

MAIN DESTINATIONS AND TOURIST FLOWS ON THE YOUTH TRAVEL MARKET

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Global tourism has seen an explosion since the '60s due to the post-war global economic growth and over the past two decades it recorded a significant increase, youth travel being the main component of this growth. According to experts, this type of tourism is in full evolution, young tourists representing an increasingly important segment of the global tourism market.

Many experts in the tourism industry think youth travel is the fastest growing market segment, and the previsions of the World Tourism Organization estimate that in the near future youth travel will tote up 25% of the worldwide tourism market. On one hand, this phenomenon can be explain through the cultural motivation of the young people in practicing tourism, and on the other, through the relatively low or acceptable costs of transportation, especially for the youth in well developed countries.

Keywords: youth travel, tourist flows, tourist destinations.

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More and more young people travel abroad for their vacation, to visit their friends or relatives, to study, for business or for other reasons. For many of them these travels represent their first incursion in foreign countries and are a real adventure. This movement of young people from their residence country towards various tourist destinations generate at global level a multitude of tourist flows that represent the most substantive expression of the tourism activity. Firstly, tourist flows imply a temporary movement of young people in accordance with the size of the demand, the tourist potential of that region, the distance to the chosen destination, the accessibility and prestige of the reception region.

It is difficult to identify the main countries that constitute a travel destination. While statistics for international arrivals are very well documented by the W.T.O. (World Tourism Organization) and by the majority of national tourism organizations, there are very few data about the age of the travelers. The favorite destinations of the youth must be defined by taking into account the worldwide trends in youth travel and the strategy that each country has for its tourism.

According to the W.T.O., Europe and America are the most sought after destinations by the worldwide youth, but despinde this, destinations like Asia, Africa and the Middle East have a growing market share.

According to the 2003 International Student Travel Confederation (I.S.T.C) and Association for Tourism and Leisure Education's (A.T.L.A.S.) study regarding youth travel „*Today's Youth Travellers: Tomorrow's Global Nomads. New Horizons in Independent Youth and Student Travel*” in their „tourist career” youth and students visited many regions all over the world, more than half visited Northern and Southern Europe and over 40% traveled through North America and Eastern Europe.²⁸² This general situation changed slightly in the last 5 years, so in 2007, when a study²⁸³ on the youth travel market was conducted by the World Tourism Organisation in collaboration with the World Youth Student & Educational Travel Confederation –WSYE TC, a modest decrease in the importance of the visited European destinations was recorded, this was

²⁸² Richards, G., Wilson, J., *Today's Youth Travellers: Tomorrow's Global Nomads. New Horizons in Independent Youth and Student Travel*, International Student Travel Confederation, Amsterdam, 2003.

²⁸³ World Tourism Organisation, *Youth travel matters – Understanding the Global Phenomenon of Youth Travel*, Madrid, 2008.

largely due to the extension of the surveyed respondents at world-wide level (see figure no. 1). The regions that recorded a significant growth in the number of tourists, such as Southeast Asia and Australia, probably benefited from a larger global distribution of the respondents in the year when the study was conducted.

