

Youth Travel Matters

Understanding the Global Phenomenon
of Youth Travel

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Youth Travel Matters – Understanding the Global Phenomenon of Youth Travel

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Foreword

This report has been developed within the framework of the Cooperation Agreement signed between the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the World Youth Student and Educational Travel Confederation (WYSE Travel Confederation), a UNWTO Affiliate member.

The rapid development of youth travel has stimulated a growth in research, which has helped to create a sharper picture of youth travellers, their motivations, requirements and behaviour. The aim of this report is to bring together the various studies carried out by WYSE Travel Confederation and UNWTO in the field of youth travel over the past five years in order to provide a comprehensive overview of the characteristics and trends in this segment.

The unique motivations of young travellers makes this niche market extremely important to the key objectives of the global tourism agenda; and the personal social and economic value of youth, student and educational travel is increasingly being recognised by educational institutions, employers, official tourism organisations and governments worldwide.

Young people travel with a purpose – to explore and to engage with cultures, and to mix their travel ambitions with study, work, volunteer placements and adventure. They tend to stay much longer and therefore spend more than the average tourist, interacting more closely with the communities that they visit and making a direct contribution to local businesses.

More than any other market segment, youth and student travellers can pave the way to responsible tourism, helping to achieve a more equitable distribution of tourism development on a world-scale and become more sustainable by taking responsibility for the impact of their travel ambitions on climate change.

Young travellers will be tomorrow's globally-oriented citizens, leaders in future travel trends, and pioneers in contributing to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

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This report was prepared by Greg Richards of Tourism Research and Marketing, Barcelona, and Reader at the Centre for Leisure, Tourism and Society, Bristol, on commission to the WYSE Travel Confederation and the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).

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Introduction

Youth travel has become an increasingly important part of the global tourism industry in recent decades, as more young people have begun to travel more frequently and over greater distances. Youth travellers are recognised today as valuable visitors who can, not only make an important economic contribution to the places they visit, but also develop personal skills, social ties and cultural links in their quest for engaging experiences.

The important and multiple impacts of youth travel have recently begun to be appreciated by governments across the world, and they are now taking a more active role in developing youth travel policies, products and marketing campaigns. Although the global youth travel industry is now more than 50 years old, it is only rather recently that the rapid growth of this market, combined with the increasing professionalisation of the youth travel community, has drawn more attention to its potential. Youth travel is becoming more important in the global travel industry as a whole, and is stimulating the development of new market niches in areas such as specialised youth accommodation, work experience, volunteer travel, 'au pairing', language learning and educational travel.

The present report includes a review of government youth tourism policy worldwide, a profile of the behaviour of young independent travellers, an analysis of the impacts of extended travel experiences on young people's attitudes and values, market profiles of different youth travel sectors, and a bibliography of youth travel studies.

Structure of the Report

Chapter 1 will deal with some of the key questions surrounding the development of youth and student travel in recent years, including the concept of youth travel and its importance in terms of both market size and value.

The remaining chapters provide a comprehensive overview of recent research on youth travel, bringing together reports from the WYSE Travel Confederation research programme to address the following questions:

- Who are the youth and student travellers? (Chapter 2)
- What policies do governments have? (Chapter 3)
- What impact does their travel have? (Chapter 4)
- How are different sectors of the youth and student travel market performing? (Chapters 4-7)
- What is the future of youth and student travel? (Chapter 8)
- What else has been written about youth and student travel? (Bibliography)

Executive Summary

The present report, *Youth Travel Matters – Understanding the Global Phenomenon of Youth Travel*, provides an up-to-date overview of the global youth travel industry. The extensive programme of original research presented in this unique publication was undertaken by the WYSE Travel Confederation and by UNWTO between 2002 and 2007.

This report provides a fresh picture of today's young traveller and shows that youth travel is:

...an important industry

- With an estimated 160 million international tourist arrivals a year, youth travel would account for over 20% of international tourist arrivals;
- the youth travel market is worth an estimated US\$ 136 billion a year, or around 18% of worldwide international tourism receipts;
- due to longer average trip duration, a typical youth traveller spends more than the average tourist during his/her trip. The average youth traveller spends US\$ 2,600 per trip, of which US\$ 1,550 is spent in the destination;
- as a proportion of the total income, young people spend more than any other group on international travel.

...a growing market

- Total average travel expenditure by young people increased by 39% between 2002 and 2007;
- with global volume growth of 3-5% a year and spend increasing by 8% a year, the youth market is growing faster than most other travel segments;
- the average number of trips taken over the past five years by young people increased from 6.2 in 2002 to 7.3 in 2007, indicating a growing frequency of travel;
- as people try to stay young with 'youth' travel styles extending into their early 30s, the market for youth travel products will continue to grow;
- 50% of youth accommodation suppliers increased their capacity in 2006.

...an opportunity to reinforce positive values

- Young people undertake long trips, primarily to increase their knowledge of the world and to encounter and learn about other cultures;
- 70% of all trips taken by young people are motivated by goals such as a desire to explore, work or study abroad;
- over 80% of young travellers report that their trip has changed their overall lifestyle in some way, and the majority said that they were travelling in a more responsible manner and thinking more about issues such as social justice and poverty;