New Horizons in Independent Youth and Student Travel

Today’s Youth Travellers:
Tomorrow’s Global Nomads

A Report for the International Student Travel Confederation (ISTC)
and the Association of Tourism and Leisure Education (ATLAS)
by Greg Richards and Julie Wilson
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International Student Travel Confederation
Serving student travellers for over 50 years, the ISTC has grown from a concept formulated by student leaders to increase international understanding into a global network of the world’s leading student travel organisations. Today's specialist student travel organisations in 106 countries serve the 21st century’s sophisticated student traveller with special flight ticket arrangements on more than 80 airlines, their own globally accepted student identity card and a full range of surface travel, study and work abroad, adventure and cultural experience programmes – providing educational experiences through travel to over 10 million students and youth travellers each year.

Association for Tourism and Leisure Education
The Association for Tourism and Leisure Education (ATLAS) was established in 1991 to develop transnational educational initiatives in tourism and leisure. ATLAS provides a forum to promote staff and student exchange, transnational research and to facilitate curriculum and professional development. ATLAS currently has members in more than 50 countries.

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Preface

This study began four years ago as a modest ISTC project to compile a review of existing studies on the characteristics of the modern student traveller and research on the student travel market. The ISTC sought help from the world’s leading travel research authorities and came up with the same answer each time; that there was almost no market research on this sector.

But it was an accepted fact that students and young people are the fastest growing travel niche, accounting for one in five international travellers. They are served by a multi billion-dollar specialist niche industry that has grown and become increasingly sophisticated in meeting their specialist demands and is arguably the most successful niche market in the travel industry.

It was time for a study on the global phenomena of Student and Youth travellers.

Greg Richards, then co-ordinator of ATLAS, had a similar interest. Over the next three years, ATLAS worked with the ISTC on ‘Today’s Youth Travellers: Tomorrow’s Global Nomads’, the first ever global study of student and youth travellers conducted using primary research.

ATLAS created the ‘Backpackers Research Group’, an international network of academics involved in studies of student and youth travel, which exploded the myth that there was little or no research on this market by assembling the first comprehensive bibliography of research work on the young independent traveller. This body of work covers the psychological, economic, market and personal development impact of the young traveller and is used as an important context to ‘Today’s Youth Travellers: Tomorrow’s Global Nomads’.

Savvy, informed by the Internet and motivated to equip themselves for life in a global society, young people stay longer, spend more than the average tourist and mix their travel experiences with adventure, study, work and relaxation. No longer the ‘lone drifter’, they travel to become a part of the ‘on the road’ global community of millions of young travellers, united and inspired by their ‘not a tourist’ self-identity.

Societal support for the value of student and youth travel is increasing. Educational institutions, potential employers and parents – many of whom were the last generation of young travellers – recognise travel as an important personal development experience and a way of creating greater international understanding in our world.

ISTC thanks Greg Richards and Julie Wilson for their vision, dedication and attention to detail in the conduct and analysis of this survey project. Their efforts make a significant contribution to the worthy cause of promoting Student and Youth travel.

David Jones

Director General

ISTC
Executive Summary

‘Today’s Youth Travellers: Tomorrow’s Global Nomads, New Horizons in Independent Youth and Student Travel’ is a detailed report on the main findings of a major transnational survey on independent youth and student travel, undertaken by the International Student Travel Confederation (ISTC) and the Association of Leisure and Tourism Education (ATLAS).

The aim of the survey was to gather consistent and detailed transnational information on the youth and student independent traveller market, combining information on the social and cultural aspects of young travellers (their backgrounds, motivations and experiences) with data on travel purchases, information gathering, destinations and previous travel experience. It focuses on different dimensions of the last major trip made by youth and student respondents, who were contacted via ISTC’s global network of student travel organisations. Responses have been drawn from 2,300 young people and students from Canada, the Czech Republic, Hong Kong, Mexico, Slovenia, South Africa, Sweden and the UK.

The survey is unique as the first specific study to cover all aspects of the youth and student travel experience or, the ‘whole journey’ from trip planning and booking through to the trip itself. The methodology is also unique in that it is based on primary research at a global level with young people themselves, rather than by deriving conclusions from national tourism statistics. The study also draws together existing academic and market-based studies on youth and student travel into a comprehensive bibliography.

The decision to travel

The first step in any journey is the decision to get up and go. This section examines who is travelling and why.

Who are the travellers?

- The majority are students, aged below 26 years and with a high education level.
- Although they tend to have lower incomes (51% earn less than US $5,000 per annum), they are clearly prepared to save and/or work during their travels to increase their spending power.
- Over half identify themselves as ‘travellers’, around a third as ‘backpackers’ and roughly one fifth as ‘tourists’. This self-identification or ‘travel style’ category was used to shed light on various other findings of the survey and is clearly important, as many differences were evident according to travel style.

Why are young people and students travelling?

- The main motivation tends to be to explore other cultures (83%), followed by excitement (74%) and increasing knowledge (69%) – demonstrating the desire to encounter ‘different’ people and places.
- Those respondents identifying themselves as ‘backpackers’ tend to be more ‘experience seekers’ looking for contact with their fellow travellers. Those identifying themselves as ‘travellers’ have more social motives and are more likely to be visiting friends and relatives during their trip. It is those identifying themselves as ‘tourists’ who are more likely to be looking for relaxation on their trip.
- Younger travellers (under 26) place more emphasis on social contact and excitement, while slightly older travellers are seeking more individualised experiences and are less often in search of extreme experiences.
- Long trips are clearly seen as a ‘once in a lifetime opportunity’ for many young people and students, and they are prepared to dedicate a lot of time, energy and money to ensure that their trip is just that.
How much travel experience do they already have?
- Young people and students’ previous travel experience is considerable. The average number of previous trips outside of their home regions was six, with those over 26 averaging eight previous trips.
- The trips tend to include at least two different countries, and for more experienced travellers the number of countries increases. Those travelling for longer periods visit more countries.

Planning the trip
Having decided to travel, how do young people and students go about finding information and booking their trip?

What information sources do they use for planning their trip?
- The main information sources used in planning the trip are the Internet (71%) and friends/family (70%).
- Guidebooks are used by 37% overall but are used far more by slightly older (over 26) travellers. The latter are more experienced travellers and call themselves ‘backpackers’.
- Less experienced travellers rely more heavily on travel agents for information.
- The very wide range of information sources drawn upon suggests that pre-trip planning is highly detailed, even for more experienced travellers.

How do they book their travel, accommodation and activities?
- The majority of young people and students use travel agents to book their travel (65%), and the overall split between mainstream travel agents and specialist travel agents is more or less equal. However, those calling themselves ‘backpackers’ were significantly more likely to use specialist travel agencies (42%) and those calling themselves ‘tourists’ more likely to use mainstream travel agents (51%). As they get older, they tend to prefer to make their own travel arrangements rather than using travel agencies.
- Few travellers book any accommodation in advance of their departure.
- The average travel booking lead-time is six weeks, rising to two months for trips over four months in duration. This lead-time is significantly longer for long haul and non-Western destinations.
- 56% of young people obtain some kind of student discount on their trip, 30% obtain an under 26 discount, 25% obtain discounts on rail and bus and 17% obtain accommodation discounts.