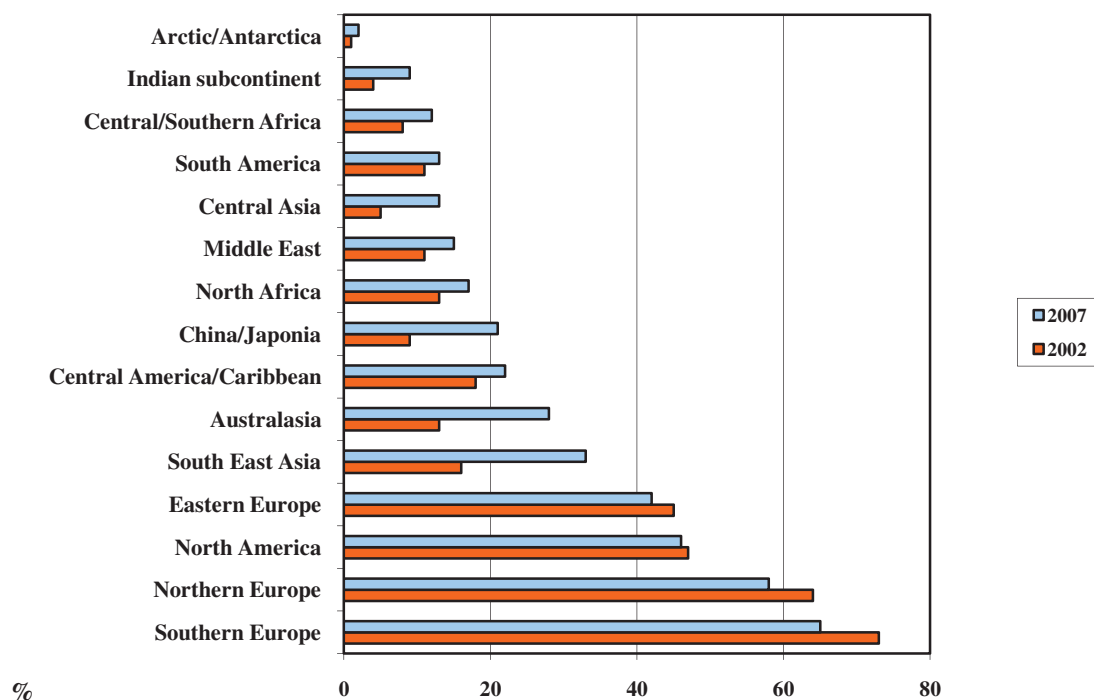


Fig. no. 1 Visited destinations during the “tourist career” in 2007 compared to 2002

Source: World Tourism Organisation, *Youth travel matters – Understanding the Global Phenomenon of Youth Travel*, Madrid, 2008.

The regions preferred by young people as main destinations in the last major trip taken in 2002 were Northern Europe (30%), South Europe (16%), North America (16%) and Western Europe (8%), followed by Southeast Asia and Australasia (see figure no. 2).

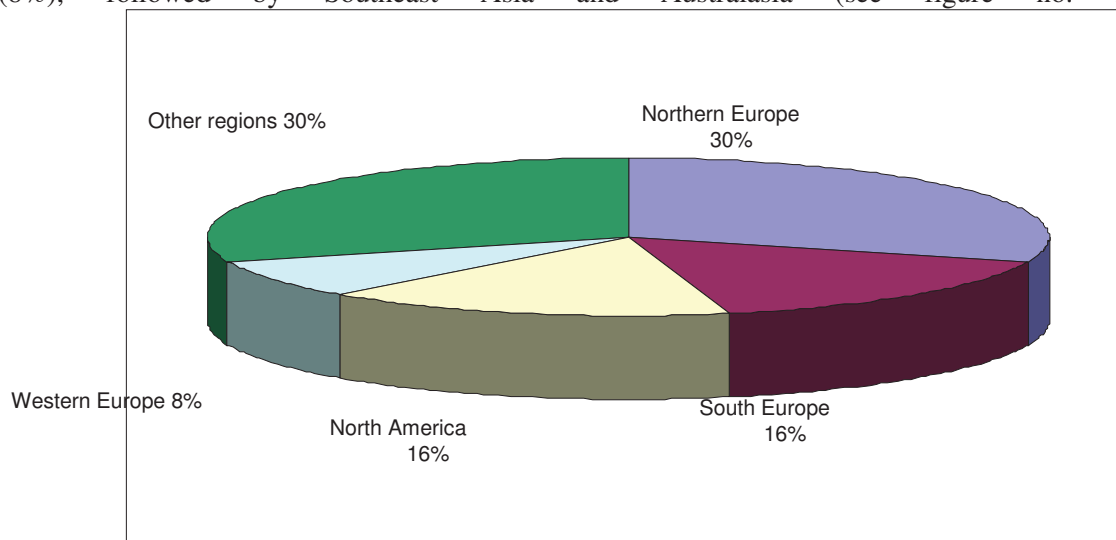


Fig. no. 2 Main tourist destinations preferred by young people in the last major trip taken

in 2002

Source: Richards, G., Wilson, J., *Today's Youth Travellers: Tomorrow's Global Nomads. New Horizons in Independent Youth and Student Travel*, International Student Travel Confederation, Amsterdam, 2003.

Youth usually go back to certain tourist destination, in North America the number of tourists who visit this continent for the first time is lower than the number of tourists who return, and over 70% European regions are visited several times. The other tourist regions have a high number of tourists who come for the first time in these countries, especially in the Indian sub-continent (60% come for the first time), South America, South-Eastern Asia and Australasia (approximately 50% of the young travelers come here for the first time). These are destinations that must be seen at least "once in a life time".

