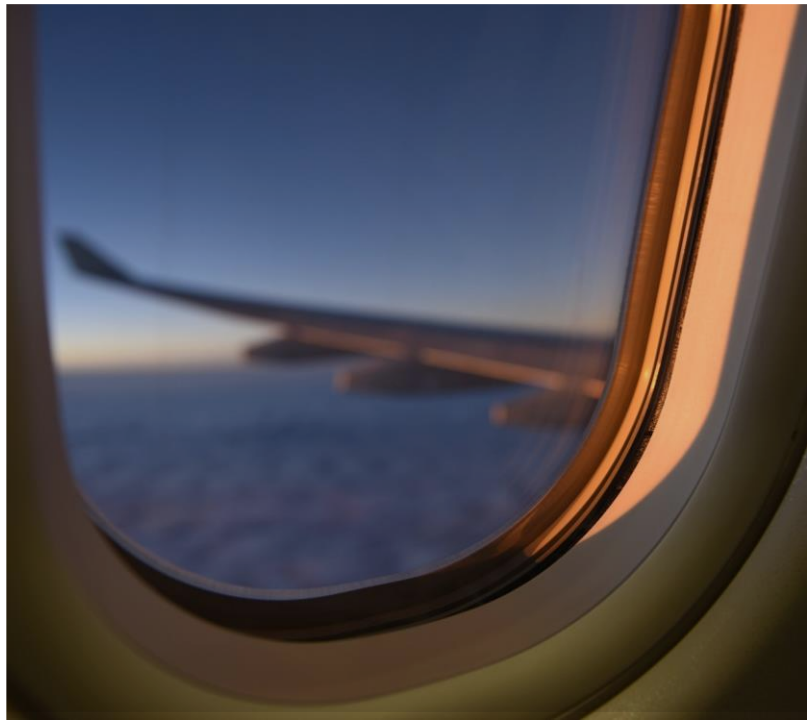
Search themes

June, 2020



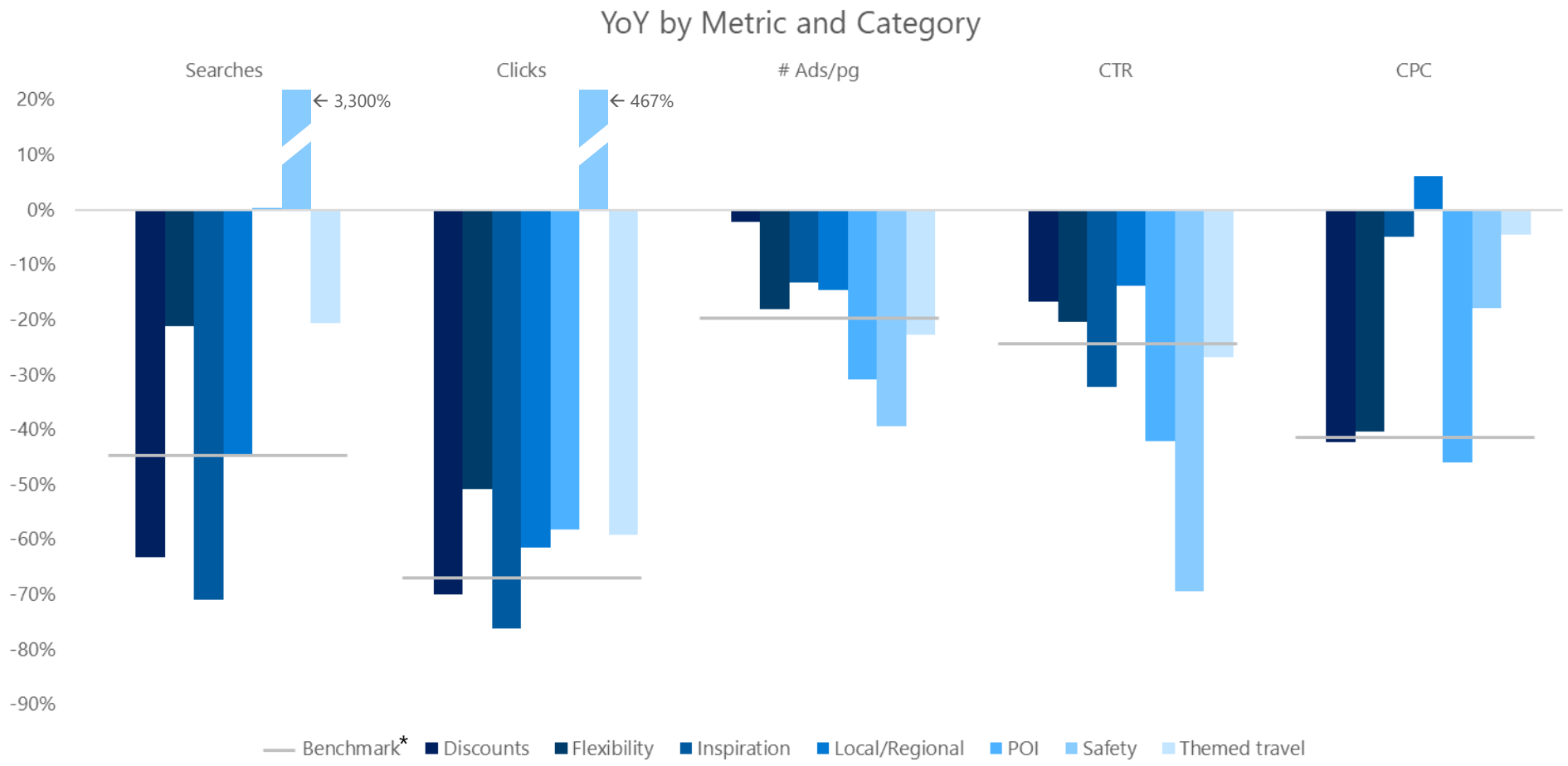
While Travel has been hit hard, certain subcategories are still relatively safe bets

Travel Flexibility and Safety are on many consumers' minds and those categories have outperformed the rest of the vertical in terms of **YoY** volume growth. The increased appeal of Local trips and Points-of-Interest (aka POI) has resulted in better clicks (intent) and click-through rate (CTR) (efficiency) relative to the broader Travel vertical benchmark*.

		Relative to the Travel benchmark*, YoY this category is seeing:				
Category	**Opportunity for Category**	**More consideration**	**More intent**	**Less competition**	**More efficiency**	**Lower cost**
Discounts	○	-	-	-	✓	✓
Flexibility	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	-
Inspiration	✗	-	-	-	-	-
Local/Regional	○	-	✓	-	✓	-
POI	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓
Safety	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	-
Themed travel	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	-

Source: Microsoft Internal Data, Mar-June '20 vs. '19. ✓ = better YoY performance than the *benchmark (i.e. a representative set of top Travel terms). Consideration = searches; Intent = clicks; Competition = # ads/SRP; Efficiency = CTR; Cost = CPC

Categories performance relative to the YoY Travel benchmark* for various metrics



CTR= Click-through rate
CPC = cost-per-click

Source: Microsoft Internal Data, Mar-June '20 vs. '19. *Benchmark is a representative set of top Travel terms. Consideration = searches; Intent = clicks; Competition = # ads/SRP; Efficiency = CTR; Cost = CPC

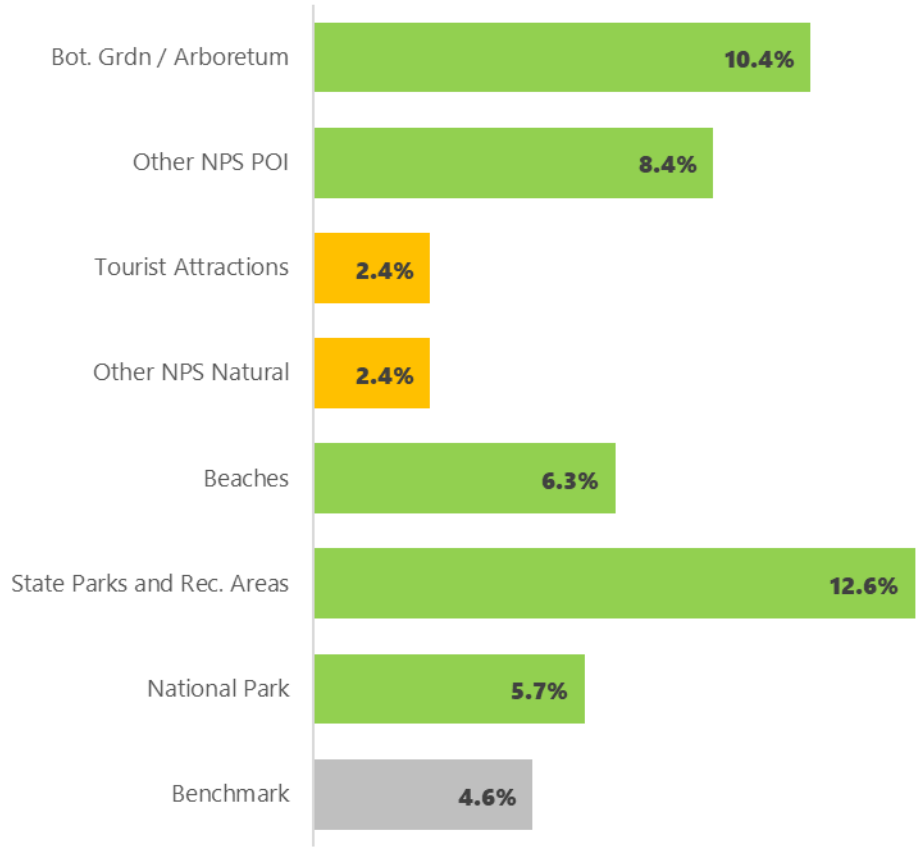
Looking at YoY performance only tells us part of the story.

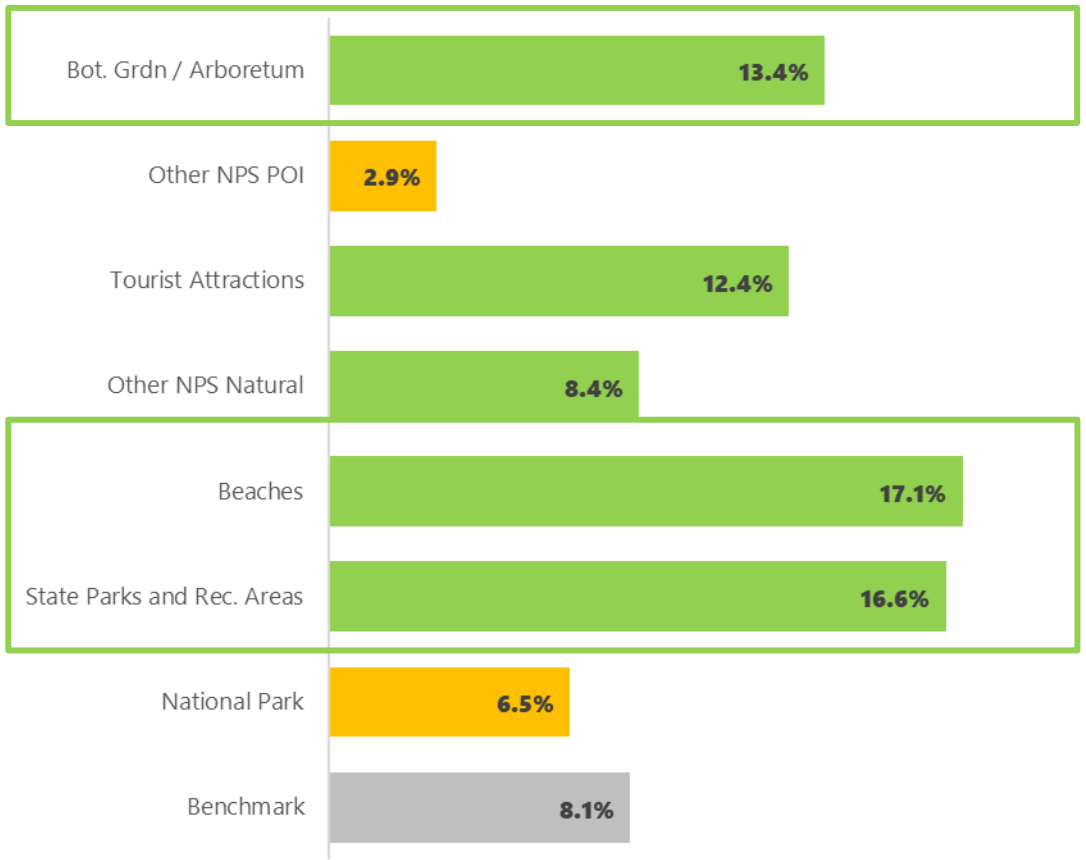
Let's see how categories have trended since the onset of COVID-19.

Points of interest analysis

Category analysis: Points-of-interest

Search volume growth for nature-based activities have outpaced the broader Travel vertical since the onset of COVID-19. POIs like **State Parks, Beaches, and Botanical Gardens** outperformed National Park Service (NPS)-managed ones in **click growth**, suggesting that people are favoring lower-profile outdoor destinations during this time.