‘On the road’
The bulk of the report deals with the trip itself – where do youth and student travellers go, how do they travel, where do they stay, how much do they spend and what do they do when they arrive?

Where do they go?
- Young people have visited many different world regions in the past, with the main destination regions visited during their last big trip taken being Europe (56%) and North America (16%).
- The destinations that are most popular with those calling themselves ‘backpackers’ are Southeast Asia, Australasia and South America. North America is the most popular destination with those calling themselves ‘travellers’.
- Females are more likely to be travelling in Western Europe, the Middle East and Central/Southern Africa while males are more likely to be travelling in Eastern Europe, North, Central and South America, China/Japan and Southeast Asia.
- A ‘travel career’ appears to be forming among the young people and students surveyed, as the least experienced travellers are visiting the westernised areas of Europe and North America but more experienced travellers tend to visit more ‘challenging’ destinations including South America, China/Japan and the Indian sub-continent.
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How do they reach their destinations?
- By far the main mode of transport to the destination is air travel (82%), with rail travel next at 30%.
- Those calling themselves ‘tourists’ are more likely to use tour buses to reach their destination, while ‘backpackers’ tend to use the rail and coach networks more than ‘travellers’ and ‘tourists’.
- ‘Backpackers’ are more likely to use air transport, trains, coach or hitchhike within their destination while ‘travellers’ and ‘tourists’ are more likely to rent a car, and ‘tourists’ again tend to use tour buses more.
- Males are significantly more likely to hitchhike to and within the destination than females.

Where do they stay?
- The most popular forms of accommodation were visiting friends and relatives (41%) and backpacker hostels (32%).
- Backpacker hostels were particularly used in Australasia and Southeast Asia.

How long do they stay?
- The average length of the last main trip was considerable – 63 days on average. Those calling themselves ‘backpackers’ travelled for longer (an average of 74 days).
- The longest duration trips are taken in Australasia (128 days), North America (90 days) and the Indian sub-continent (84 days) and the shortest duration trips were taken in Europe (34 days).

How much do they spend?
- Within the destinations the average spend is relatively low at under US$ 20 per day. However the total average spend in the destination is high at US$1,200 per trip (not including travel costs).
- The average total spend is highest in Australasia, South America and Southeast Asia.
- Those calling themselves ‘backpackers’ spend the most overall on their trips (an average total spend of US $2,200) which is explained by their tendency to travel for longer periods.
- There is a great deal of importance placed on saving up and working during the trip for that ‘once in a lifetime’ experience, as their budgets are often very close to their annual income.

What do they do on their travels?
- The most popular activities are visiting historic sites and monuments (77%), walking and trekking (76%) and more leisurely pursuits such as sitting in cafes/restaurants (72%) and shopping (72%).
- Fewer are undertaking academic study or learning a language during their trip (28%), but this still adds up to a significant number of participants.
- Activities are remarkably similar for backpackers, travellers and tourists, indicating that although the travel styles may be perceived as very different, the activities undertaken in the destination are often very similar.
- ‘Backpackers’ do more of everything, which fits with their experience-seeking motivations. More experienced respondents also did more activities.
- There appears to be intense periods of activity during the trip, which is interspersed with periods of ‘hanging out’.
- Walking/trekking and cultural events are most popular among female respondents, while male respondents’ activities tend to be more focused on sports and adrenaline experiences.

What information sources do they use during their trip?
- The main information sources used during the trip were guidebooks (46%), with Lonely Planet the most frequently used, particularly among those calling themselves ‘backpackers’, underlining its status as the ‘Backpackers’ Bible’.
- Email and Internet are used frequently for keeping in touch (by 68%).
Reflecting on the trip
The return home is a time to reflect on the experience of the journey and what benefits it has produced.

What do they gain from their travels?
• The main benefits gained from travel are a thirst for more travel (which supports the ‘travel career’ idea above) and cultural benefits such as an increased understanding and appreciation of other cultures.

And in conclusion...
The report concludes that youth and student travellers are experience seekers who travel for long periods in search of culture, adventure and relaxation. They already have a great deal of travel experience and often make repeat visits. Furthermore, their travels are sophisticated, carefully planned and have a lasting impact on their personal and professional lives. This is evident as they return from their trips having gained many personal benefits. But most of all, they gain a thirst for more travel, which increases the long-term potential of this market. Importantly, the total spend on their major trips is higher than for most other markets, even if the daily average spend tends to be lower. The potential is increased even further with the evidence that many young people and students are building a ‘travel career’. Driven by this thirst for more travel, they expand their horizons by choosing increasingly challenging destinations, as they become more experienced travellers. This ‘development trajectory’ indicates the need to develop new products to meet the demands of this market.

However, the youth and student market should not be viewed as a homogenous group in terms of their style of travel and their motivations. The report differentiates many characteristics of youth and student travellers according to how they define their style of travel, as well as other factors. This increases the need to develop products oriented specifically to those who prefer a particular travel style.

Perhaps the most important conclusion is that this is a growth market, in that the majority of youth travellers are presently or have previously been students. The continuing rapid growth in student numbers around the globe is a very optimistic prospect. This is because the international student population consists of avid travellers who are prepared to save up to ensure their trip meets the ‘once in a lifetime’ requirement, even if the trip does not end up being a one-off (which – judging by the high number of repeat visits – it is clearly not).

Summary version also available...
This full report gives a detailed analysis of the research findings. For those interested in taking a briefer look the world of youth and student travel, a summary version is also available for download at both the ISTC and ATLAS websites (www.aboutistc.org or www.atlas-euro.org), and is available in hard copy from ISTC.
**Introduction**

Youth and student travel is increasingly being recognised as an important segment of the global travel market. Young independent travellers tend to travel more frequently and for longer periods than many older tourists or those taking package holidays. This has provided the stimulus for the development of specialist professional youth and student travel companies across the globe. Youth and student travel is also a major potential growth market, as the international student population expands, incomes rise among young people and new markets are opened up in newly industrialising economies as well as in Central and Eastern Europe. It has been estimated that around one fifth of all tourism journeys in the world are made by young people aged 15-25, and this is forecast to rise to 25% by 2005. Youth travel also provides an important basis for the travel decisions of future generations.

In fact, student travel has been around since the Middle Ages and indeed, youth and student travel has been an important cornerstone of the international travel market for over 50 years. However, it is only the explosive growth of the international student population in the last decade or so that has brought this market into the research spotlight and presented the youth and student travel industry with an even clearer growth prospect.

The importance of youth tourism as a field of international interest for policymakers and researchers was first emphasised internationally in November 1991 with the first World Tourism Organisation (WTO) conference on youth tourism in Delhi. ISTC and FIYTO (the Federation of International Youth Travel Organisations) co-host an annual globally attended trade fair and conference devoted exclusively to the youth and student travel industry, while this year the Student and Youth Travel Association of North America (SYTA) will host its seventh annual conference on youth travel in Quebec.

