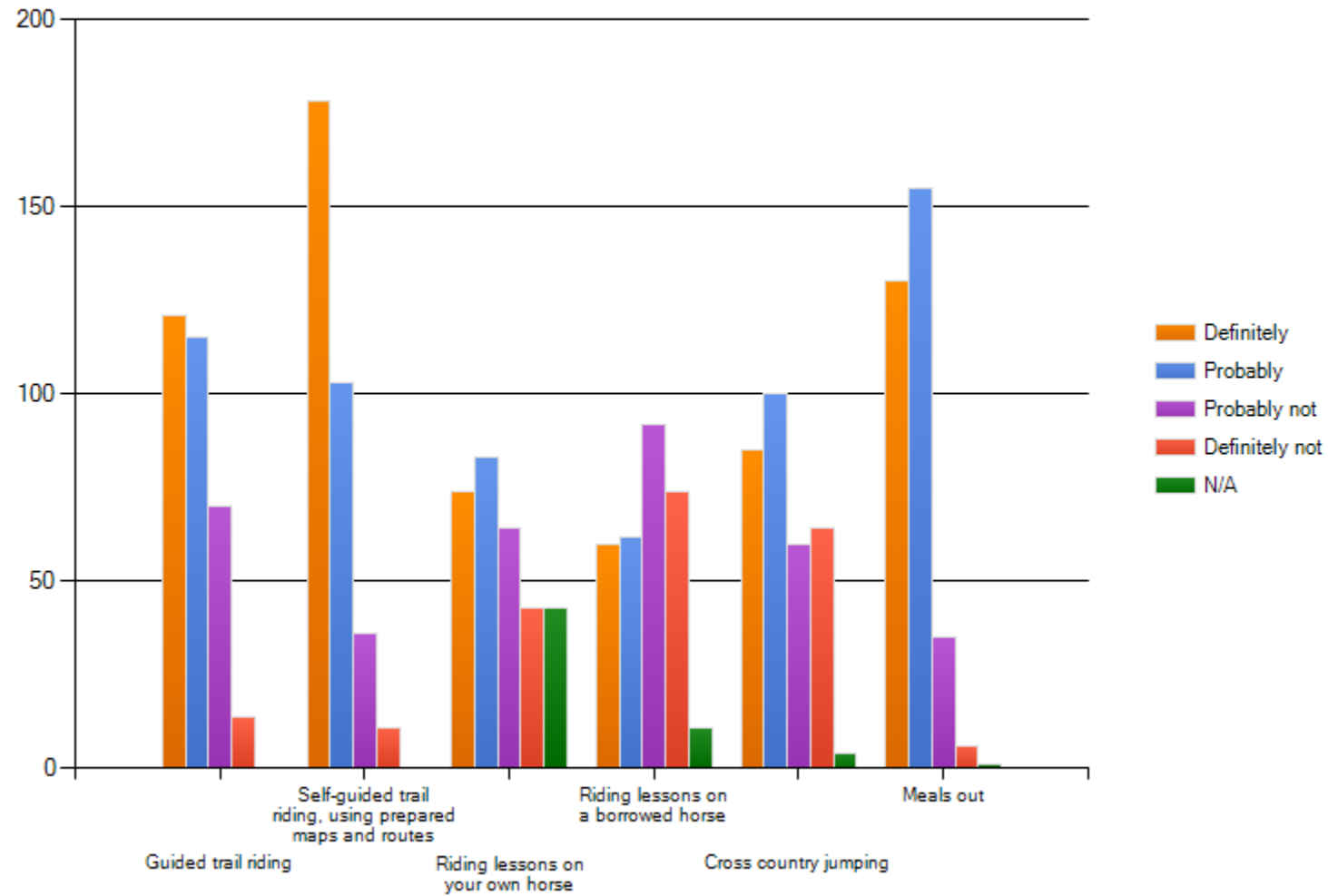
What facilities would you like included in a riding holiday? Select as many as apply.