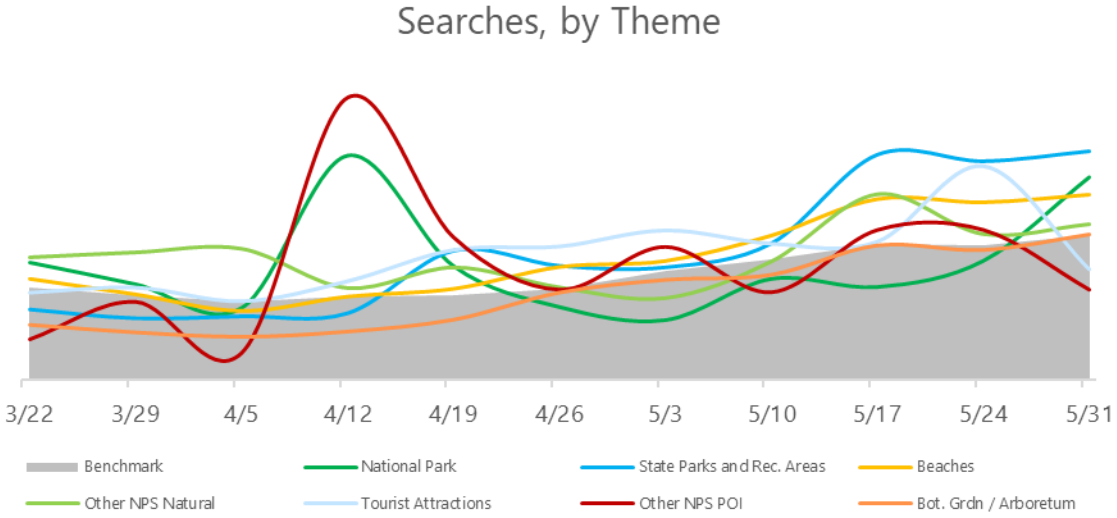


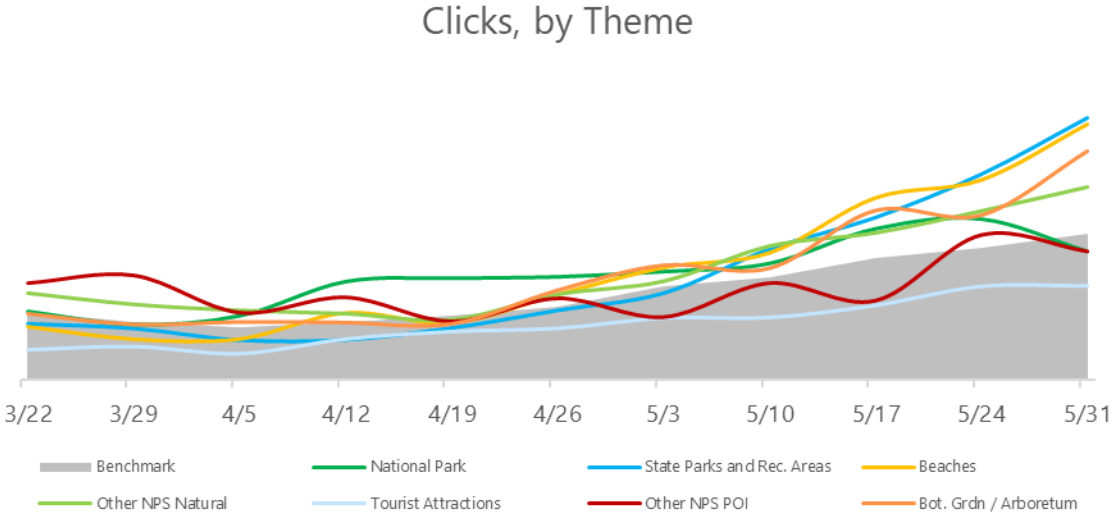


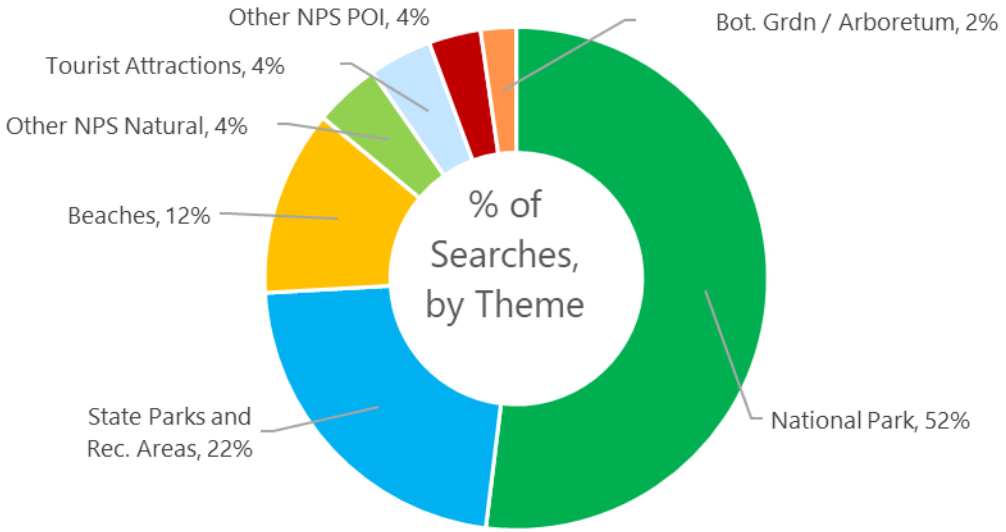
Source: Microsoft Internal Data. *Growth Rate is the compounded rate calculated over an 11-week period starting Mar 22, 2020.
Benchmark is a representative set of top Travel terms. Yellow bars = slower growth than the benchmark, green = faster, red = declining trend. NPS = National Park Service.

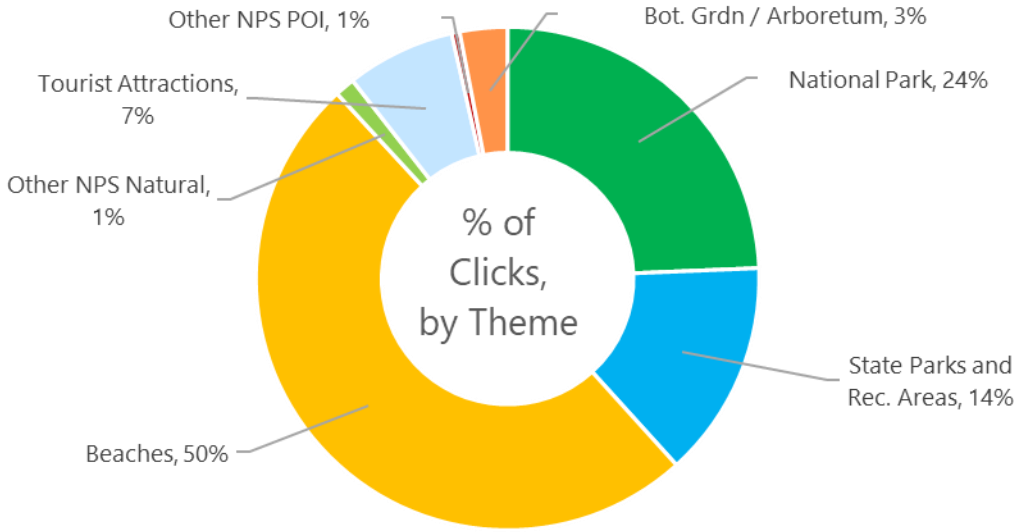
Indexed search and click volume: points-of-interest

We see that people are searching for national and state parks in large volumes but clicking on ads for beaches, suggesting opportunity for the former themes





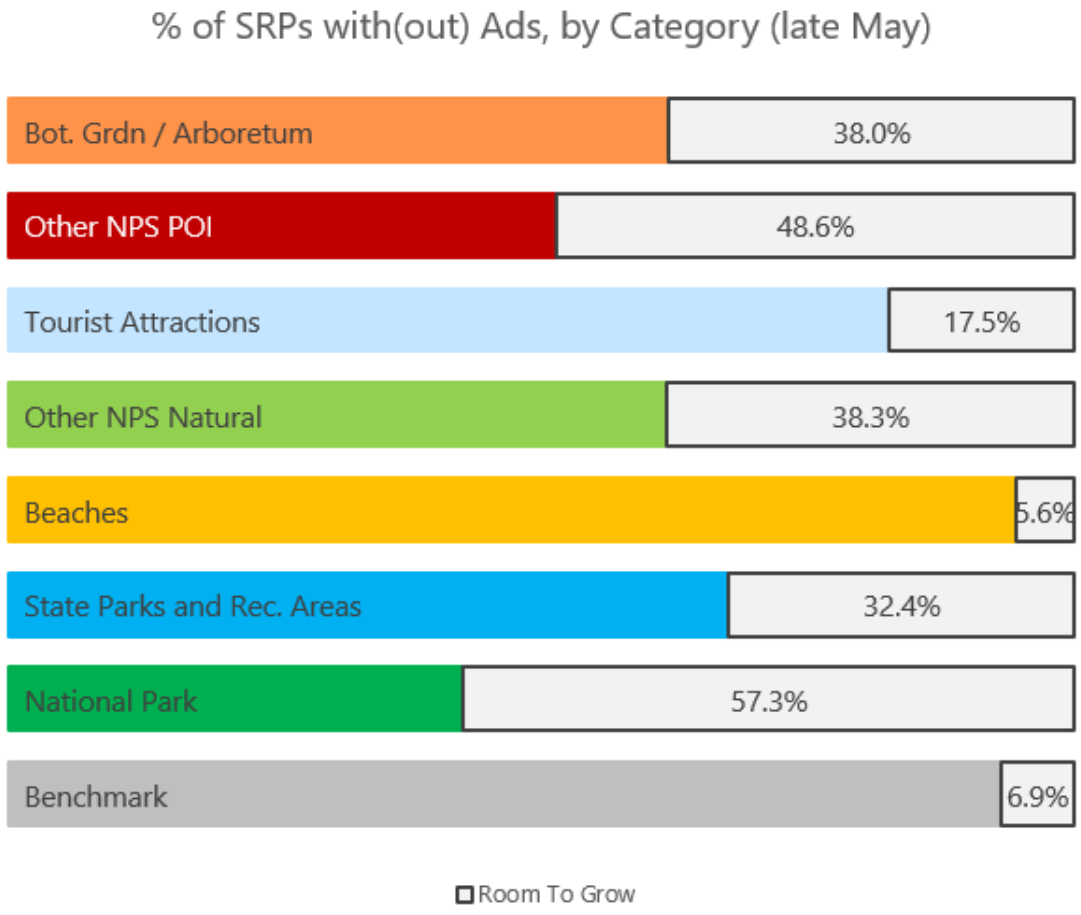


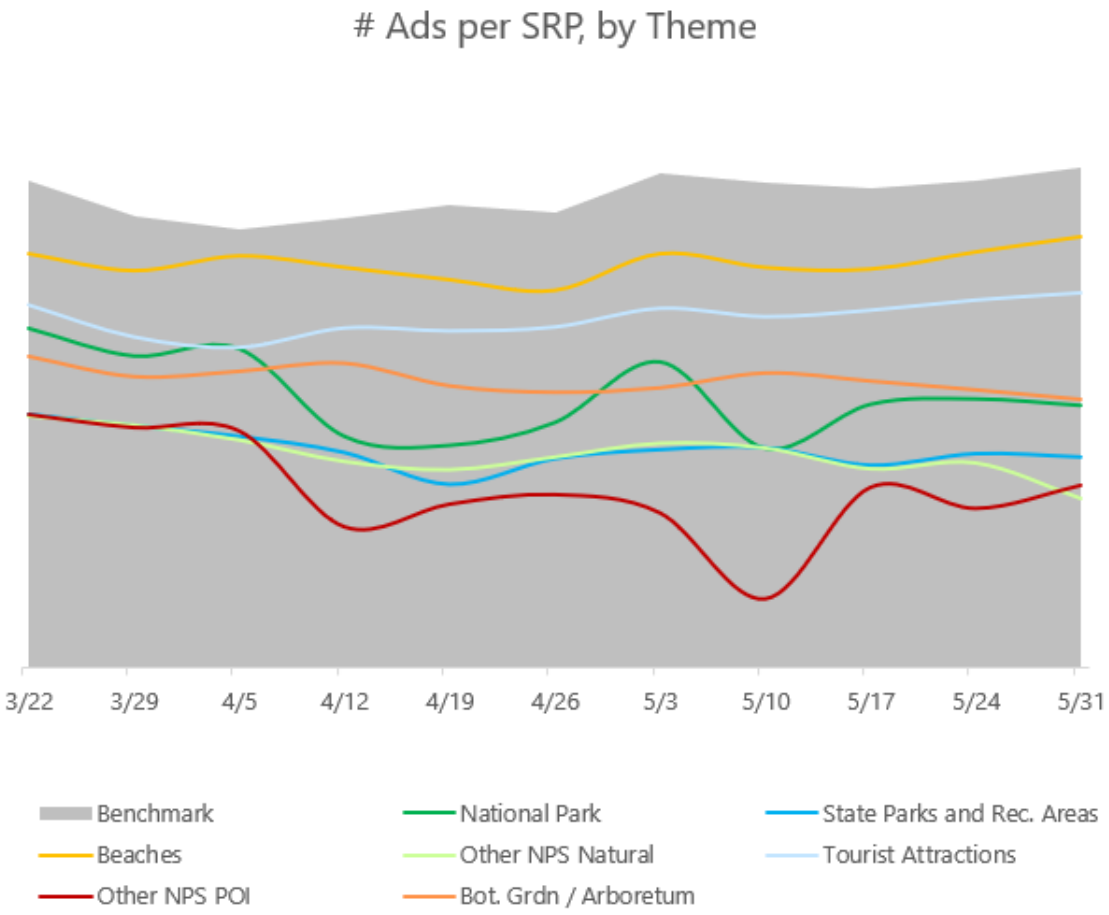


Source: Microsoft Internal Data. % of Searches/Clicks within the category noted in the title of the slide. Benchmark is a representative set of top Travel terms. NPS = National Park Service.