The regions that are visited by a larger number of tourists with ages over 26 are South and Central Africa (44%), South and Central America (25%), the Middle East (21%) and South-Eastern Asia (20%)(see figure no. 3). These regions are considered "difficult", and this explains why experienced travelers prefer these destinations, while most young people prefer Europe and North America.

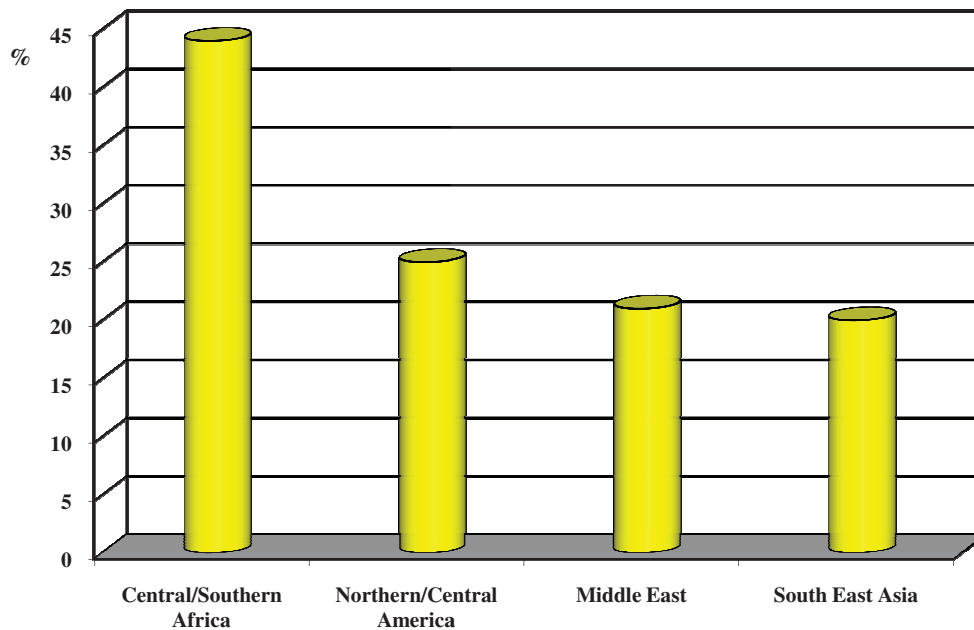


Figure no. 3 Regions frequented by young people over 26 years old

Source: Richards, G., Wilson, J., *Today's Youth Travellers: Tomorrow's Global Nomads. New Horizons in Independent Youth and Student Travel*, International Student Travel Confederation, Amsterdam, 2003.

The desire for more travel is among the most important benefits obtained by young people who visit regions with more "difficult" and more "exotic" tourist destinations, such as Southeast Asia, the Indian sub-continent, Central and South America and Central and South Africa, and *discovering other cultures* represents the least important gain of those who visit Europe and Northern America, which is due to the fact the culture of these regions is among the most globalized and familiar in the world.

Countries considered the most popular destinations on the youth travel market are Australia, United States of America and France, all being visited by over 10% of tourists, followed by Spain, Italy, Germany, Great Britain and Thailand, each with approximately 6% of the youth travel demand. These figures are correlated with statistics regarding international tourist arrivals issued by the World Tourism Organisation, which mentioned France as the main destination of

2006, USA being third.