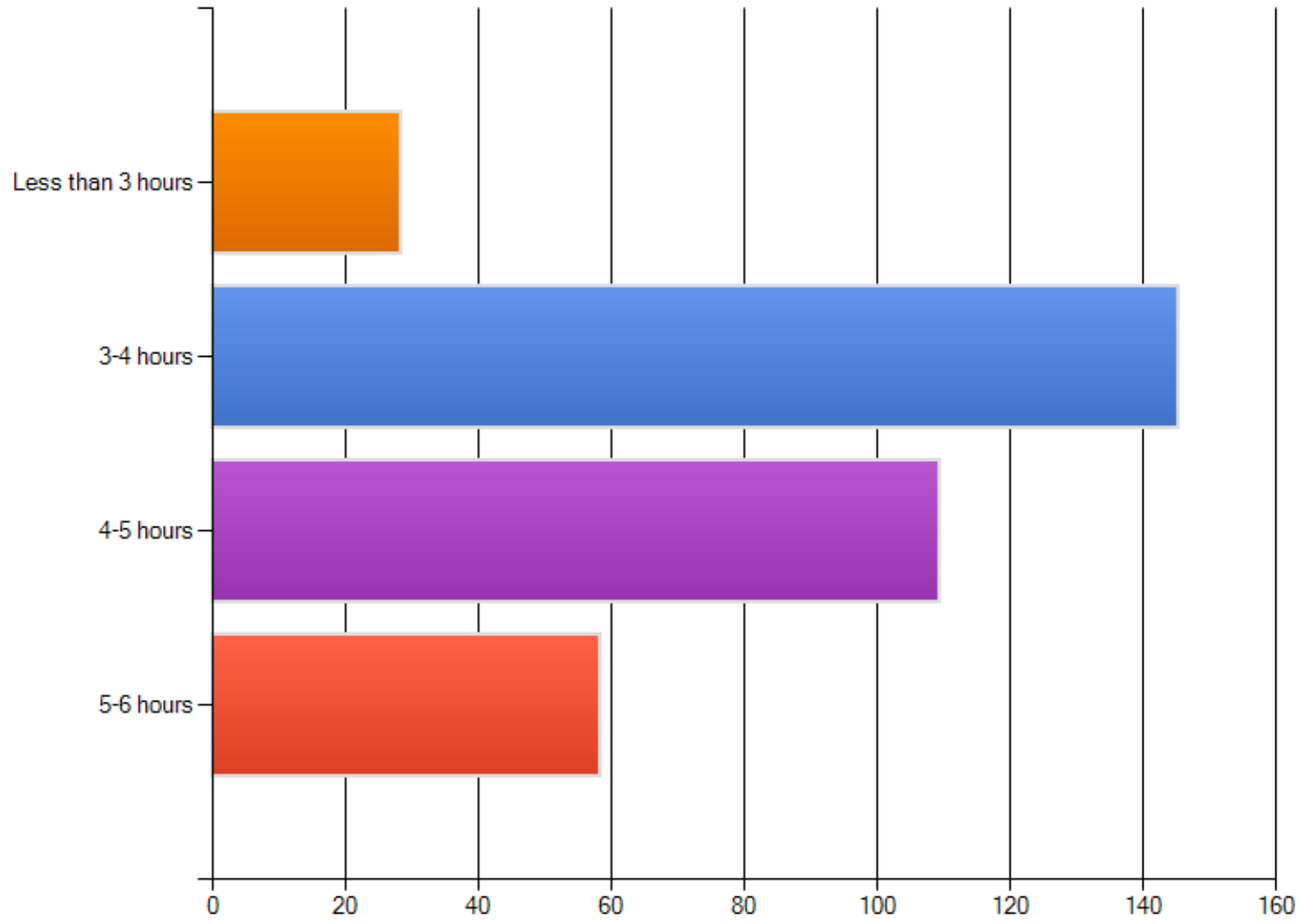
How far would you travel to go on a riding holiday?