ISTC continues to support the wider benefits of travel for young people and in 1993, an agreement was made between UNESCO and ISTC, underlining their shared common goals, namely to promote international understanding through travel and cultural enrichment, and to ensure these activities are accessible to all young people, irrespective of their educational, social, economic or geographic background and status. ISTC is also the umbrella confederation for the International Association for Educational Work Exchange Programmes (IAEWEP) – whose members specialise in arranging work abroad programmes for students and young people, with more than 50,000 students and young people participating annually.

The importance of youth and student travel is also being recognised in different world regions. In the European Union, for example, the contribution that young people can make to the relationships that increasingly bind the EU member states together has been emphasised (ATI, 1995). With the EU currently being enlarged to 25 member states, this will surely become even more important in building bridges between new and existing member states. At present, the European Commission’s YOUTH Programme is active in stimulating youth and student travel by offering young people opportunities to participate in social and cultural programmes abroad, while academic and employment exchange programmes such as SOCRATES (including ERASMUS and LINGUA) and LEONARDO facilitate the mobility of more than 100,000 young people and students annually within the European Union.

Despite this, youth and student travel has not been given its due consideration, nor has it been studied in great detail, due at least in part to problems with measurement, although this ‘neglect’ probably also stems from the misconception that youth and student travel markets are lower value.

This document reports on the findings of a major transnational survey on independent youth and student travel, launched in 2002 by the International Student Travel Confederation (ISTC) and the Association of Leisure and Tourism Education (ATLAS) – a unique research partnership dedicated to understanding the youth and student travel phenomenon.
The survey was designed specifically to analyse the global independent youth and student travel market and gather consistent and detailed transnational information on youth and student independent travellers. It is unique in that it is the first study to cover all aspects of the youth and student travel experience, or the ‘whole journey’; from trip planning and booking through to the trip itself and the reflections following the trip.

The survey combines information on the social and cultural aspects of young travellers (their backgrounds, motivations and experiences) with data on the way in which the travellers purchased their travel and gathered information, as well as their destinations and previous travel experience. It focuses on different dimensions of the last major trip made by 2300 youth and student respondents, who were contacted via ISTC’s global network of student travel organisations.

The methodology is also unique in that it is based on international primary research with young people themselves, rather than analyses of secondary data (as most previous studies have been). It is also the first document to draw together existing academic and market-based studies on youth and student travel into a bibliography.

**What’s inside this report?**

This report provides detailed information on the motivations, activities, destinations, information use, travel purchase and expenditure of youth and student travellers going abroad. It is structured around a series of key questions that were developed for the survey which relate to those young people and students who are travelling, including their similarities and differences, destinations and motivations to travel, information-gathering, booking, spending and activity behaviour, and the kind of benefits they gain from their travel experiences. These questions were designed to reflect the ‘journey’ as a whole from planning through to return and as such, the report is also structured like a journey. The decision to travel is the focus of the first section, moving on to planning the trip, the trip itself (or being ‘on the road’) and finally reflections on the trip, which asks what kinds of benefits were gained from travelling.

This is the full version of the report, which is entitled ‘Today’s Youth Travellers: Tomorrow’s Global Nomads’ The shorter ‘summary report’, which has been oriented towards the travel industry, is available from the ISTC and ATLAS websites, or in hard copy from ISTC (details can be found at the end of this report). The reports have been designed as companions so that those who wish to get a succinct flavour of the findings can consult the summary version of the report while those who wish to gain a deeper perspective can consult the full version. The two reports together therefore provide an authoritative mix of perspectives on youth and student travellers which should be of interest to the youth and student travel industry as well as university researchers.

Existing studies on youth and student travel are outlined in the next section, and these are also listed in an extensive bibliography of youth and student travel sources, which can be found at the end of this document. Following the review of studies, the aims and methodology of the survey are discussed in more detail before moving on to discuss in detail the main findings of the survey.
The report as a ‘journey’

The decision to travel
- Who are the youth and student travellers?
- Why are young people and students travelling?
- How much travel experience do they already have?

Planning the trip
- What information sources do they use for planning their trip?
- How do they book their travel, accommodation and activities?

‘On the road’
- Where do they go?
- How do they reach their destinations and how do they travel around when they arrive?
- Where do they stay?
- How long do they stay?
- How much do they spend?
- What do they do on their travels?
- What information sources do they use during their trip?

Reflecting on the trip
- What do they gain from their travels?

Previous youth and student travel studies

The increased commercial, political and academic interest in young travellers has stimulated a wide range of studies in recent years. However, while defining student tourism has proved to be a relatively easy task, there is a general lack of agreement concerning the definition of what constitutes a ‘young’ tourist (Seekings, 1995) and still no agreed definition on the parameters of youth tourism, although those applied for statistical purposes generally include all travel by young people aged between 15 and 29 years (e.g. WTO, 1991). In a study by WTO (2002), ‘less than 25 years’ was the cut-off point but in general, many smaller scale studies specific to youth tourists continue adopt the upper age limit of 26, to increase coherence of the group (Horak & Weber, 2000).

However the market might be defined, its global significance is being increasingly recognised. In a study of outbound travel of German, British and French young people, WTO (2002) stated that outbound youth tourism (age 15 to 25) accounted for 17% of all international trips in these markets in 2000, concluding that more and more young people are travelling abroad on holiday, to visit friends and to study, as well as for business.
In addition to the size of the market, there are several other reasons why youth and student travel is of interest, including the notions that youth travellers:

- Can build bridges between people and cultures.
- Generally have a greater propensity to travel than other segments (ATI, 1995), as their high degree of mobility is a major factor on which youth tourism is based (Horak & Weber, 2000).
- Can often develop prototypes for the new tourist by setting trends
- Can create new attractions and help to establish whole new destinations (Horak & Weber, 2000).
- Can spend longer periods travelling than other tourists, spreading their economic contribution further in terms of both time and space.
- Tend to concentrate their spending within local communities, resulting in lower leakage factors.
- (In the case of students, despite their relatively low incomes) can have proportionally high levels of discretionary income, a great propensity to save money for travel and free time to spend on leisure pursuits, including travel.

Increasing awareness of these and other benefits of youth and student travel has changed attitudes towards the youth and student travel market. Rather than being viewed as an unwanted element to be excluded from many destinations, youth and student tourists have instead become a very desirable market segment.

In 1995, the European Travel Commission published a study specifically dedicated to Europe’s youth travel market covering 26 countries (ATI, 1995), albeit still using secondary data sources. This study was commissioned in response to a perceived neglect of the market both by the mainstream travel industry and by government authorities responsible for the development of tourism. The study concluded that in the mid-1990s, the 15-26 age group took around 80 million trips and made 100 million border crossings per year, representing one fifth of all international trips in 24 of the European countries surveyed and around a quarter of all holiday travel (Horak & Weber, 2000), a figure that has been widely repeated since, even though the research has not been updated. Following the ATI study, reports began to try dispelling ‘popular myths’ about youth and student travel (such as perceived low spend and shorter stay) in an attempt to turn around its negative image. Some smaller scale studies on youth tourism have started considering the potential for marketing overseas tour packages to the youth segment (e.g. Kale et al, 1997) while the World Tourism Organisation commissioned a major study from IPK International on outbound youth tourism by UK, French and German young people, underlining the timeliness and relevance of this market (WTO, 2002). They argue that for many young people, international travel has become an integrated part of their lifestyle.