Competition analysis: points-of-interest

National parks and other outdoor activities have significant headroom for ads on the search results page (SRP), especially when compared to beach terms which have more competition

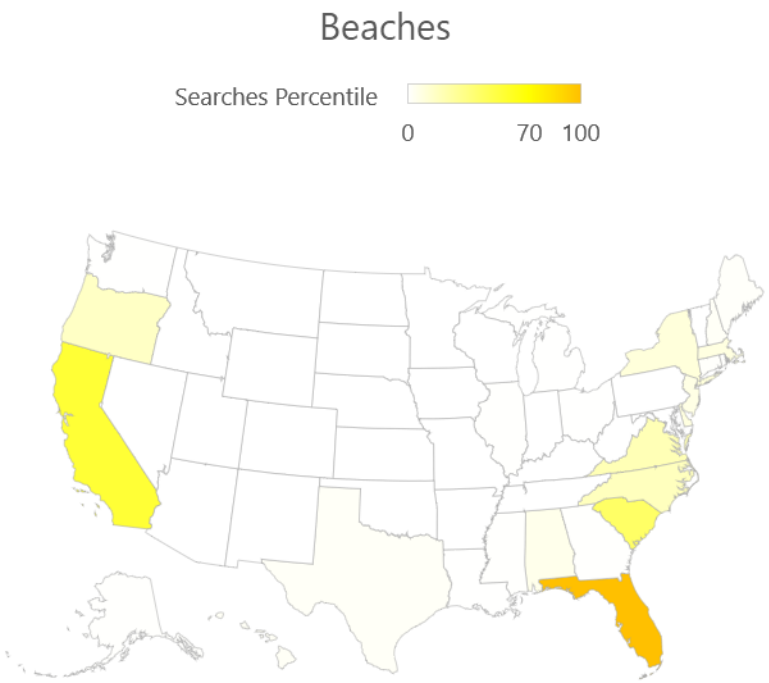


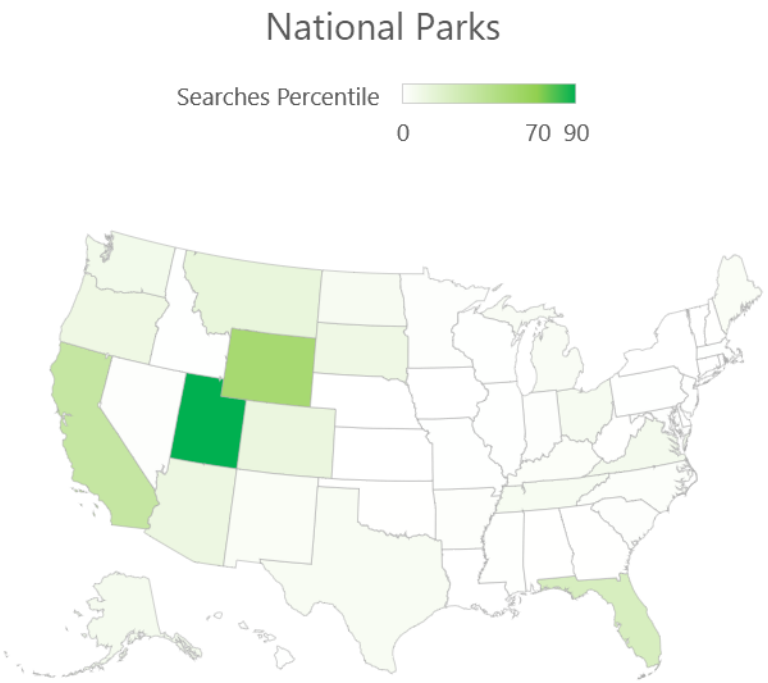


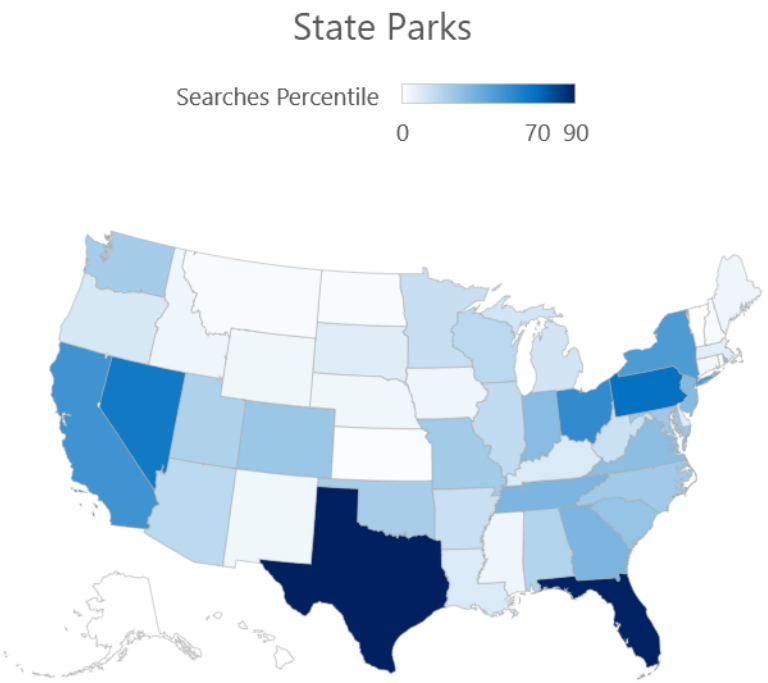
Source: Microsoft Internal Data. Room to Grow = % of SRPs without any ads; other portion of each bar indicates % of SRPs WITH ads, calculated in the last week of May.

Which states are seeing the highest search volume for their beaches and parks?

Unsurprisingly, Beaches pop in coastal areas, and Florida is the clear leader here. Similarly, searches peak for the most popular National Parks: Yellowstone, Zion, and Bryce. Interestingly, searches for State Parks have a fairly broad spread, with Texas, Florida, Nevada, and Pennsylvania leading the way.







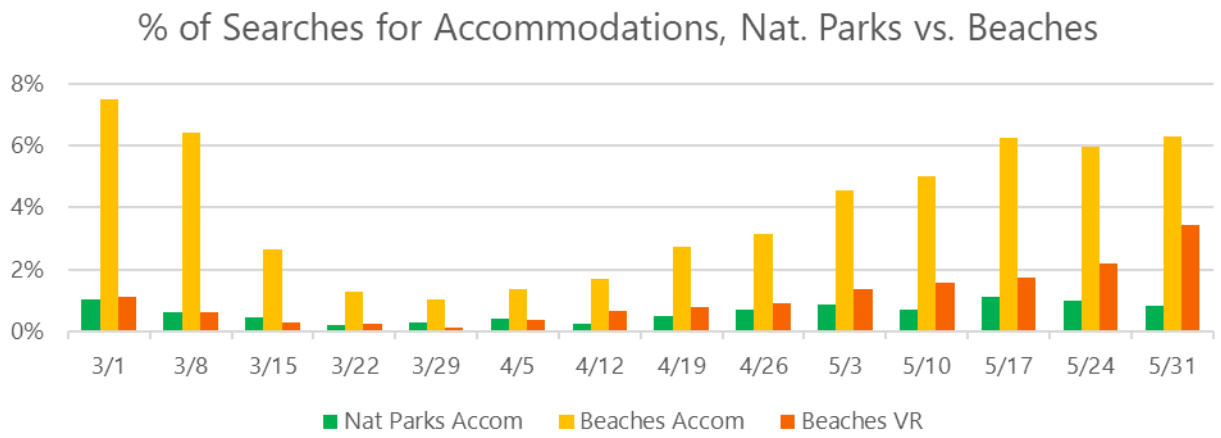
Source: Microsoft Internal Data. Timeframe: May 2020

POIs and Accommodations

Beaches + Accommodations terms get far more searches and more clicks, relative to Parks + Accommodations. Lodging advertisers should consider creating demand, especially for vacation rentals near National/State parks by positioning as a getaway from lockdown.

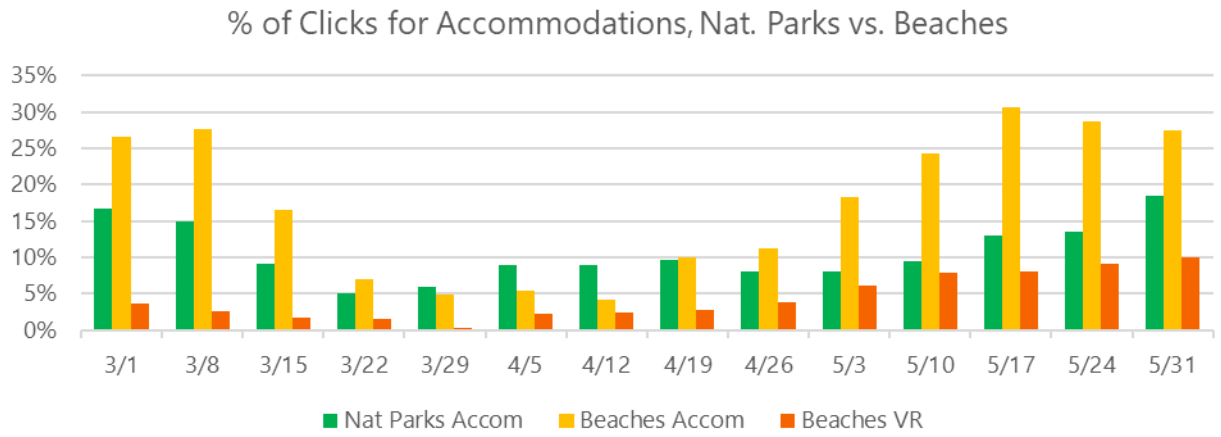
7.8X

Beaches Accommodations searches compared to Nat'l. Parks



2.0X

Beaches Accommodations Clicks compared to Nat'l. Parks

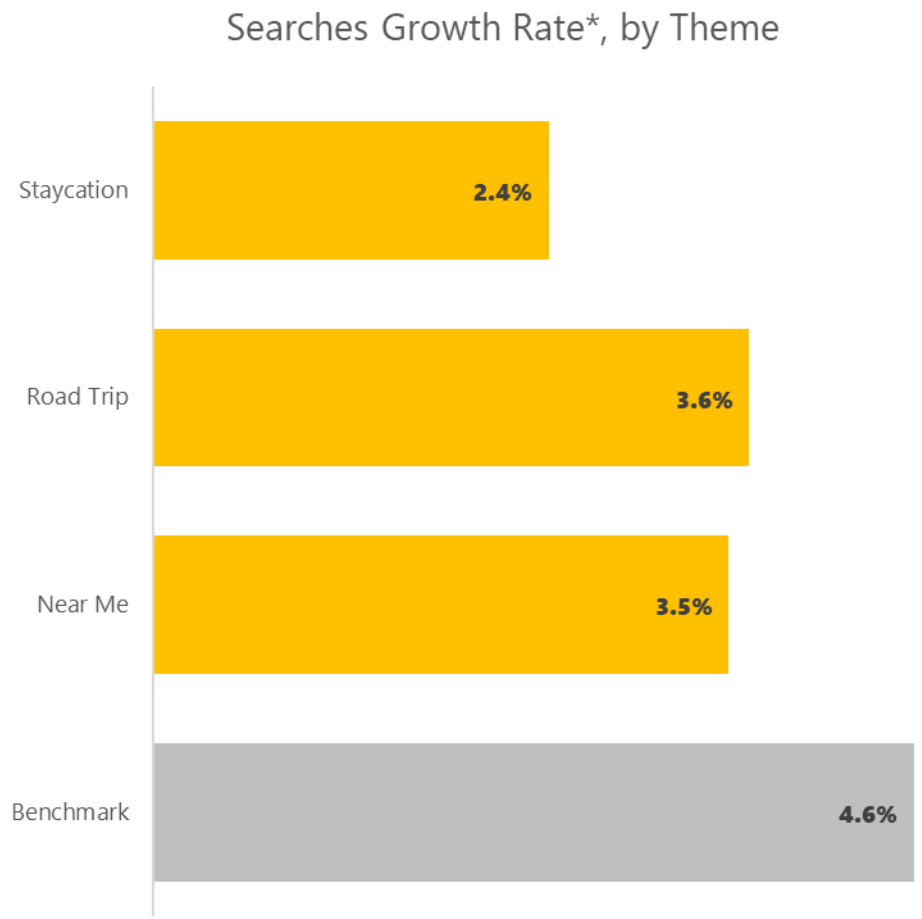


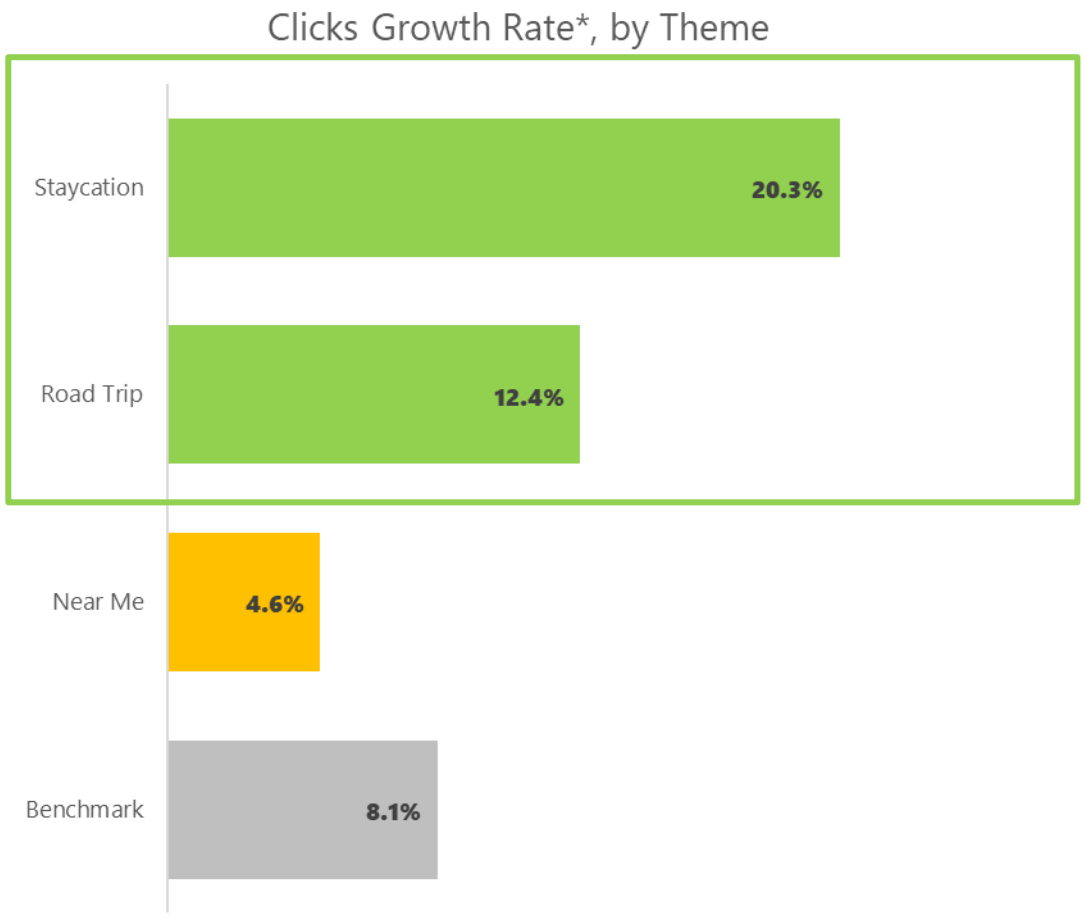
Source: Microsoft Internal Data. % of Searches and Clicks compared to queries within these themes that don't include an Accommodations token.