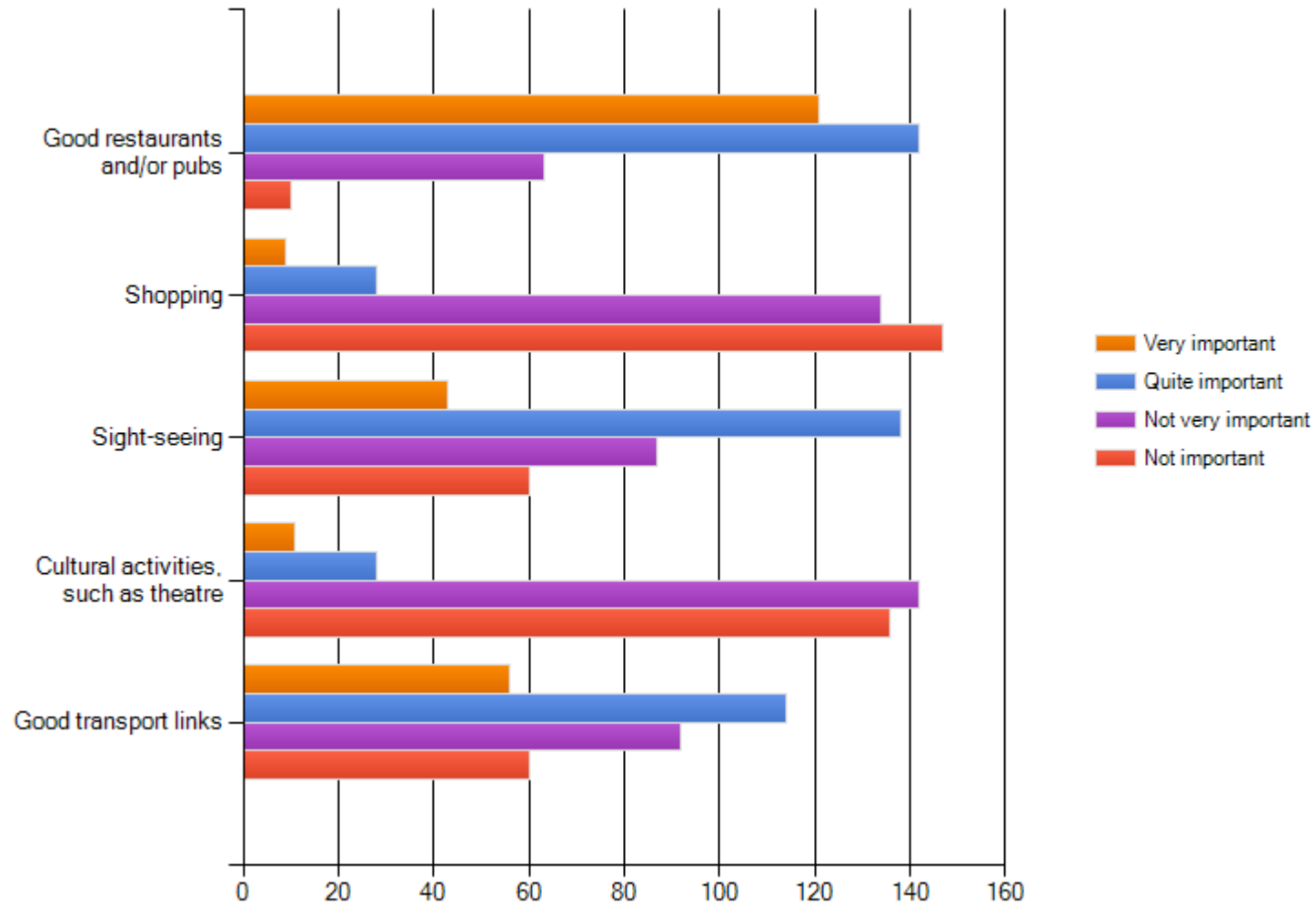
Which of the following activities would you want to take part in on a riding holiday?