In its forecasts for growth in the 1995 report, ATI observed a widely held view among those concerned with the development of youth travel that it was a static or even declining market in the mid-1990s, for two main reasons. Firstly, there had been a fall in European originating youth travel in the past few years and secondly, there was a concern at that time that changes in demographic structures would lead to a substantial reduction in the number of young people (see also Jefferson, 1991). However, the 1995 ATI report also presented four major growth factors for the market at that time in an ‘optimistic scenario’ (p. 40) and indeed these factors have largely held true eight years on:

- Changing perceptions of social class boundaries (which has increased access to various tourism and travel opportunities that were previously only available to higher class travellers)
- An increasing percentage of young people in full time education (including the widening of access to tertiary level education establishments)
- Levels of youth unemployment were predicted to drop
- A growing importance of parental incomes.
Various additional growth factors have emerged more recently that perhaps were not foreseen at that time, including:

- The rise of budget/low cost airlines
- The growth of long distance coach travel specifically targeted at young travellers
- Shorter employment contracts for those working, leading to significant gaps in employment
- The growth of dedicated student and independent travel suppliers
- The global rise of Internet culture, opening up new destinations via this medium
- The growth of independent travel guidebooks such as *Rough Guide* and *Lonely Planet*, covering many destinations ‘off the beaten track’, including those frequented by younger independent travellers
- The growing tendency for students and young people to work or study during their travel as a means of funding their trip.
- The propensity of young people and students to travel to destinations that other tourists tend to avoid (often due to accessibility, infrastructural and political issues), which means that the market is less prone to external shocks (such as war, terrorist incidents and political unrest).

All of these factors have almost certainly contributed to the growth in youth tourism since the mid 1990s, giving an added impulse to youth and student travel worldwide, and stimulating more research interest in this field.

The focus of much academic research has tended to be on youth and leisure, rather than specifically tourism (e.g. Roberts, 1983). Early studies by Cohen (1972) and Vogt (1974) identified the distinctive travel activities of ‘drifting’ or ‘wandering’ youth while later attempts to study the youth travel market have been isolated and mostly based in Europe (Seekings, 1998; Horak & Weber, 2000; Pastor, 1991; Wheatcroft & Seekings, 1995). Other studies have focused solely on student travel (e.g. Bywater, 1993; Chadee & Cutler, 1996). Most of this research has been based on secondary sources rather than original survey data, or has been derived from national and international tourism analyses on the basis of the younger travellers in the samples.

More recently a lot of attention has been focused on the growth of ‘backpacker’ tourism (including the ‘gap year’ and big Overseas Experience, or ‘OE’ phenomena), and this has spawned a number of surveys at national level, particularly in Australia and New Zealand (e.g. Bureau of Tourism Research, 2000). However, most of the information on this market comes from surveys conducted by individual companies (which are often not available to third parties) and sub-analyses of national tourism surveys (Richards & Wilson, 2004). Some data are available for youth hostel tourism, but this is only a sub-set of youth and student tourism and it is difficult to draw conclusions about the youth and student market as a whole. In 2000, ATLAS launched its Backpacker Research Group (BRG), which has developed a research programme and an extensive bibliography of backpacker research and has a growing international members list (more details at www.atlas-euro.org).

Several elements of youth tourism experience will require close observation in the coming years. The explosion of the international backpacker market and the growth of youth hostelling are well documented, but other markets are also expanding. Clarke (1992) studied the growth of youth tourism in beach-oriented destinations, a growth which was acknowledged in claims that one in three holidays taken by young people are located in beach-oriented resorts (Wheatcroft & Seekings / ATI, 1995). But the youth and student market is clearly also diversifying away from traditional beach-oriented experiences. For example, a study by Sellars (1998) observed a growth in young people taking holidays to pursue their interest in alternative and dance music sub-cultures, emphasising the importance of clubbing and music experiences in the (mostly short-haul) UK youth tourism market. In any case, several sub-niches of the youth and student travel market are becoming more important.
Other research has started to consider some of the sociological impacts of increased youth mobility. Schönhammer (1991) undertook two studies to determine how young backpack tourists in Europe experience the freedom of unorganised youth tourism, with emphasis on the unorganised aspect (i.e. youth tourism that leaves behind all forms of adult control). Ford and Eiser (1996) looked at the HIV virus and the socio-sexual interaction of young tourists, while Carr (1999) researched the behaviour of young tourists in coastal resorts, mostly in terms of differences between males and females. In later studies (2001; 2002) Carr looked at youth tourists’ perceptions of safety and danger in urban areas and also the differences in behaviour between domestic and international young tourists in the UK. Reisinger and Mavondo (2003) looked at differences between male and female student travellers in an American context, finding considerable differences between genders in the areas of cultural values, personality, travel motivations, preferences for activities and lifestyle characteristics.

The predominance of studies focusing mostly on youth and student travellers from Europe and other ‘westernised’ regions is also beginning to change, for example, with research on youth tourism and recreation in China (Wei-Shu, 1995) and travel behaviour and motivations of students of Asian origin (Chadee & Cutler, 1996). Focusing on the role of travel in contemporary youth culture(s), Desforges (1998) looked at global representations and local identities in youth travel, signalling a developing interest in youth and student mobility as a global post-modern phenomenon.

Even more recently, connections have begun to be made between youth and student travel and the potential for creating a culture of peace and non-violence among young people. This includes a global transnational research project by ISTC / ATLAS on the effects of cultural tourism experiences on the attitudes and values of young travellers towards other cultures, and also an initiative by the International Youth Hostel Federation working with UNESCO and the International Institute of Peace through Tourism, entitled ‘Youth Hostelling for Peace and International Understanding’.

In spite of the growing body of youth and student travel literature, it remains fragmented and it is difficult to gain an overview of the global market. The current report attempts to address some of the weaknesses in previous research by providing a comprehensive picture of youth travel derived from original research conducted globally with the youth and student travellers themselves.

1 Details of the current ISTC/ATLAS global transnational research on the effect of cultural tourism experiences on the attitudes and values of young travellers towards other cultures can be found later in this report.
Why the study was conducted

This study was carried out in order to characterise and understand international youth and student travel more clearly, as well as testing some of the widely held notions about this market.

The main aim, however, was to investigate different dimensions and characteristics of international youth and student travel, from the point of view of those participating in it: young people and students themselves.

With the aim of gathering data on the backgrounds, motivations, benefits and experiences of young international travellers, their destinations and previous travel experience, as well as their methods of purchasing travel and gathering information, a set of key questions – resembling the journey – were devised according to the aim of the study, which were:

The decision to travel
- Who are the youth and student travellers?
- Why are young people and students travelling?
- How much travel experience do they already have?

Planning the trip
- What information sources do they use for planning their trip (including intensity)?
- How do they book their travel, accommodation and activities? (including lead time)

‘On the road’
- Where do they go?
- How do they reach their destinations and how do they travel around when they arrive?
- Where do they stay?
- How long do they stay?
- How much do they spend?
- What do they do on their travels?
- What information sources do they use during their trip?

Reflecting on the trip
- What do they gain from their travels?