Local/Regional analysis

Category analysis: local/regional

While searches for Staycations, Road Trips, and "Near Me" terms have not kept pace with the Travel benchmark growth since COVID-19, clicks for the first two categories have substantially outpaced it.

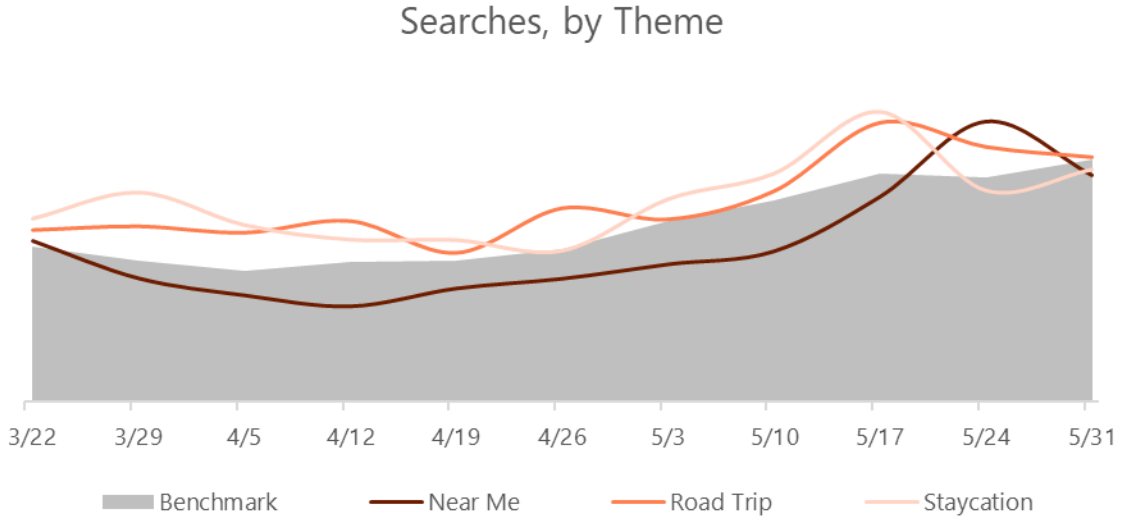


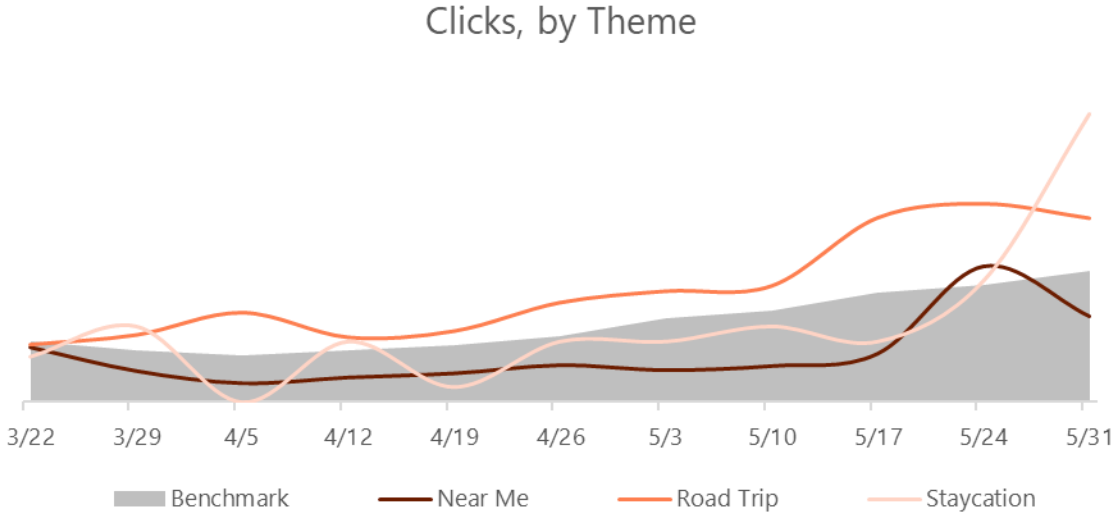


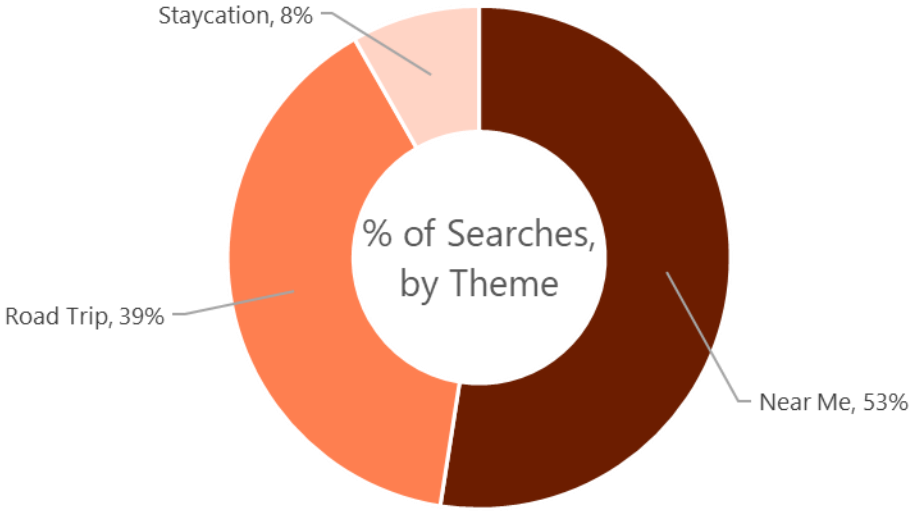
Source: Microsoft Internal Data. *Growth Rate is the compounded rate calculated over an 11-week period starting Mar 22, 2020.
Benchmark is a representative set of top Travel terms. Yellow bars = slower growth than the benchmark, green = faster, red = declining trend.

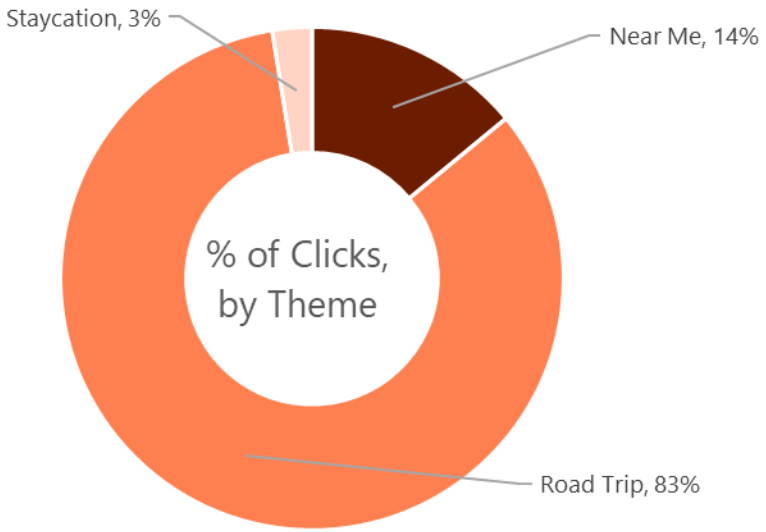
Indexed search and click volume: local/regional

Here we see that road trips outperformed the benchmark for much of the past 11 weeks, and only started to slow slightly in late May. Staycations do not represent a large volume of searches or clicks.