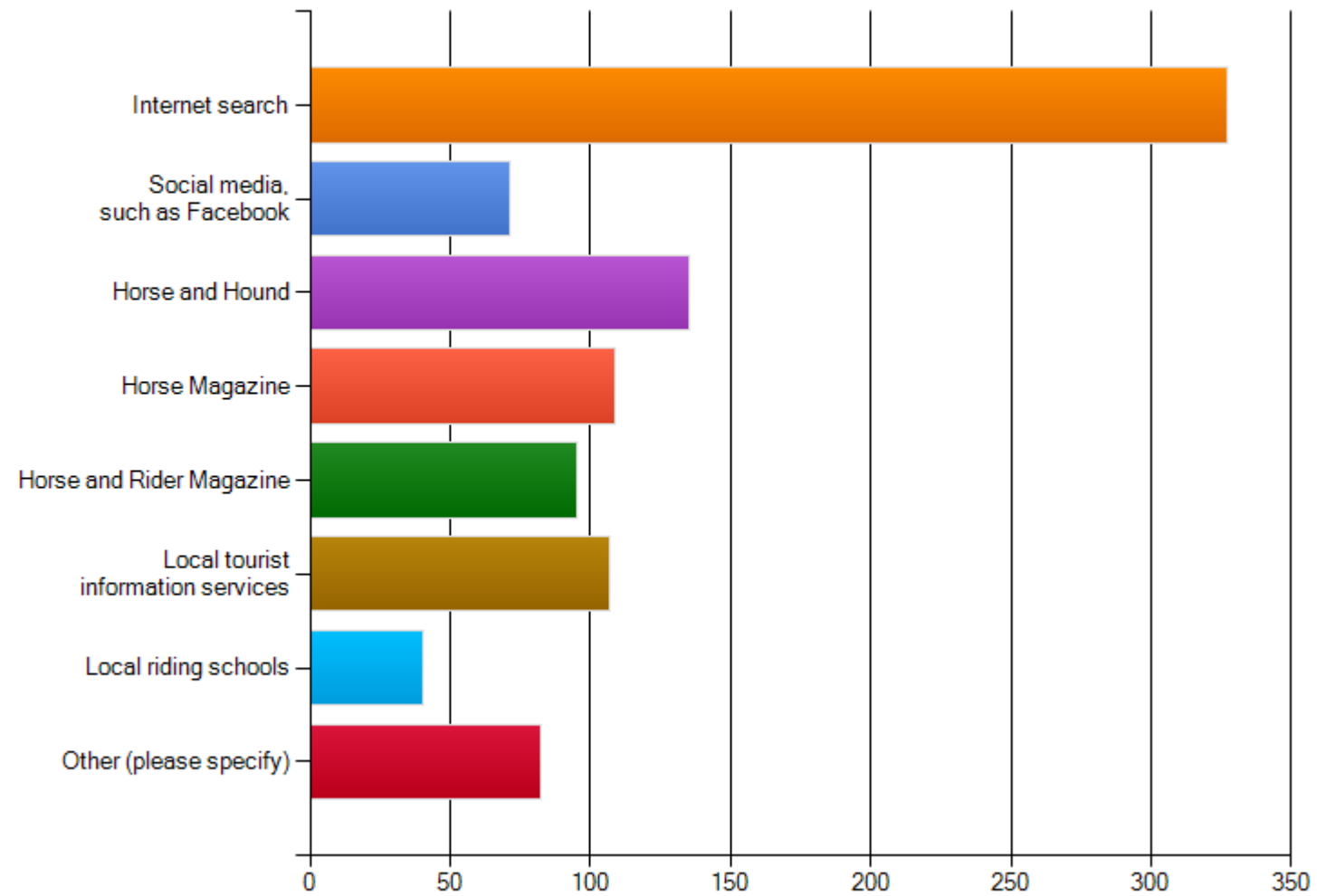
How long would you like to ride for per day on a riding holiday?



What other facilities and attractions would be important to you when considering a riding holiday in the UK?



Where would you look for information about riding holidays in the UK? Select as many as apply.



Market research: key conclusions

There IS a market for equine tourism

There are two types of equine tourist – with and without own horse

They have expectations about service quality and provision

Part Two: Perceptions of the countryside



The rural and the countryside

- The 'countryside ideal' is a mix of ideology, myth, image and lived experience. 'Countryside' is a very English cultural construct (Bunce, 1994)
- The antithesis of urban life – more simple, more idyllic, slower pace, somehow more 'real' (Roberts and Hall, 2001)
- Landscape and physical space and place are very important – underpin both place attachment and satisfaction (Stedman, 2003)
- The physical environment is transformed symbolically to reflect cultural and individual definitions and meanings (Greider and Garkovich, 1994)
- The way people see rural areas is of fundamental importance for the way they use rural areas (Butler and Hall, 1998)
- Use of rural areas and the 'countryside' is highly constrained by access regulations, codes (e.g. the Country Code), development of established routes, 'correct' ways of behaving and using the countryside (Edensor, 2000; Parker and Ravenscroft, 2001; Parker, 2006)

The horse: Nature and domestication

- Horses have been domesticated for several thousand years
- Training – work, sport, recreation
- Growth of ‘natural horsemanship’ opens up debates about how to keep and interact with horses (Birke, 2007)
- Ultimate goal of riding may be to achieve “a oneness with the horse, a kind of fluid intersubjectivity” (Birke and Brandt, 2009)
- ‘Hacking’ – a more ‘natural’ way to experience the horse-rider relationship?
- ‘Hacking’ – a more authentic way to experience nature and the countryside?