Previous studies have tended to be limited geographically or have only dealt with basic socio-demographic data. This is because most studies have been based on re-analyses of national tourism surveys. The ISTC/ATLAS study aimed to overcome these limitations by asking detailed questions of young people and students worldwide about their travels.
Box 1 - Previous studies of youth and student travel: A summary

- Research on youth and student travel has shifted away from sociological and anthropological studies of ‘wandering’ and ‘drifting’ youth in the 1970s, towards youth and student travel as a mass global phenomenon which is an increasingly attractive market.

- Market-based studies specifically dedicated to youth and student travel have begun to emerge, which have underlined not only the economic importance of the market but also the potential benefits of targeting youth and student travellers, including their tendency to travel more widely and stay longer within a given country. This results in a higher overall spend and a spread of the spending across more local destinations, in addition to lower vulnerability to the external shocks affecting other tourist markets.

- There has also been increased academic interest in some specific aspects of the youth and student travel market. This has been accompanied by an increasing segmentation of the overall youth travel market into areas such as backpacking and other sub-niche youth tourism based on sub- and countercultures, including adventure tourism and tourism based on music scenes, although there is still a general lack of transnationality and cross-cultural comparison in most of the available research.

- Potential has been recognised for building a culture of global peace and understanding through the vehicle of youth tourism, which has given added value to the international youth and student travel market.

How the study was conducted

The data used in the study were collected during the Spring of 2002, using mailing lists provided by travel company members of ISTC in different countries. Through their network of travel companies worldwide, ISTC was able to provide access to young travellers, particularly students. Potential respondents were approached by email and asked to participate in the survey, using a special survey system designed for ISTC. This system allows rapid display of results for individual surveys, but lacks a facility for the analysis of the whole data set or the identification of sub-groups within the data. The data were therefore translated into the SPSS statistical package to allow for more detailed analysis. ISTC and ATLAS designed the questionnaire collaboratively, and the ATLAS Backpacker Research Group advised on the selection and design of questions. The questionnaire included some standard questions developed for other surveys, such as the ATLAS Cultural Tourism Survey. This also allowed comparison of the results and limited the need to pilot the questionnaire.

A number of points should be noted in terms of the representativeness of the survey. The survey generated over 2,300 responses from eight countries: Canada, Czech Republic, Hong Kong, Mexico, Slovenia, South Africa, Sweden and the UK. Forty-two different nationalities were represented in the sample, emphasising the mobility of the international student population (although the majority of respondents were nationals of these eight countries). These countries were selected to provide a range of different types of generating markets in Africa, the Americas, Asia and Europe in an attempt to redress the European bias of previous studies.
One remarkable aspect of the survey was that there were more female respondents (67%) than male respondents (33%). This is contrary to the response usually gathered from email contact surveys, which tend to have a majority of males. It is also different from the image of backpackers, for example, who are usually assumed to be predominantly male. However, observations in the field and longitudinal surveys of travellers have indicated an increasing proportion of female travellers, including the recent ISTC/ATLAS research on the impact of cultural tourism experiences on young travellers, which had 58% female respondents in the sample. Male respondents tended to be slightly older on average than female respondents.

The remainder of this report presents a review of the major research findings organised around the key questions about the student travel market listed above. As well as looking at gender differences, special attention has also been paid to significant differences between those in the sample who were under and over 26 years old (see Figure 1). Where such age differences are discussed, it should be remembered that the split between these groups was 83% under 26 and 17% over 26. In terms of why it was important to look for such significant differences between these age two groups, it is still useful to separate those younger than 26, given that this is the cut-off age for many existing studies (e.g. Horak & Weber, 2000). More importantly though, it is possible to illustrate the characteristics of younger travellers and then to observe the significant changes that take place when this group pass the age of 26.

1. The decision to travel

Who are the youth and student travellers?

Occupation

Not surprisingly, the majority of respondents were students (70%) (Figure 2). The predominance of students is also reflected in the age profile of the respondents. Over 60% were aged between 20 and 25, with only 5% of the sample aged over 30. Of the students in the sample, 89% were under 26, which is also unsurprising. However, 61% of professionals were also under 26. 70% of unemployed respondents were under 26 years.
Education

The respondents had a relatively high level of education, with 34% having already gained a higher education degree and a further 25% still studying for one.

Figure 3: Respondents by highest education level

Income

Half of the total respondents had an income of US $5,000 or less, conforming to the stereotype of lower youth and student traveller incomes. The relatively large travel budgets (see below), however, indicate that many young people and students are able to save up for a major trip, or can supplement their income by working abroad.

Most of those earning less than US $5,000 are under 26, underlining the fact that earning power increases with age.

Backpacker, traveller or tourist?

One of the important elements of the survey was a self-definition question, which asks respondents to classify themselves as ‘backpackers’, ‘travellers’ or ‘tourists’ during their most recent long trip. The main reason for including this question was that youth travellers are often labelled as backpackers, but it is much more appropriate to ask them how they themselves would describe their way of travelling. This is a particularly interesting point given the more recent emergence of the ‘backpacker’ industry in parts of the world.

Over half the sample identified with the label ‘traveller’, compared with almost a third who called themselves ‘backpackers’. Less than 20% considered themselves ‘tourists’. Self-designation also tended to change with travel experience, with those respondents who had taken numerous trips more often calling themselves backpackers or travellers (see also Figure 5 below). The proportion of backpackers also varied significantly according to origin country. Almost half the respondents based in Slovenia called themselves backpackers, compared with a third of those in Canada and Mexico and just over a quarter of respondents in Hong Kong and the Czech Republic. South African-based respondents were particularly likely to see themselves as travellers (65%), whereas Hong Kong-based respondents were much more likely to call themselves tourists.
Analysis of travel styles by destination (see the section ‘on the road’ below) indicates that people are most likely to associate with the ‘backpacker’ label where the development of the backpacker industry is strongest, for example, within enclaves of dedicated backpacker infrastructures in Southeast Asia, the Indian sub-continent and Australasia.

In general, older respondents were more likely to call themselves ‘travellers’, while the ‘tourist’ label was most popular among respondents under the age of 26, who were significantly more likely to call themselves ‘tourists’ or ‘backpackers’. This may suggest attempts by older and more experienced travellers to distance themselves from these labels.

**Why are young people and students travelling?**

The basic motivations for travel among the respondents are a mixture of exploration (ranked first overall, 83%), excitement (ranked second, 74%) and increasing knowledge (ranked third, 69%), although relaxation-based motivations also feature (Figure 4). Some respondents were highly oriented towards experiencing as much as possible during their trip. This seems to be particularly true for ‘backpackers’, who tended to be motivated by experience-seeking factors, whereas ‘tourists’ were more likely to be in search of relaxation. The fact that a relatively high proportion of ‘travellers’ were staying with friends and relatives perhaps explains the fact that they tended to emphasise visiting friends and relatives and developing close friendships more than other groups.

A relatively small proportion of respondents were travelling for more altruistic motives, such as contributing something to the places they visit. This indicates that most people are looking for knowledge of other cultures without getting ‘actively’ involved in the local communities. People rarely had one overriding motive – most trips comprised two or more important motivations, such as relaxation combined with culture. This is perhaps not surprising given the relatively long trips taken. Different parts of the trip may well be dominated by different motivations and activities.