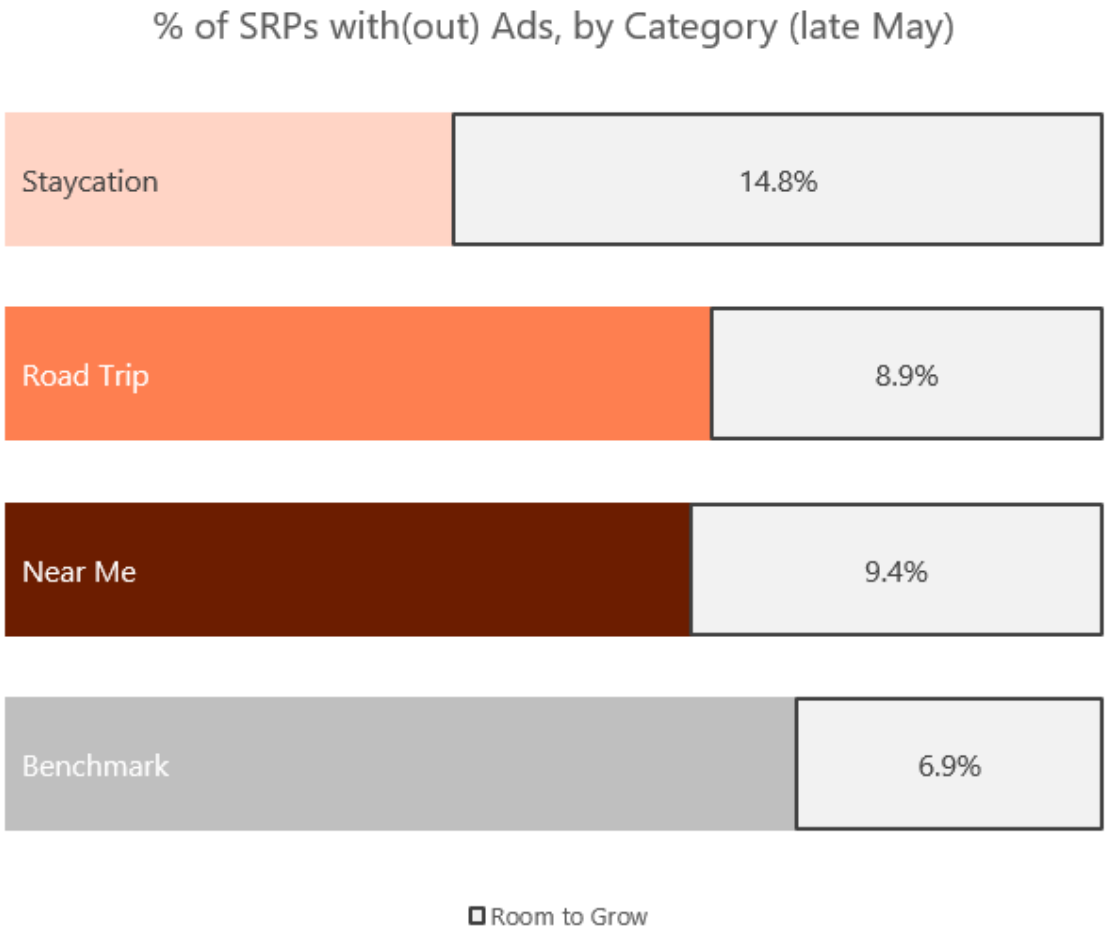


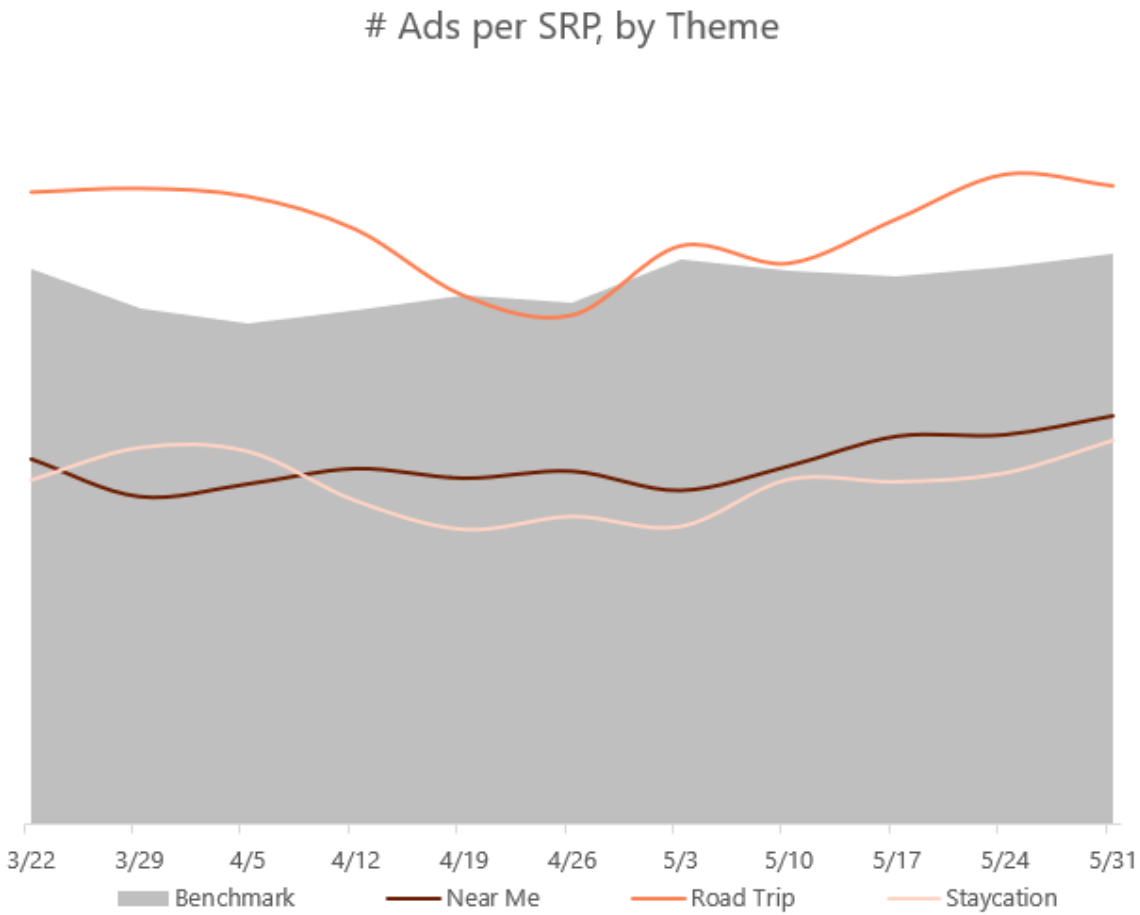


Source: Microsoft Internal Data. % of Searches/Clicks within the category noted in the title of the slide. Benchmark is a representative set of top Travel terms.

Competition analysis: local/regional

Nearly 10% of road trip and "near me" terms don't generate ads, and competition is heavy on road trip SRPs that have ads. Terms like "scenic drives", "interstate travel", and "road trip" have lower coverage so we recommend adding those to campaigns.





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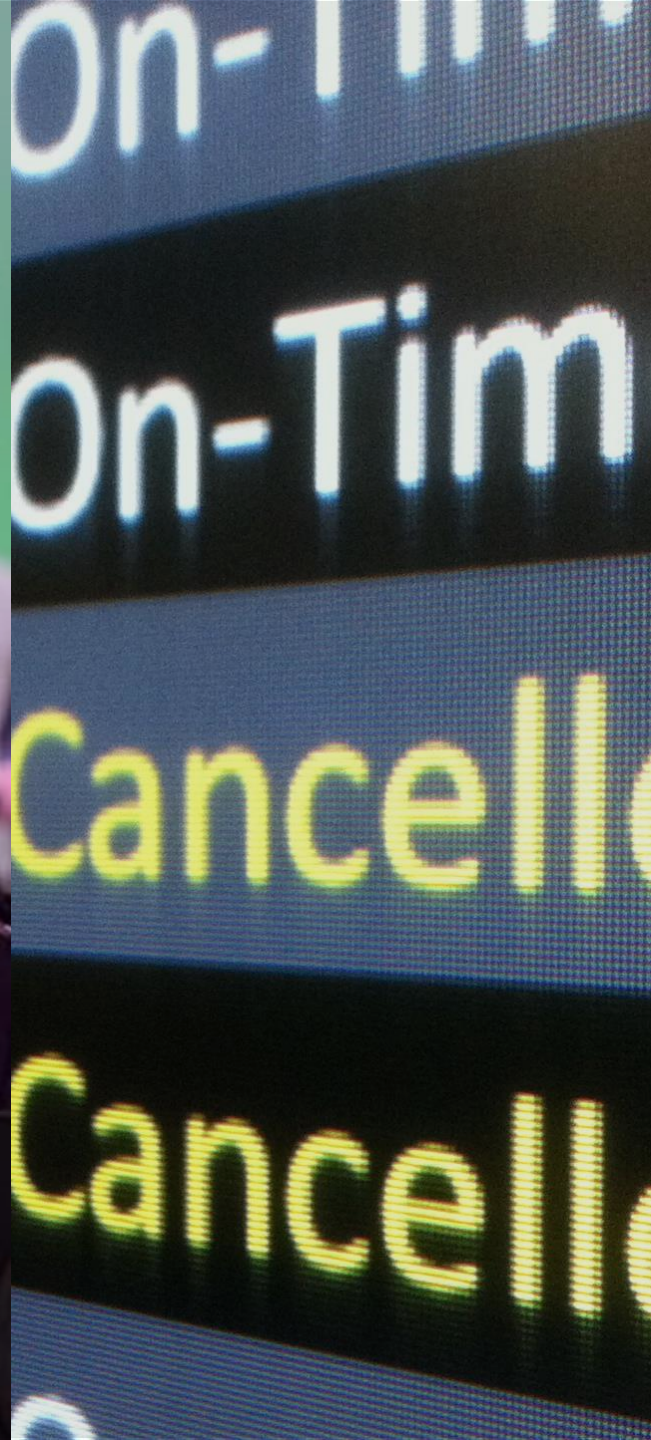
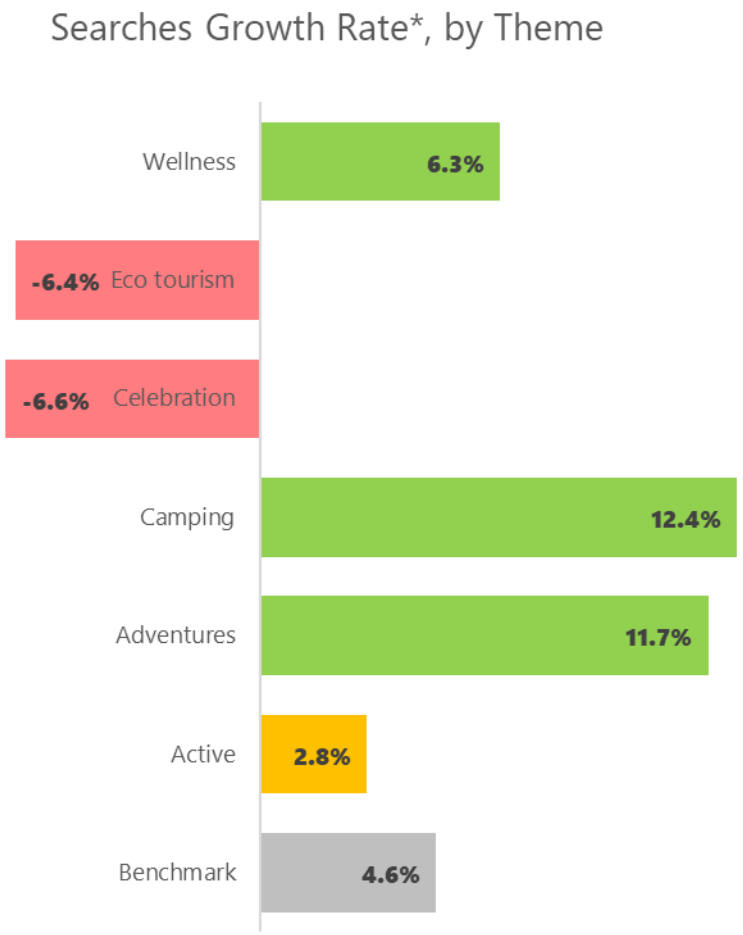
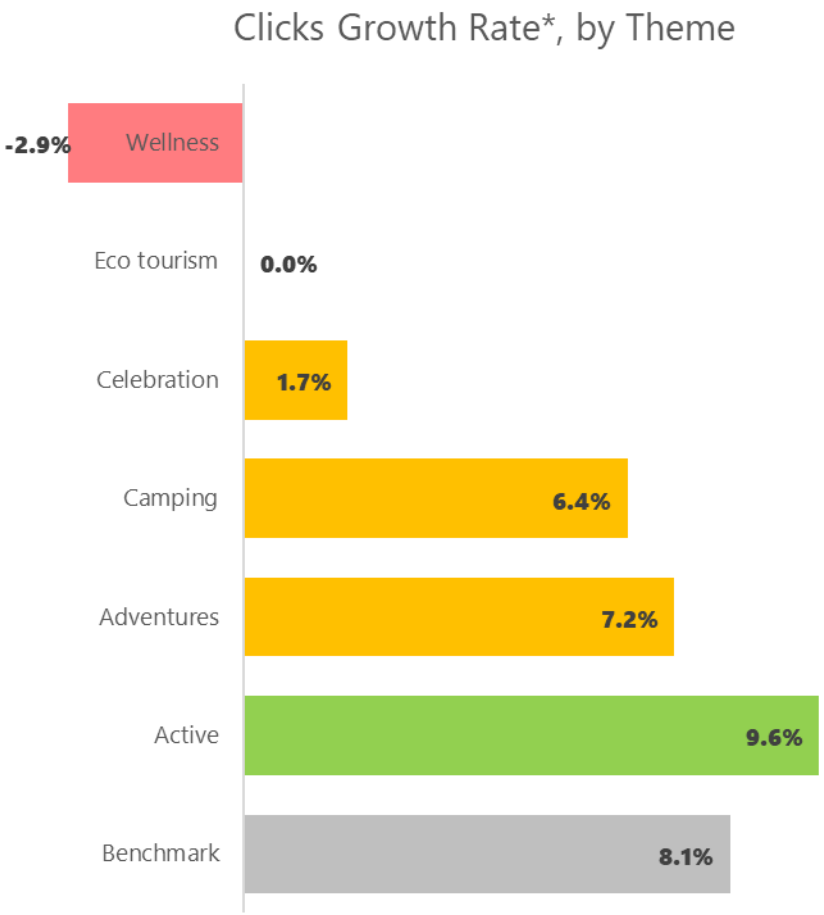
Other themes analysis



Category analysis: themed travel

Several themes associated with travel have shown strong search growth rates including camping and adventures, and terms associated with sports and fitness (i.e. "Active") have healthy click growth. Notably, emerging themes like ecotourism and staples like celebrations (e.g. weddings), have been in decline.