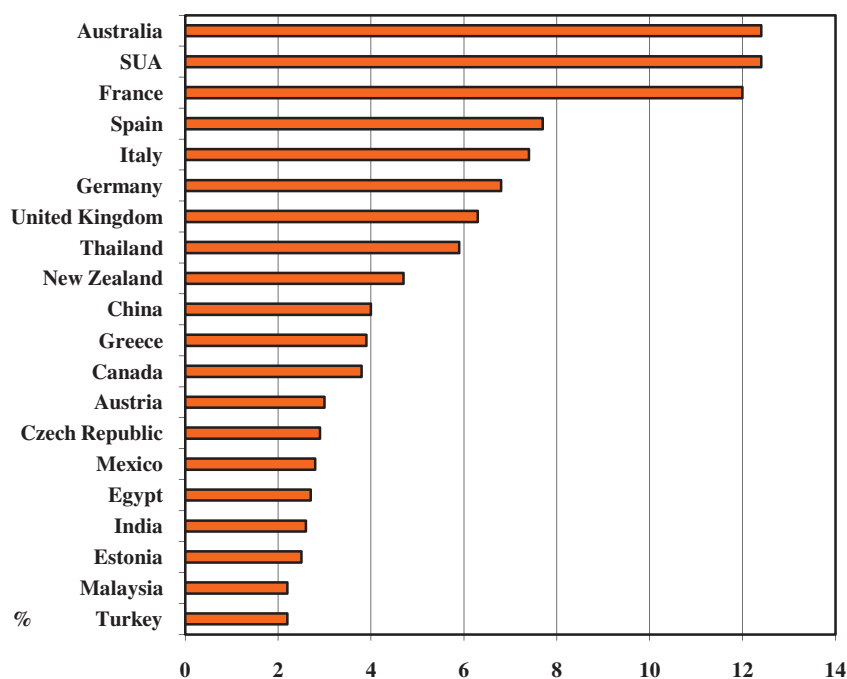


Figure no. 4 The main 20 destinations visited in the last major trip

Note: one trip can cover more than one tourist destination.

Source: Richards, G., *New Horizons II – The Young Independent Traveller 2007*, WYSE Travel Confederation, Amsterdam, 2007.

As mentioned in the paper „*Today's Youth Travellers: Tomorrow's Global Nomads. New Horizons in Independent Youth and Student Travel*”²⁸⁴, some tourist destinations tend to attract certain types of tourists more than others (there are three segments of tourists established on the youth travel market: backpackers, travellers and tourists). Destinations like Southeast Asia, Australasia and South America are dominated by backpackers, while in North America and in Canada the number of travellers is higher than the number of backpackers, which could be determined by the fact these hikers are integrated in a particular group during their travel.

Among the most popular tourist destinations in 2007, Thailand, New Zealand and Australia are the main destinations for backpackers, who generally chose the ones with well developed infrastructure for youth travel. In contrast, classic tourist destinations from South Europe, such as Turkey, Spain and Greece, tend to attract more young tourists and fewer backpackers. An interesting European destination is Estonia, but because this country recently joined the European Union, it can still be perceived as an adventurous destination for some.

There seems to be a close connection between the development stage of tourism and the travelling style. Relatively “mature” destinations from Northern America and Europe record a lower number of backpackers, while new destinations have a larger number of backpackers. This could be an indicator of the “pioneer” function of young travellers, who are trail blazers for other travellers and young tourists. Backpackers also tend to visit as many countries as possible during their trip, more than any other type of traveller. In the last major trip, a backpacker visited an average of 2.4 countries, compared to 1.8 for hikers and 1.7 for tourists *At an intra-regional level*, youth visit more different countries, thus: South-Eastern Asia (with 2.4 visited countries),

²⁸⁴ Richards, G., Wilson, J., *Today's Youth Travellers: Tomorrow's Global Nomads. New Horizons in Independent Youth and Student Travel*, International Student Travel Confederation, Amsterdam, 2003.

Northern Europe and South America (both with 2.3 visited countries) occupy the first places in youth tourism.

As the tourist's experience grows, people tend to travel more. Therefore, those who visit Northern Europe have previously made only five major trips compared to the eight made by those who visit Australia, China, Japan, South and Central Africa, and the over ten trips made by those who visit India and South America. This sustains the idea of a „tourist career”, Europeans usually travel first inside Europe, and then to Australasia which is considered their first inter-regional journey and then continue with less known destinations from Asia, Africa and Latin America. Young people build a “tourist career” by starting from “easy” destinations, with the most developed infrastructures for individual tourism, then go to more “adventurous” destinations. In 2007, among the destinations that attracted more experienced tourists were countries like Vietnam, Morocco, South Africa, India and Argentina, while less experienced travellers chose destinations in Europe. Although it is easier to travel to destinations to which there are flight connections or other types of transport, most young people want to avoid “the beaten track” and travel to non-tourist areas. Backpackers tend to travel especially to less visited regions, and travellers try to separate themselves from tourists through their activities at the destination.