Perhaps surprisingly, there was relatively little difference in motivation between travellers in terms of length of stay. Motivations also varied little with increasing travel experience, perhaps reflecting a relatively stable set of basic travel motives. It is likely that motivations will differ more widely between different trips taken by the same individual, but this could not be measured in the current survey. There were differences in motivations for first time and repeat visits, with those on first time visits being more motivated by the chance to relax mentally and use their physical skills/abilities. Repeat visitors were more likely to state ‘visiting friends and relatives’ as a motivation, which suggests that friendships were made on previous visits or that repeat visits tend to be made to places with family/friendship connections.

A factor analysis of the motivations expressed by the travellers in the survey identified four main motivating factors. These can broadly be characterised as experience seeking, relaxation seeking, sociability and contributing to the destination. There was a clear difference in terms of factors that were important for each of the travel ‘styles’, with backpackers scoring higher on the experience seeking factor and tourists emphasising the relaxation factor. Travellers, on the other hand, tended to combine experience and relaxation seeking with sociability.

There were also clear links between some motivations relating to interaction of respondents with the places visited. Those who stated that contributing to local culture was a very important motivation, and also that exploring other cultures was important, ranked ‘interacting with local people’ as a very important motivation for them.
Under 26ers were significantly more likely to agree that associating with other travellers and having a good time with friends were important motivations for their trip. This indicates that younger travellers place more emphasis on social interaction with other travellers, as well as communal rather than individually based experiences. It may be the case that younger, less experienced travellers feel more comfortable in the company of fellow travellers than they do with more solitary pursuits (see section ‘what do they do on their travels’ below). Younger travellers were also more motivated by excitement and the opportunity to challenge their abilities than were over 26ers, suggesting a search for more thrilling, extreme and relatively ‘difficult’ experience by younger travellers. It may follow that over 26ers have already undertaken activities that meet these excitement/challenge-based motivations when they were younger and no longer need to seek out more extreme experiences.

‘Increasing knowledge’ as a motivation was high among those visiting more westernised (and also many English-speaking) destinations; Canada, UK, USA, Germany, or those with a more ‘globally’ known cultural heritage (e.g. Italy and Mexico). However, it was lowest in Southern Europe (Greece, Spain, Turkey and Portugal) and also Thailand. Visiting friends and relatives was a more important motivation for those visiting USA, Canada, France and Australia, and again was less important for those visiting Southern Europe or less developed destinations (e.g. Mexico, Thailand).
Avoiding hustle and bustle and finding a calm atmosphere were particularly important for those visiting Thailand, Portugal, Italy and Mexico, while Thailand and Canada were more visited by those wanting to use their imagination. The more ‘physical ability’-motivated respondents were more likely to have visited Canada, Portugal, Thailand and Mexico, while those motivations connected to experiencing and exploring other cultures, including wanting to contribute something, were important for those visiting Mexico and Canada.

Perhaps the most interesting relationship between motivation and destination, however, was that those visiting Thailand scored ‘associating with other travellers’ considerably higher than for those visiting any other destination. This may be due to the more obvious presence of well-known traveller ‘enclaves’ and a more established infrastructure for ‘independent’ travel in destinations such as Thailand and Malaysia. These enclaves have led to a greater concentration of travellers in close proximity and hence there are more like-minded travellers to associate with and with whom to exchange information and stories. There was a strong relationship between certain ‘communal’ aspects of the youth and student traveller experience. Those who stated that ‘building close friendships’ was a very important motivation for their trip and that associating with other travellers was also very important, were much more likely to use fellow travellers as an information source, keeping a high level of social/communal activity. This supports the idea that these more fashionable ‘enclaves’ are no longer just functional intersections or resting places for independent travellers, but instead they have taken on the function of an attraction themselves – not just for the travellers staying within them having common experiences with other travellers, but also for other tourists watching the travellers (for example, the Banglamphu area of Bangkok) (Richards & Wilson, 2004).

**How much travel experience do they already have?**

On average, the respondents had made six trips outside their region of residence over their entire travel career (see Figure 5). Given the low average age of the respondents and the fact that these trips often involve inter-continental travel, the respondents demonstrate a very high level of travel activity. Not surprisingly, however, the number of trips increases with age, with 5.9 trips for those under 26 and 8.0 for those over 26, underlining the relatively higher level of travel experience of older travellers, supporting the ‘thirst for more travel’ ethic that comes from travelling when younger (see the section on ‘benefits gained from travel’ below).

Respondents from Sweden (7.4 previous trips) and UK (6.5 previous trips) were on average the most experienced of the respondents in the sample, while those from South Africa (4.0 previous trips) and Hong Kong (4.4 previous trips) were the least experienced.

The trips tend to include at least two different countries, and for more experienced travellers, the number of countries visited per trip increases. The number of countries was also higher for those under 26 than those over 26, suggesting a slightly wider level of mobility of younger travellers. What is clear for both age groups, however, is that those who travel for longer are visiting a greater number of countries during their trip.
2. Planning the trip

What information sources do they use for planning their trip?

Youth and student travellers tend to be information intensive, consulting a wide range of information sources before departure. Unlike previous surveys of traveller information sources, the Internet is the main form of pre-trip information gathering (71%) followed by family and friends (70%) (Figure 6). The level of Internet use is likely to be higher than average among our sample given the survey method. However, a recent survey of backpackers in Australia indicated that 44% had used Internet to gather information prior to arrival (TNT/Uni Travel, 2003).

The types of information sources used in planning do not vary too much with increasing travel experience, with the exception of guidebooks. Of those who had taken three trips or less only 30% used guidebooks, compared with 50% of those having taken ten trips or more (and this difference became even more marked during the trip, when 60% of the most experienced travellers had a guidebook with them).

Guidebooks were also consulted by more than 60% of backpackers prior to departure, compared with less than 20% of tourists. If more experienced travellers are more likely to use guidebooks for planning their trip, it is likely that such travellers were planning visits to more ‘difficult’ or ‘complicated’ destinations for longer periods which required higher levels of planning. More experienced respondents were travelling longer, further and to lesser known destinations, so this can explain why they need to undertake more detailed planning. Some differences were evident between respondents using travel agents and the Internet as an information source when planning their trip, as those who used these sources were significantly less experienced travellers.
The type of information sources used in planning the trip differed significantly between younger travellers and over 26ers. Older respondents were more likely to have drawn upon a previous visit as an information source, which fits with their higher levels of travel experience. This was supported again by their lower tendency to use travel agents for information in planning a trip, whereas under 26ers were significantly more likely to use them as an information source. Over 26ers also were more likely to use guidebooks to plan their trip, implying less spontaneity, but also a higher requirement for knowledge about the destinations they visited (Figure 7).