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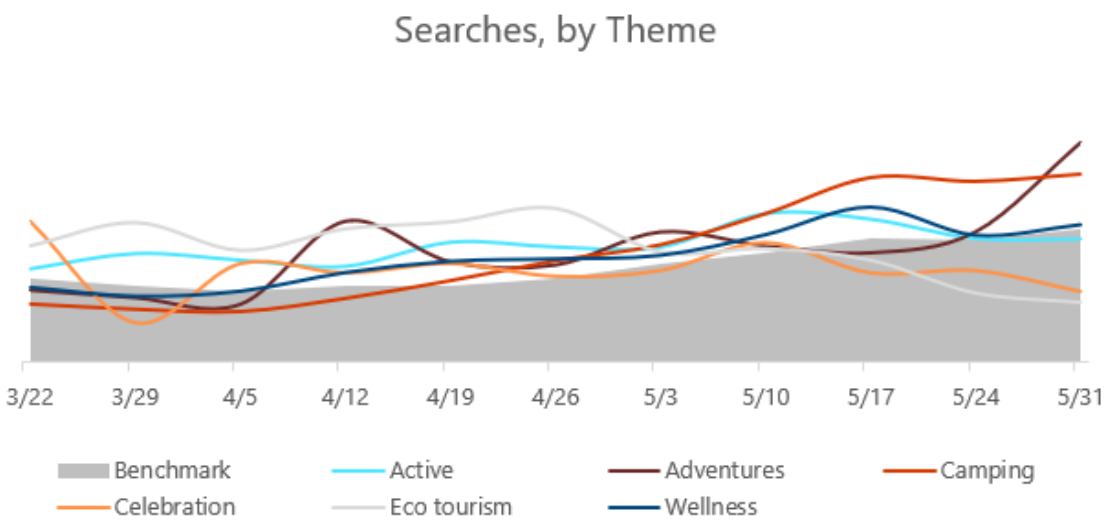
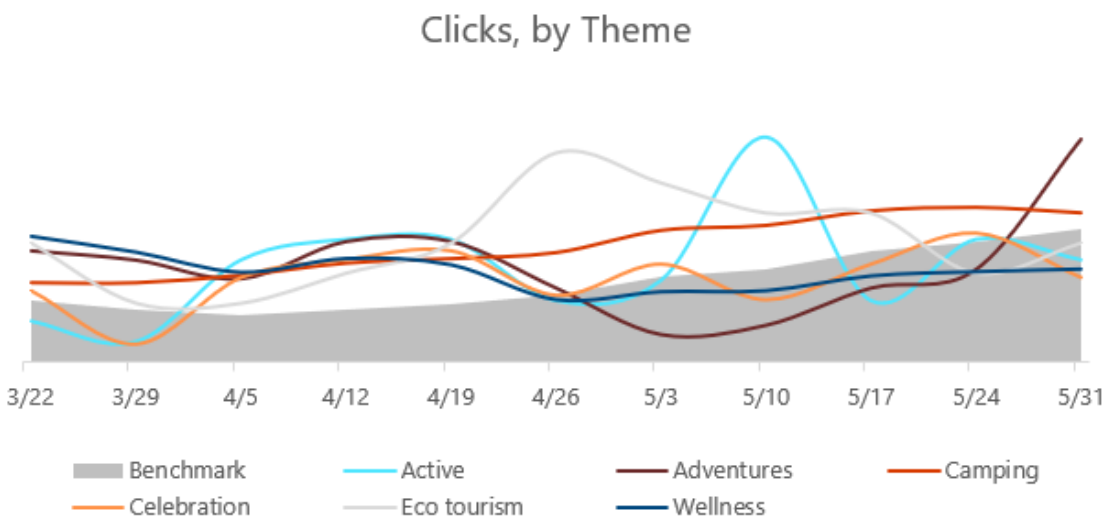
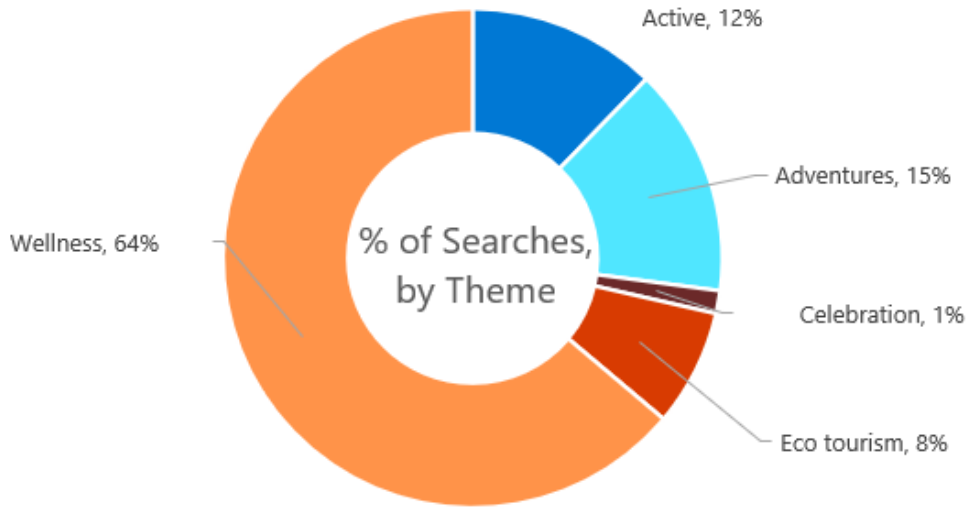
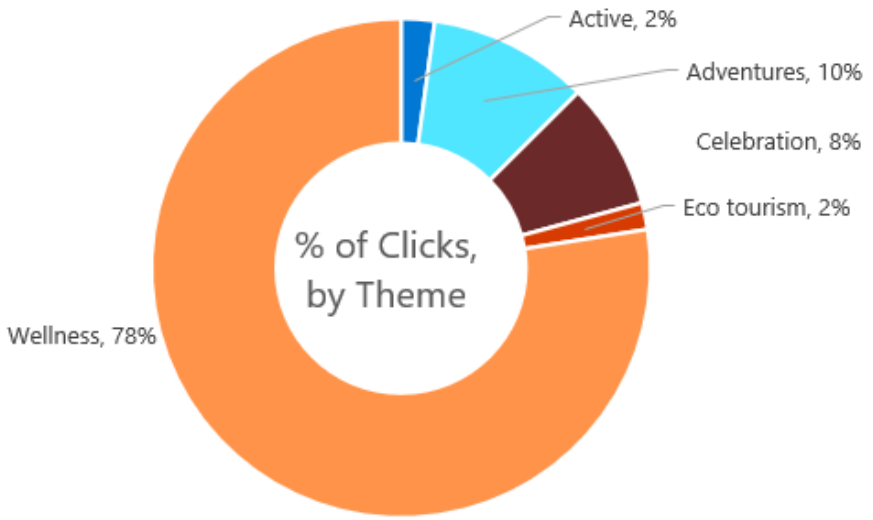
Indexed search and click volume: themed travel





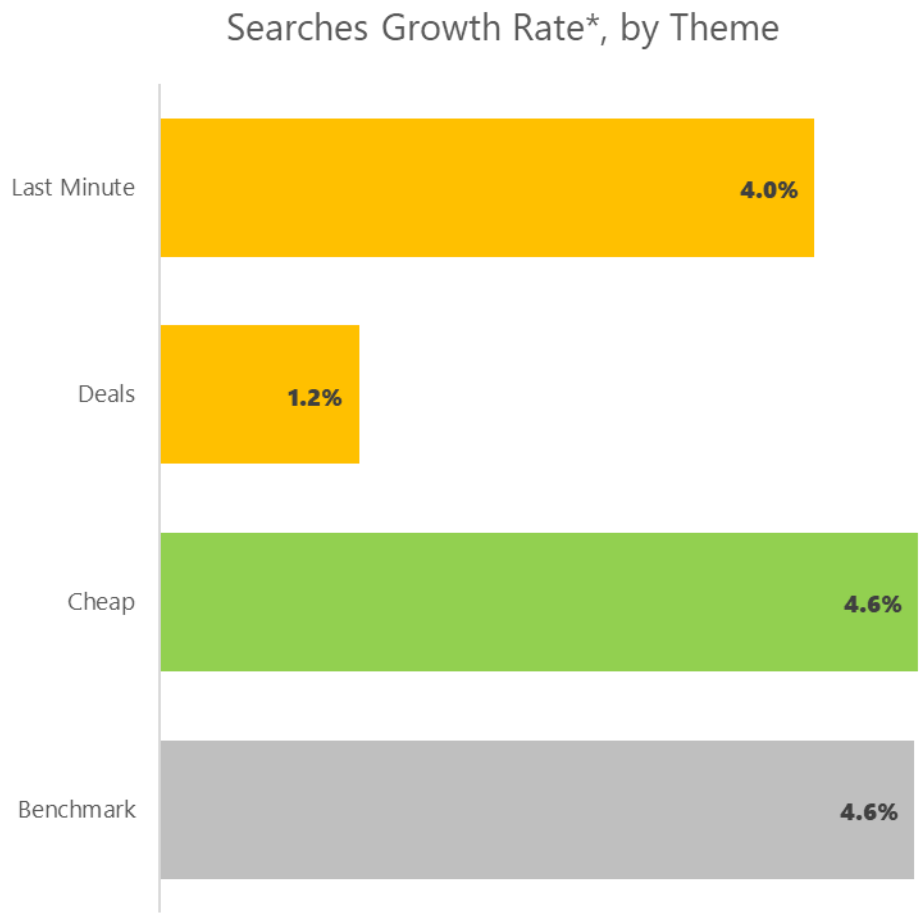


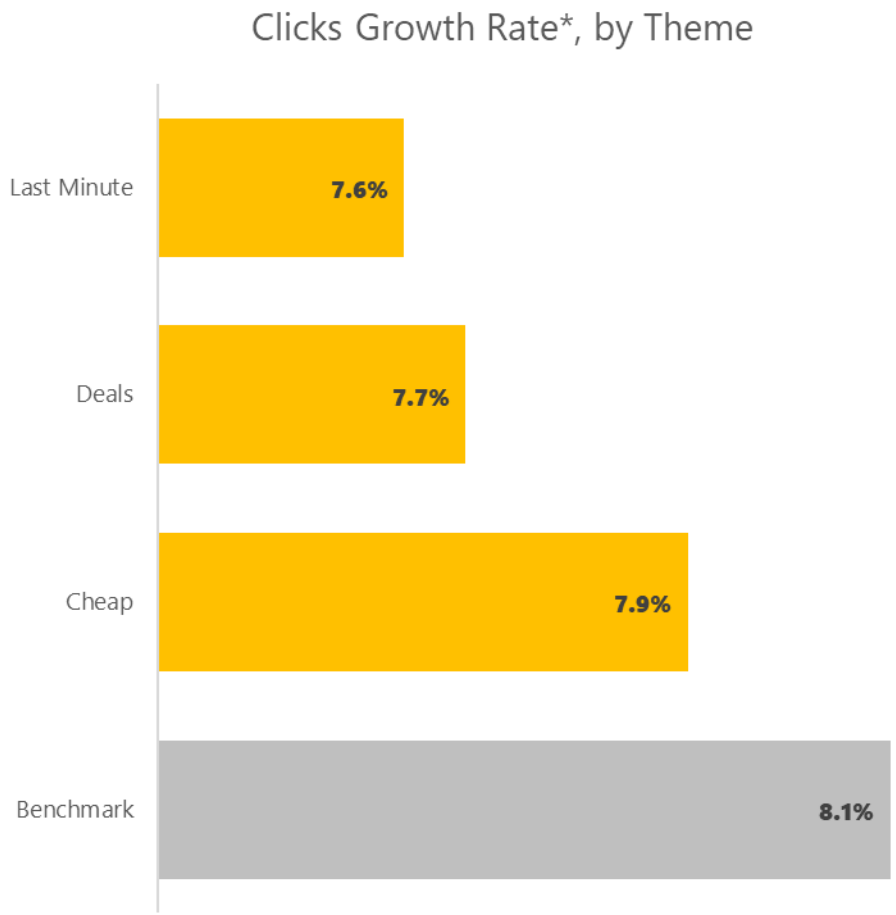


Source: Microsoft Internal Data. % of Searches/Clicks within the category noted in the title of the slide. Benchmark is a representative set of top Travel terms. Camping omitted from % of Searches and % of Clicks graphs to avoid scale mismatch.

Category analysis: discounts

Also surprising was that discount-related terms, while growing since the onset of COVID-19 in the US, have not risen as fast in either searches or clicks than the travel benchmark, suggesting that this is not as much of a driver of traveler behavior right now.





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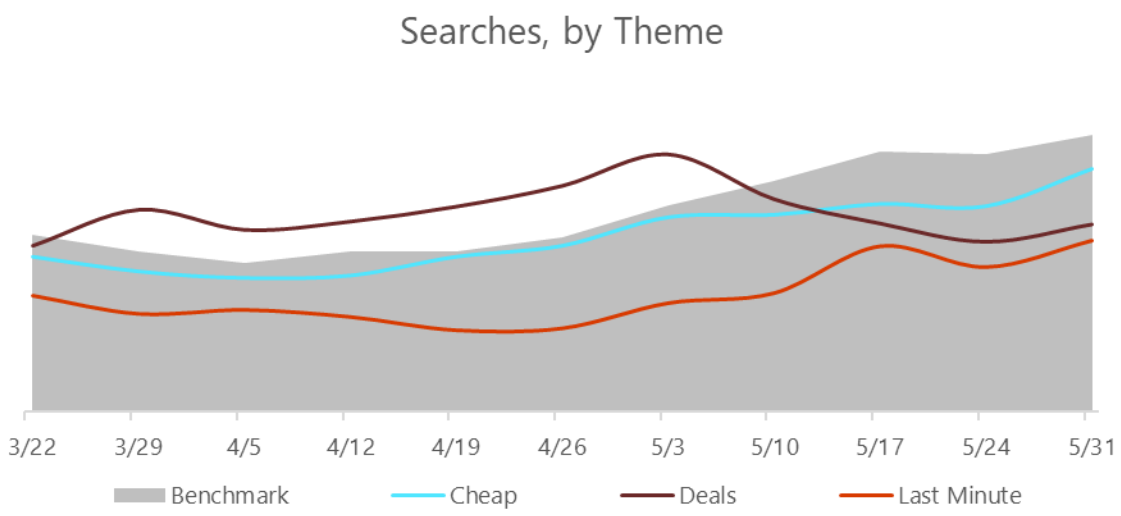
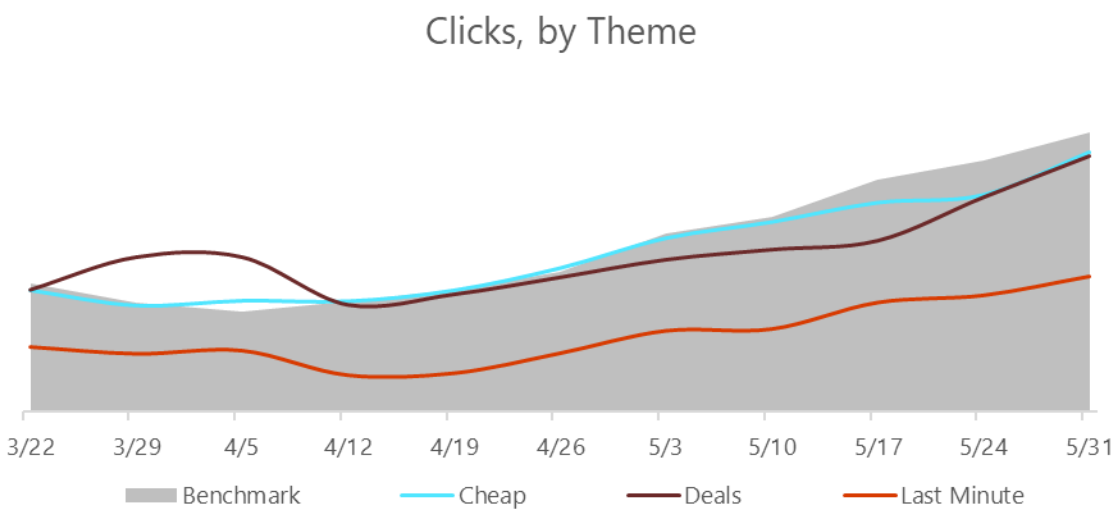
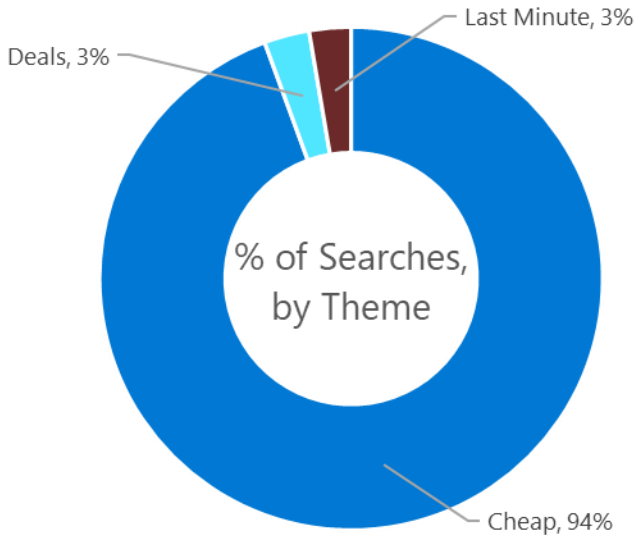
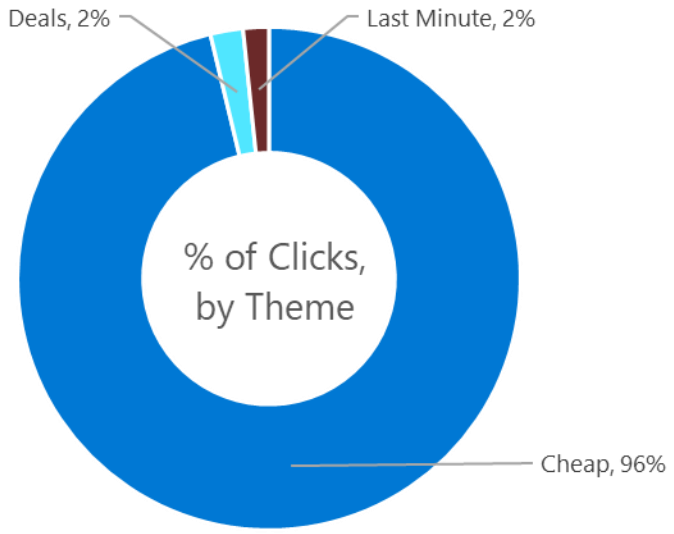
Indexed search and click volume: discounts