The research project

Stage 1

- Informal interviews, focus groups, observation
- Leisure riders and 'hacking'
- Key issues to emerge:
 - Enjoyment of hacking and riding in the countryside
 - Inexperience and lack of confidence with using routes, tracks and maps
 - Tendency to stick to well-rehearsed, 'safe' options

Stage 2

- Semi-structured interviews
- 20 leisure riders
- 6 'key informants'
- Key research questions:
 - How do riders understand and experience 'the countryside' when riding out on their horses?
 - What factors affect this enjoyment?
 - What factors influence their use of rural spaces?

Romantic ideas about the countryside

You know, I ride the same route and it's different almost every time you go. . . You know, the colours on screens and things like this, they change depending on the weather and the season. . . Different times of year, you know the mist, it's different from when it's sunny and then you know, there's snow in the winter. . . There's nothing nicer than a frosty day

It feels like you're a long way from civilisation

It's just beautiful and on a sunny day it's fantastic. I don't think there's anything to beat it

Wild country, amazing views and a lack of people

It's usually quite an adventure

With the views, and the openness, you know what I mean, big wide spaces without roads, absolutely, I think it's wonderful

It's just you, your horse and the view

Some downsides ...

I don't do roadwork if I can avoid it cos the roads are pretty nasty round here, the roads I try and avoid, motorbikes particularly

It's just a bit strange here, everything being flat

I think it's much safer when you ride with somebody, I think the world's changed a lot

I'm not adventurous enough to sort of just get my own map out of the car and, oh yes, I can find my way round there. . . I don't really have the confidence

The amount of traffic on the roads has increased, I don't think people are as considerate as they were

Perceptions of the countryside: key conclusions

Romantic ideals about riding in the countryside – potential for equestrian tourism development

Riding seen to provide unique and unmediated access to the countryside

But people lack confidence and need support

Implications for equine tourism development and service provision

A photograph showing three riders in dark equestrian attire, including helmets and jackets, riding brown horses in a field. The riders are positioned in a line, moving from left to right. The horses are in motion, with their manes and tails flowing. In the background, several people are sitting on the grass, watching the event. The overall scene is outdoors on a grassy area.

Part three: Equestrian events

This book:

- Uniquely draws together events management and human-animal studies.
- Is formed from empirical research conducted by a multinational team of events management and tourism researchers.
- Uses a single, extended case study to explore a range of themes and issues, both empirically and theoretically.



Humans, Horses and Events Management

Edited by Katherine Dashper, Guðrún Helgadóttir, and Ingibjörg Sigurðardóttir



Landsmót: A large event in a small community

- The biennial championships of the Icelandic horse
- Culturally, socially and economically significant
- Moves location
- Held in both rural and urban locations
- Based on research conducted in 2016 at Hólar in north east Iceland
- 8000 humans and 800 horses in a region of 4000 inhabitants
- 5 day event in July



Landsmót: Market segmentation

International tourists

Travelled to Iceland: (1) for the event; (2) for riding; (3) experience nature; (4) visit friends and relatives

Domestic tourists

Visit event: meet with friends and relatives; music and partying; do business; view horses and sport

Word of mouth marketing important for both

Landsmót: Visitor experience

Event facilities

Catering facilities; staff knowledge and helpfulness; security; site management; ease of buying online; parking

Event programme

Timing and flow of the programme; additional entertainment; commentary; activities for children

Landsmót: Host community experience

Concerns

Influx of numbers; detract from other tourism in high season; regional damage if not a success;

Opportunities

Showcase the region and equine businesses; economic impacts, including renting out property (human and equine); development of infrastructure

Landsmót: Economic impacts

Average daily spend

€220 ; international tourists spent on average 30% more than domestic tourists; international tourists spent more on horse related equipment and shopping and souvenirs

Where did spending take place

57% on the event site

Total economic impact

Approximately €1 million

Landsmót: Event legacies

Short-term impacts

Success of event increased confidence and reputation; rural location of event created a sense of community on site

Long-term impacts

Development of physical infrastructure; reputation as host of major events; sporting legacy and promotion of equestrianism; development of both rural and equestrian communities

Equestrian events: key conclusions

Have major impacts for rural communities – economic, social, cultural, political, equestrian

Can be difficult to stage but provide opportunities for infrastructure development and skill building

Provide opportunity to establish a regional identity as an equestrian location, to be leveraged through other equine tourism activities



Some conclusions

Equine events and tourism can support rural sustainable development

There is a market for equine tourism – need to understand more about who, what they want and how to communicate

Potential equine tourists have different levels of need, confidence and expectations

Equine events can help develop a regional identity and drive tourism development



THANK YOU

ANY QUESTIONS?