There were also significant differences between respondents from different origin countries in terms of the type of information sources consulted before travelling. Friends and family were consulted more by respondents from Hong Kong, Mexico and Canada than other originating countries. Slovenian, Mexican and South African respondents were significantly less likely to draw upon a previous visit for information than other countries. Tourist boards were not important at all for respondents from South Africa, the UK, Mexico and Sweden. Travel agencies were more important for respondents from Mexico, Hong Kong and Canada than for others.
Perhaps the most interesting difference between originating countries is the level of use of the Internet as an information source prior to the trip. The Internet was significantly more important for those originating from Canada, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Hong Kong and the UK than those originating from South Africa (with only 35% consulting Internet information). The level of use of guidebooks between originating countries was also significantly different. Respondents from Slovenia, Canada and the UK consulted guidebooks significantly more prior to their trip than respondents from South Africa and Mexico.

As well as differences in information sources consulted according to origin countries, there were also differences according to the destination visited. Respondents planning to visit Germany, France and the USA were very likely to use friends and family as an information source for making their plans. Guidebooks were drawn upon more often for planning visits to Australia, Italy and France but were not really popular in planning trips to Greece, the UK, Germany and Spain. Those planning a trip in Western Europe (particularly Austria, France, the UK, the Netherlands and Ireland) were also much more likely to draw upon a previous visit as an information source than those visiting longer haul destinations (Mexico, Thailand and Australia), where the likelihood of a repeat visit was lower.

By way of comparison for information sources used in trip planning, 49% of student travellers in Chadee and Cutler’s (1996) study used travel agents to plan their trips. But 42% preferred to do their own planning with only the help of friends with previous travel experience, and only 2% used an overseas tourist organisation. They found it interesting that such a large proportion of students (51%) were not using travel agents, and that this underlines the problem for student and youth dedicated travel agencies in competing against other information channels.

As the current study only asked respondents to specify the information sources used in trip planning, it is not entirely clear what role the different sources play in each phase of the travel decision-making process. In future research it would be useful to look in more detail at where people get the inspiration to travel in general, or to select a particular destination and study which sources of information are used to gather information on specific aspects of the journey.

**Intensity of information use in trip planning**

In terms of the intensity of information use in planning the trip, the majority of respondents used a wide range of different information sources prior to departure. This suggests that trip planning was relatively detailed, with respondents consulting an average of three different information sources prior to their trip. Experienced travellers consulted significantly more sources pre-departure, and ‘backpackers’ were also likely to consult more sources of information than other respondents, usually because of their use of personal recommendation from fellow travellers. Interestingly, over 26ers consulted more information sources than younger travellers, which indicates that increasing travel experience does not necessarily lead to less detailed (i.e. more spontaneous) trip planning.

The picture that emerges is of careful planning of major trips by young travellers, who also tend to be relatively experienced and knowledgeable about the places they visit.

**How do they book their travel, accommodation and activities?**

Most respondents used travel agents for booking their travel (65% for air travel) – although this is likely to have been affected by the sourcing of respondents from travel agency lists – and only 10% used the Internet. The availability of Internet booking facilities is however growing rapidly, and the level of Internet bookings may have increased significantly since the survey in 2002. ‘Backpackers’ were more likely than other respondents to go to specialist youth or student travel agents for air travel booking (42%) than were other types of travellers, while those calling themselves ‘tourists’ were more likely to use mainstream travel agents (51%). In terms of accommodation, however, very few booked in advance, and this was particularly marked for
backpackers. In spite of the growth of specialists offering at least one night’s accommodation as an add-on to flights, it seems most people are happy to arrive in the destination and organise things themselves. In particular, more experienced travellers were less likely to book in advance.

The average air travel booking lead-time was six weeks, although it was significantly longer for long haul and non-western destinations – 23 weeks ahead for Swedish respondents going to Chile, for example. Exceptions include package destinations such as the Dominican Republic, which had a much shorter travel booking lead time. Travel booking lead time rose for longer trips, reaching almost two months for trips of four to six months’ duration. The average accommodation booking lead time was shorter – an average of 4.58 weeks ahead. This indicates that people book their flights first and then search for accommodation.

Discounts are clearly important for many youth and student travellers. 56% of the respondents obtained some kind of student discount on their trip, with 30% obtaining under 26 discounts, 25% obtaining rail and bus discounts and 17% obtaining accommodation discounts. Of course, there were some significant differences in the type of discounts obtained between under and over 26 year olds, although this is not surprising as many discount schemes are geared to younger travellers and students (Figure 8). Those under 26 had more discounts than those over 26 on rail/bus travel and using under 26 or student discount entitlements. However, those over 26 had more air travel discounts using membership and general discount cards, which could include frequent flyer schemes, and this would fit with the over 26 group having more travel experience overall.

**Figure 8: Discounts obtained by under 26 and over 26 year olds**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of discount</th>
<th>Under 26</th>
<th>Over 26</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student discount</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership card discount</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discount card</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discount on accommodation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discount on rail/bus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discount on air travel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. ‘On the road’

Where do they go?

The survey respondents were asked to indicate the destinations they had visited during their entire travel career, as well as the destinations they had visited during their last major trip.

Regions visited over whole ‘travel career’

Over the course of their entire ‘travel career’ to date (see Box 2), the respondents had visited many world regions (Figure 7), with over half having visited Northern and Southern Europe and over 40% having visited North America and Eastern Europe. Less developed regions had also been visited, with 18% having visited Central America, 16% to Southeast Asia and 13% to Australasia.

Destinations on the last big trip

The main destination regions on the last main trip were Northern Europe (30%), Southern Europe (16%), North America (16%), and Eastern Europe (8%), with a considerable number visiting Southeast Asia and Australasia (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Regions visited in ‘travel career’ and regions visited on last big trip

Clearly, there are high numbers of repeat visits made by young people and students (Figure 9). According to the respondents’ last trip, North America was visited by a greater proportion of respondents on repeat visits than first time visits (88%) and the same pattern was true of Europe (over 70% for all regions of Europe). However, other regions had a higher proportion of first time visits, particularly the Indian sub-continent (60% first time visitors) South America, Southeast Asia and Australasia (all with 51% first time visitors). These are relatively long haul destinations from the major source markets and are therefore more likely to be seen as ‘once in a lifetime’ destinations.
Differences existed in the regions visited by males and females. Those regions that had been visited by a higher proportion of male respondents than female were Eastern Europe, North America, Central America, South America, China/Japan, Southeast Asia and Australasia, while the regions that had been visited by a higher proportion of female respondents than male were Northern and Southern Europe, the Middle East, North, Central and Southern Africa and the Indian sub-continent. This pattern is not obviously related to perceptions or concerns over the relative safety of female travellers ‘on the road’.

The regions that had been visited by a proportionally higher percentage of respondents aged over 26 years were Central/Southern Africa (44%), Central and South America (both 25%), the Middle East (21%) and Southeast Asia (20%). These regions could be considered more ‘difficult’ for travellers and may explain why slightly older travellers might frequent them. This is supported by the fact that proportionally more young travellers (under 26) visited Europe and North America; fitting in with the idea of a ‘travel career’ (see Box 2), where ‘easier’ destinations are visited first but moving on to more ‘difficult’ destinations with increasing age and experience.

Although it should be remembered that some regions contain many more countries than others, it was clear that within certain regions, a higher number of different countries had been visited. Southeast Asia had the highest number of countries visited (2.4 countries while in that region), followed by Northern Europe and South America (both 2.3 countries while in that region). The number was lower than the average for regions such as North America (which of course corresponds to the fact that this region contains fewer different countries) and Central/Southern Africa (where individual countries are more geographically vast).