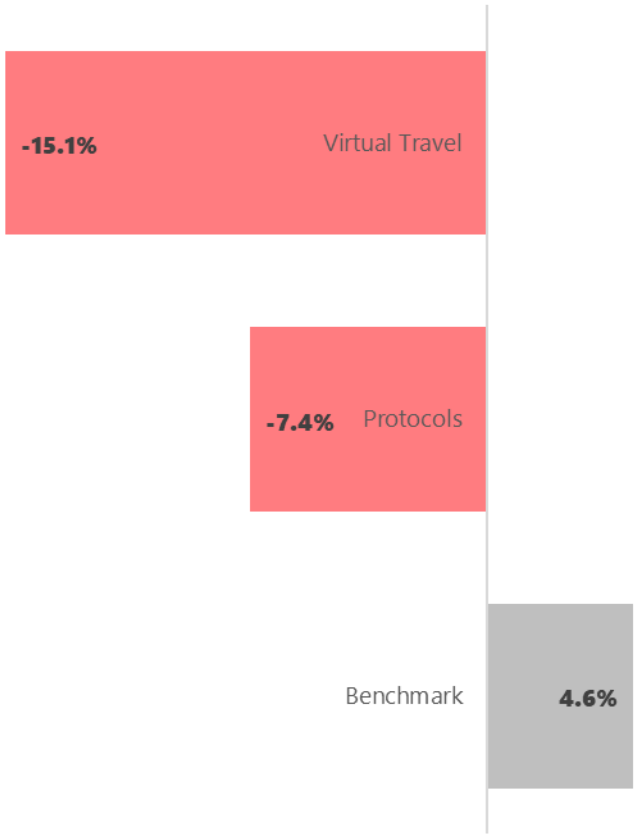


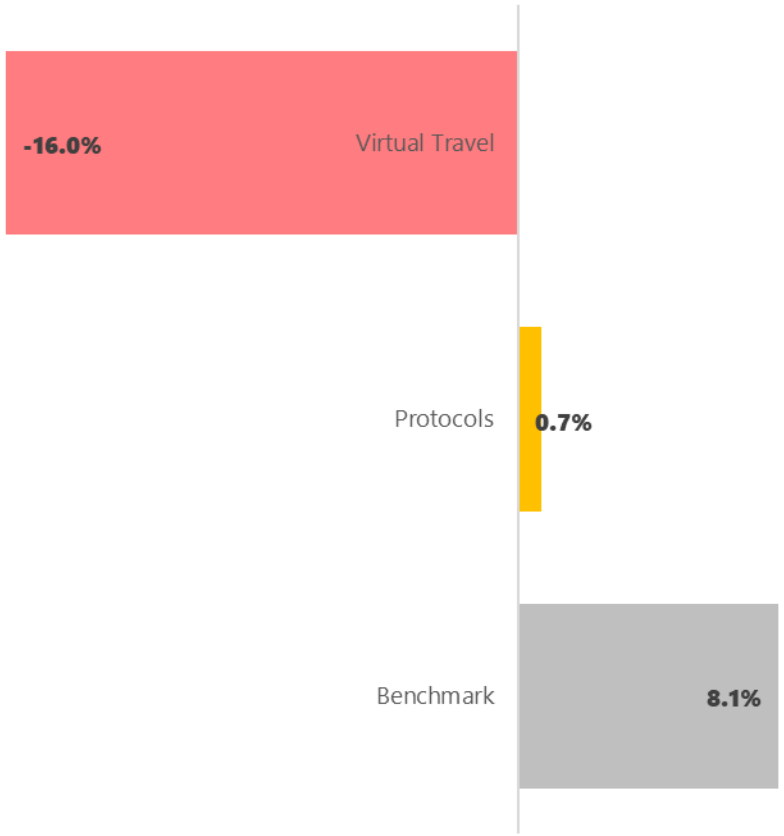


Source: Microsoft Internal Data. % of Searches/Clicks within the category noted in the title of the slide. Benchmark is a representative set of top Travel terms.

Category analysis: safety

After the initial spike in searches related to travel safety in early March, this category has been in decline





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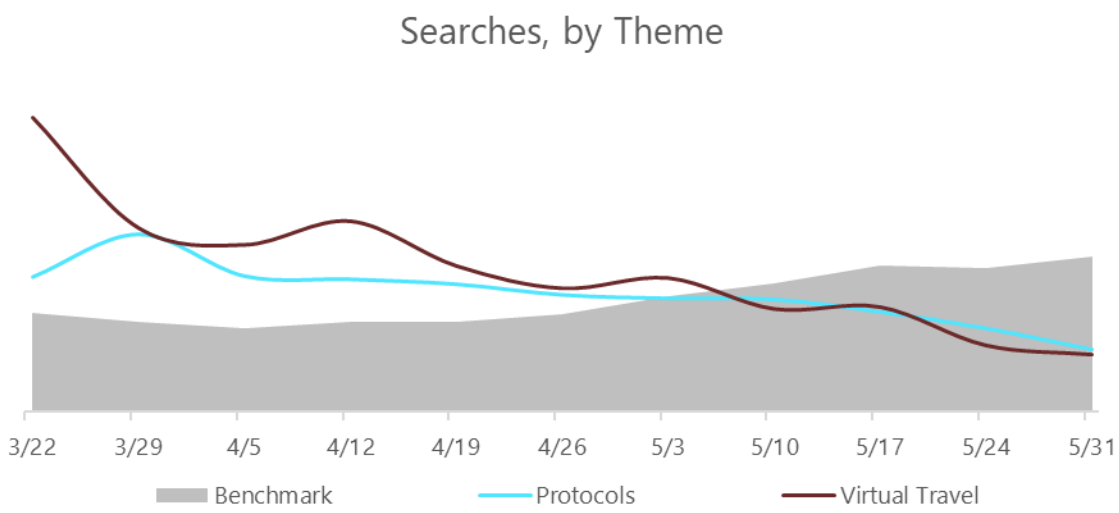
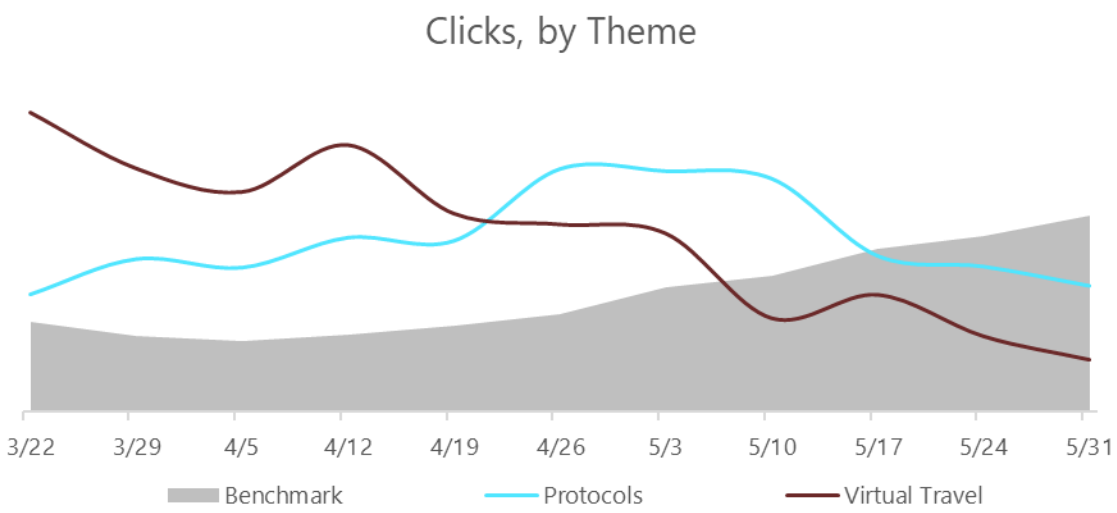
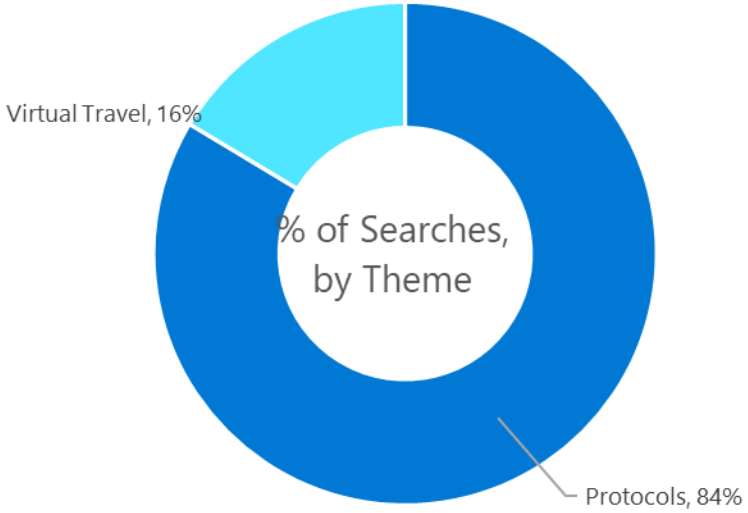
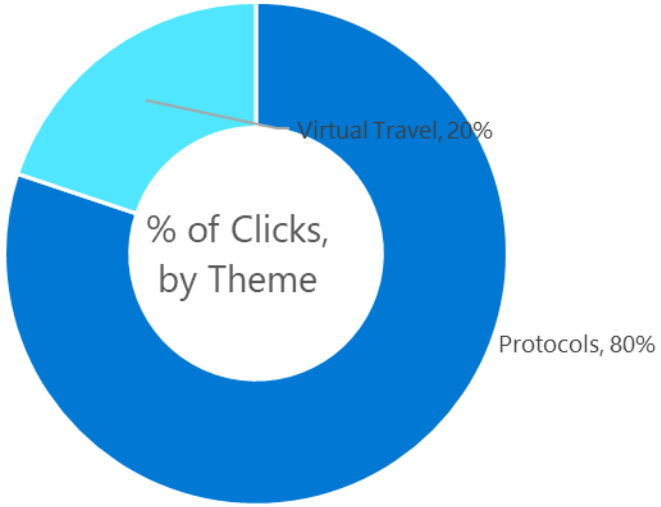
Indexed search and click volume: safety