The unsafe climate of the last years in certain regions favored some changes in the tourism industry in general and implicitly in youth travel, favoring the *development of new destinations*. For example, in 2008, overall, all the regions recorded positive results, with the exception of Europe, which saw a stagnation in the number of international arrivals. The best results belonged to Middle East (+11%), Africa (+5%) and the two Americas (+4%)²⁸⁵. The evolution of the “number of arrivals” indicator was negative in the last six months of 2008 both in Europe (-3%) and Asia (-3%). The two Americas (+1%), Africa (+4%) and Middle East (+5%) recorded positive results even in the second half of 2008, although the increase was much slower compared to the January-July period. The negative trend in international tourism, which manifested in the second half of 2008, grew in 2009 under the impact of the global economic crisis combined with the effects of the A(H1N1) epidemic that started in the spring of 2009. Based on the preliminary statistics collected from 140 countries of destination, compared to the same period of last year, it is estimated that world-wide international arrivals dropped by 7% in the January-July 2009 period²⁸⁶. In absolute terms, the global number of international arrivals reached 500 million in the first seven months of 2009, dropping from 540 million in the same period of 2008, placing this indicator at the level recorded in 2007 and 2006.

Solitary young travelers chose non-traditional destinations and are known as pioneers in this field, while youth groups tend to be more conservative when choosing a destination. They go to traditional regions, especially for their international travels, and are attracted to new destinations only through an organized event. Since estimating that these young travellers represents up to 25% of the total travelling population, the growing interest regarding new tourist regions partially reflects the spreading of the models determined by young tourists.

The tourism market is also confronting with growing competition on the global youth travel market in the sense that if established western European markets like Spain, France, Germany, Great Britain, etc., have always been preferred by young people, in the 1990-2000 period, new destinations appeared, such as Australia and Thailand, as leaders in the preferences of young travellers around the world. After 2000, new destinations, like Brazil and England, launched aggressive promotional campaigns directed at young people, which have impressive results.

²⁸⁵ UNWTO, *International Tourism Challenged by Deteriorating World Economy*, Tourism Directory 05/10/2009, <http://www.directorytourism.com>. (last accessed in 13.01.2010)

²⁸⁶ UNWTO, *UNWTO World Tourism Barometer*, Volume 7, No. 1, January 2009, Madrid.

A recent study of the Quebec University identified five countries as the main destinations in youth travel: Australia, France, New Zealand, Thailand and England²⁸⁷. All these countries identified young travelers as being an essential market segment, one that brings an important income. *Australia*, one of the leaders in youth travel, organized aggressive integrated marketing campaigns combined with other initiatives, like introducing a unique visa for the “work & travel” programs which led to attracting young people to Australasia. *New Zealand* and *England* also attract a large number of solitary young travelers with the help of promotional campaigns like: adventure tourism, cultural tourism, rest and relaxation tourism, offering accommodation services at a reasonable price and flexible work/study/travel programs. *France* successfully promoted cultural experiences and youth hostels, especially through-out young people in Europe. *Thailand* makes efforts to promote itself as a safe destination for solitary travelers, stimulating organized groups to discover the Thailand’s culture. Experts consider Germany, U.S.A and Canada as important destinations for youth travel, but none of these countries have launched marketing campaigns for the youth travel market.

The fastest growing segment on the youth travel market is represented by the young people who combine traveling with working. The majority of these young tourists take advantage of governmental programs and/or of flexible visas that allow them to work in the countries they visit, with the purpose of covering some of the expenses. United States of America are the favorite destination of most students that work and travel, followed by Australia, England and Canada.

Tourist destinations are influenced by the tourist’s country of origin, because it is clear that people usually travel first in their own country. Europe is visited by 50% of the Europeans, North America by almost 50% and the other regions by less than 20%.

As to the geographical distribution of the international youth travel, there is a concentration in the northern countries that are well developed. There are significant differences in the tourist flows, thus:

- *Canadians* visit Northern Europe and Northern America, representing also the largest number of tourist who visits Central America;
- the main destinations for young people from *South Africa* are almost exclusively North America and South Europe, with the exception of a small part who visits the Indian sub-continent and their region of residence;
- *English* people usually travel inside Northern and Southern Europe, but also to North America; they are among the youth that visits Central and South Africa, China and Japan;
- *Swedish* people visit in a high number destinations from Northern Europe, Southern Europe and North America, but they also visit the south-east part of Asia and Western Europe;
- the young people from *Hong Kong* more and more tend to visit Northern Europe, but also China and Japan; they also record a high number of visits to Australasia because of the geographical proximity of these two regions.

The youth travel market is still dominated by the industrialized countries in Europe, North America and the Southeast Asia, and countries like India, China or the ones in South America have a great potential to develop this form of tourism, although the development of these markets seems to be rather slow.

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