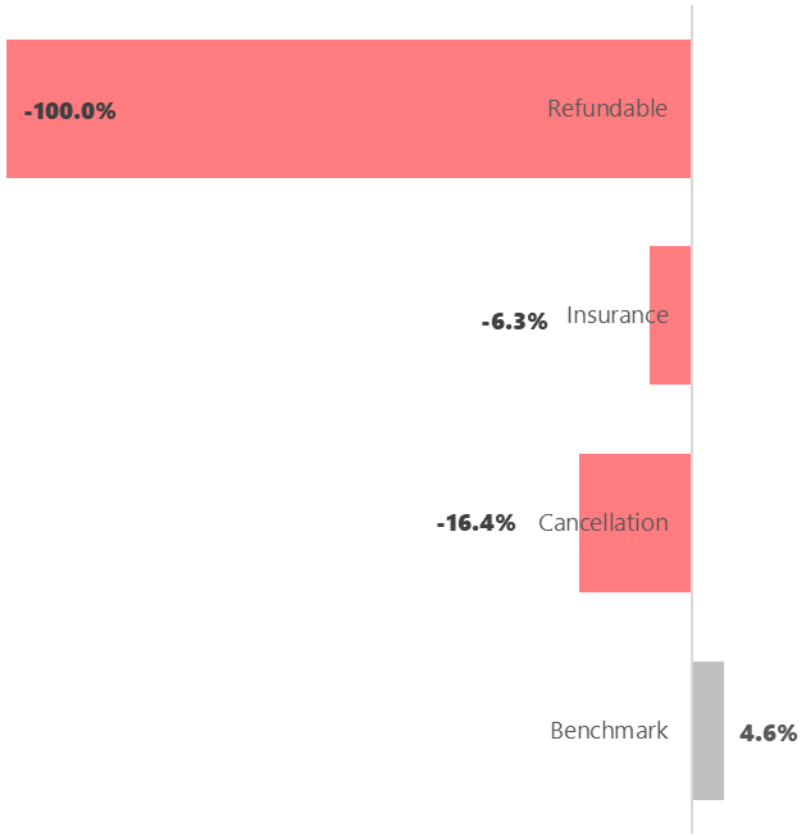


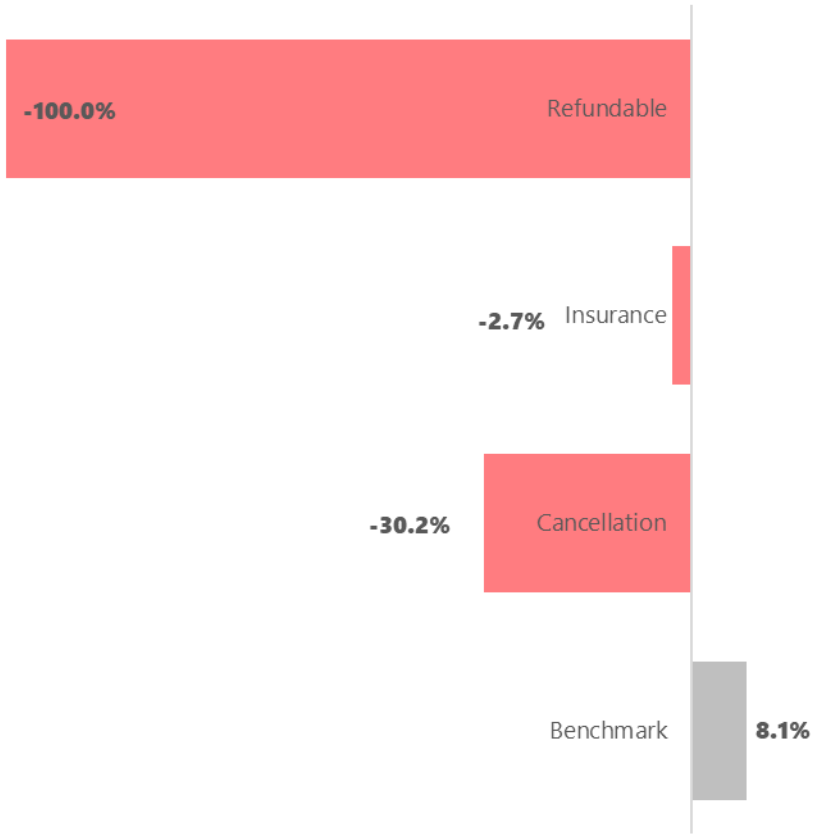


Source: Microsoft Internal Data. % of Searches/Clicks within the category noted in the title of the slide. Benchmark is a representative set of top Travel terms.

Category analysis: flexibility

Similar to travel safety, flexibility is also a category that showed early volume spikes, but have since been in decline





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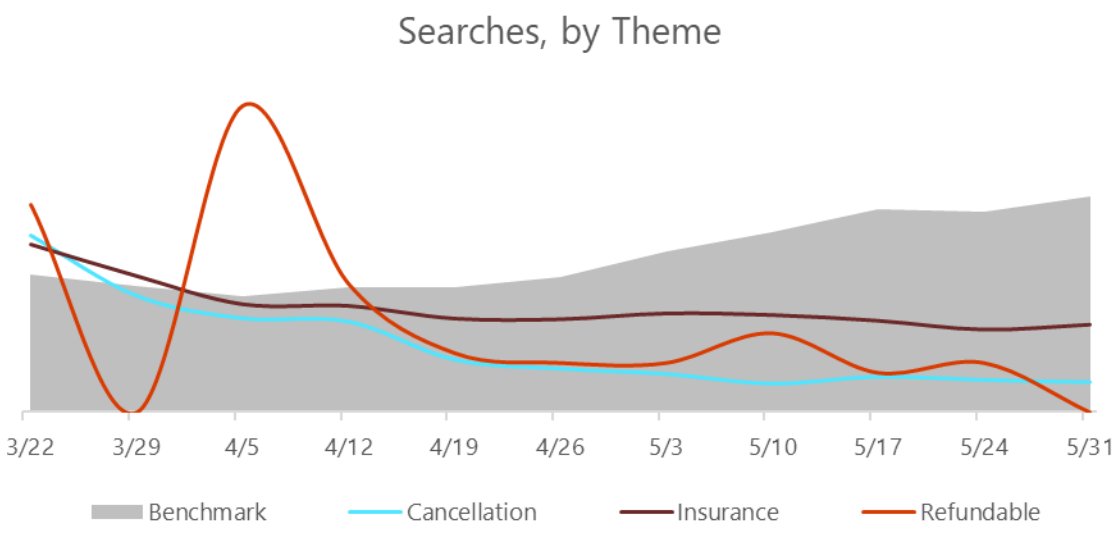
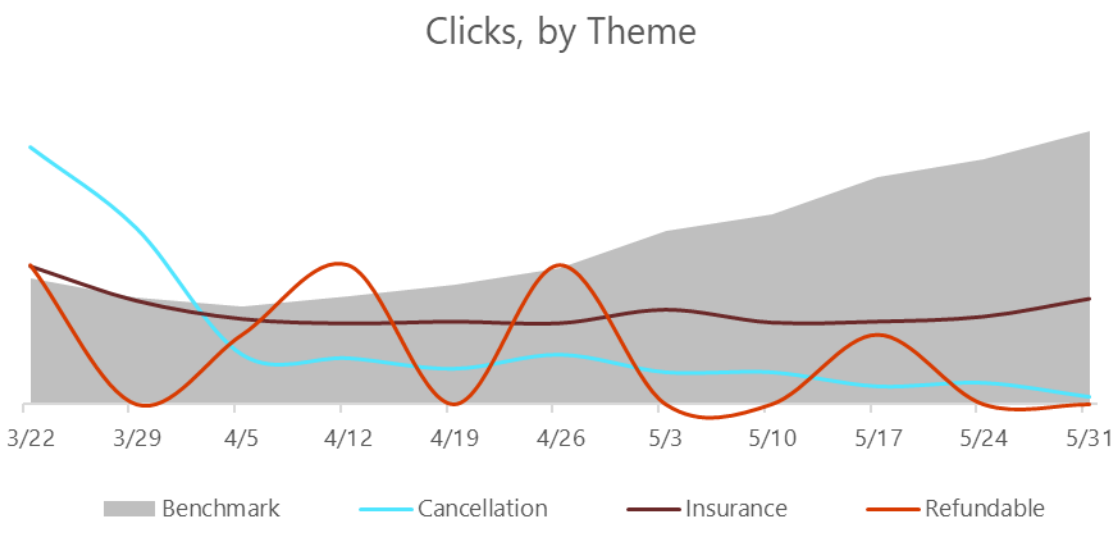
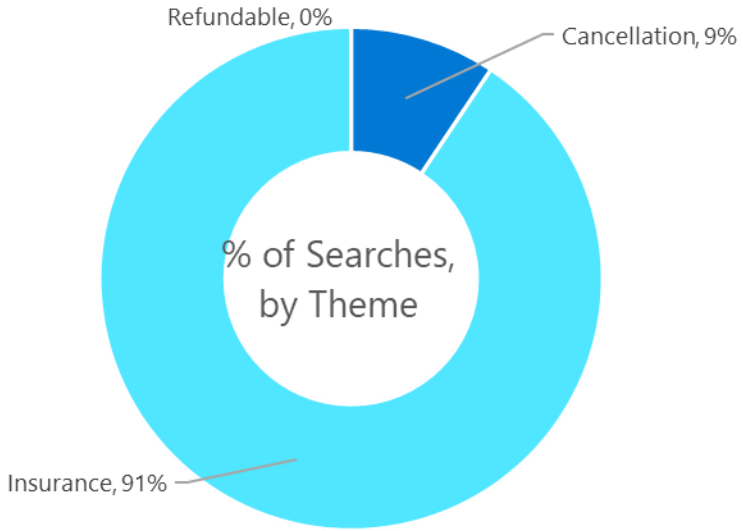
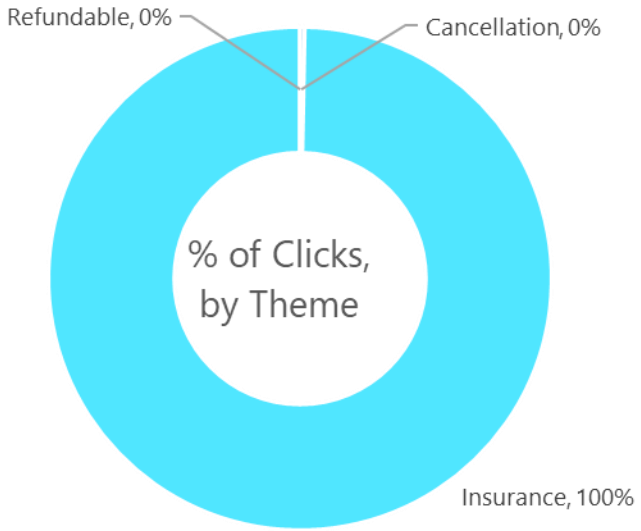
Indexed search and click volume: flexibility









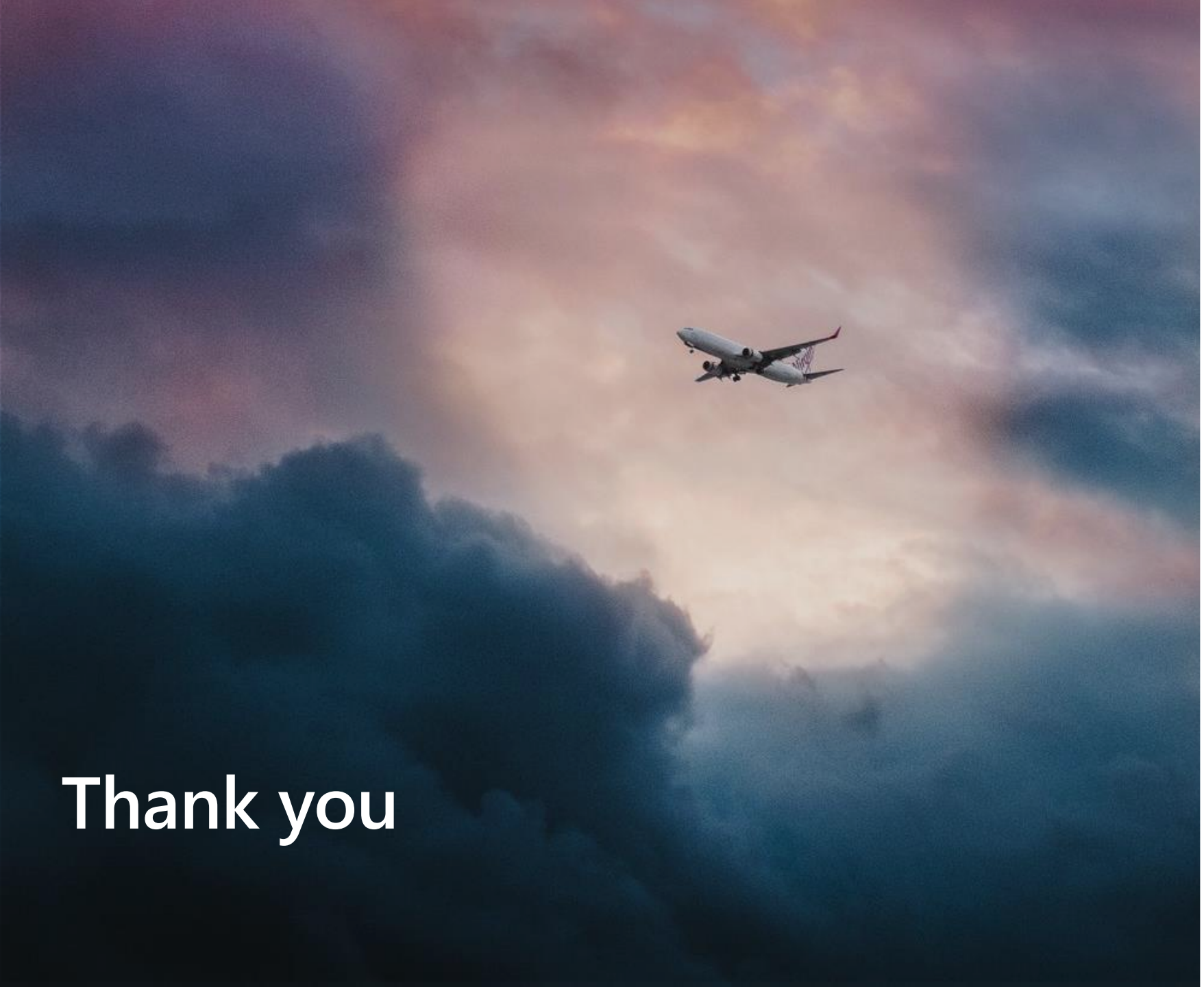
Source: Microsoft Internal Data. % of Searches/Clicks within the category noted in the title of the slide. Benchmark is a representative set of top Travel terms.

Lastly, it’s worth calling out categories we found to have immaterial search volume:

- General cleanliness of airlines/hotels (e.g. “aircraft cleaning”, “safe travel”)
- Timing (e.g. “when is safe to travel again”)
- Educational/Transformational Travel (e.g. “student travel”, “voluntourism”)
- Distance (e.g. “trips within {n} distance”, “day trips in {x} state”)

Strategies and recommendations

Learn immediate and recovery-phase strategies, and how to approach new opportunities and optimize account health in the Digital Advertiser's Guide to COVID-19



Thank you