Certainly, when looking at the regions visited by the amount of previous travel experience, there is a clear pattern as to where the more experienced and less experienced travellers are going that fit well with the findings on age and regions visited. Those respondents visiting South America were the most experienced travellers (having taken an average of 9.1 previous trips), followed by those visiting China/Japan (8.2 previous trips), the Indian Sub-continent (8.1 previous trips) and Central/Southern Africa (8 previous trips). Regions that were visited by respondents with the least travel experience were Northern Europe (only 5.8 previous trips), Southern Europe (6 previous trips) and North America (6.5 previous trips). These findings again provide support for the existence of a ‘travel career’ (see Box 2).

\[N.B.\] This was analysed without including those respondents originating from the region in question, as they may have biased the level of travel experience (because they tend to travel around extensively within their own region).
Box 2 - Are youth and student travellers building a travel ‘career’?

As travel experience increases, so people tend to travel further a field. The average visitor to Northern Europe had only made five major trips previously, compared with eight trips for visitors to Australia and over ten trips for those visiting India. This gives some indirect support for the idea of a travel career (Pearce, 1993) among the respondents, with Europeans, for example tending to travel within Europe initially, and then to visit Australasia for their first big inter-continental trip before striking out for less developed Asian, African and Latin American destinations.

Additionally, even though most survey respondents might be regarded as relatively young travellers, as many of them indicated that they were on repeat visits to a foreign country, implying that a self image as an ‘avid’ traveller can have already set in at a young age.

The ‘travel career’ idea is also supported by the fact that as travellers get older, they have built up more travel experience (see section 1 above) and that the main benefit derived by young people from their travel is a thirst for more travel (see section 4 below). Youth and student travel providers have also developed new products as the market has matured and the more experienced travellers have entered new phases of their travel careers.

There is some evidence of differentiation between destinations in terms of traveller types. Some destinations, such as Southeast Asia, Australasia and South America were dominated by ‘backpackers’, whereas in North America ‘travellers’ outnumbered ‘backpackers’. This pattern may in fact be caused by ‘travellers’ having been socialised into a particular group during their travel. It is likely, for example, that those visiting established backpacker centres such as Bangkok or Sydney will come across the term ‘backpacker’ far more often than other travellers.

A selection of individual countries indicates that Asian destinations tended to have the highest proportion of self-defined backpackers, with the lowest proportion of backpackers being found in USA and Canada (Table 1). There seems to be a link between the phase of tourism development and the travel style. Relatively ‘mature’ destinations in North America and Europe have the lowest proportions of backpackers, while relatively ‘new’ destinations such as Vietnam have the highest. This may be an indication of the ‘pioneer’ function of young backpackers, who arguably blaze a trail for the travellers or tourists who follow.

Backpackers also tended to visit more countries during their trips than travellers or tourists. The average backpacker had visited 2.4 countries during their last major trip, compared with 1.8 for travellers and 1.7 for tourists.

Table 1- Proportions of backpackers, travellers and tourists visiting selected destinations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>Backpacker</th>
<th>Traveller</th>
<th>Tourist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>53.4</td>
<td>19.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>48.9</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>75.4</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>61.7</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Box 3 - Who is going where in the world?

The destination of the trips taken was naturally strongly influenced by the country of residence, as people obviously travel within their own world region more frequently. Europe had been visited by over 50% of respondents, North America by almost 50% and other world regions by less than 20%. This corresponds to some extent with the distribution of survey respondents and also with the distribution of international tourism, which is largely concentrated in the industrialised ‘North’.

There were significant differences between the respondents from different origin countries in terms of where they travelled to:

- **Slovenia**-based respondents were travelling largely within Europe, particularly Southern Europe and Eastern Europe. Southeast Asia was also a popular destination region.
- **Mexico**-based respondents’ main destination regions were Europe and North America, although 11% of trips were within their own region (Central America) and South America.
- **Canada**-based respondents were going to Northern Europe and North America, and also had the highest proportion of respondents visiting Central America of all origin countries.
- The main destinations for **South African**-based respondents were almost exclusively North America and Northern/Southern Europe, except for 8% of trips to the Indian sub-continent and another 8% of trips in their own region.
- **UK**-based respondents travel most often within Northern/Southern Europe and North America. They accounted for the largest proportion of respondents visiting Central and Southern Africa and China/Japan of all origin countries. Southeast Asia was also important.
- Respondents based in **Sweden** also have a large proportion of visits to Northern/Southern Europe and North America, but they account for the largest proportion of respondents visiting Southeast Asia and also Eastern Europe (excepting respondents from Eastern Europe).
- **Hong Kong**-based respondents tend to visit Northern Europe most of all (35%) but a considerable number also travel within the China/Japan region (29%). They also have the highest proportion of visits to Australasia of all origin countries, which is logical given the closer geographical proximity of these two regions.
- The main destination region for respondents from the **Czech Republic** (36%) was Northern Europe, but Eastern Europe – their own region – accounted for 20% of all visits. North America and Southern Europe were also popular with these respondents.

**How do they reach their destinations? What modes of transport do they use when they arrive?**

Overall, the main modes of transport to the destination were air travel (82%) and train travel (30%). Those calling themselves ‘tourists’ are more likely to use tour buses to reach their destination, while ‘backpackers’ tend to use the rail and coach networks more than ‘travellers’ and ‘tourists’.

There were several significant differences between under and over 26 year olds. Under 26ers were significantly more likely to travel by train, coach or tour bus, use their own car or hitchhike than those over 26, who were more likely to use air transport. There were very few differences between the travel modes chosen by men and women; only air transport and tour buses were significantly different, with females being more likely to have flown to their destination.

Air transport was used by all respondents visiting Canada and Australia, and there was also a high percentage for long haul destinations such as Thailand, as well as for the UK and the USA. However, most European destinations had a much lower percentage of respondents using air transport, because London is a major airport hub for visitors to Europe and many young travellers arrive in London and use other forms of transport to travel around Europe.
The main transport modes within destinations were walking (60%), tram, metro or local bus (54%) and local train (42%). ‘Backpackers’ are more likely to use air transport, trains, coach or hitch hike within their destination, while ‘travellers’ and ‘tourists’ are more likely to rent a car, and ‘tourists’ again tend to use tour buses more. Males were significantly more likely to hitch hike to and within the destination than females.

Again, there were several significant differences between younger and older respondents in terms of how they moved around within their destination. Under 26ers were significantly more likely to use their own car, cycle and walk around, while over 26ers were more likely to hire a car and use domestic air transport.

**Where do they stay?**

Figure 11: Accommodation used on last big trip

Visiting friends and relatives was the most popular mode of accommodation on the trip (41%), followed by backpacker hostels, hotels and youth/independent hostels (Figure 10). The only significant difference between over and under 26ers for accommodation was that over 26ers were more likely to stay in hotels, implying that people are prepared to spend more on their accommodation as they get older.

Respondents from Slovenia, the UK, Canada and Mexico were significantly more likely to stay in backpacker hostels on their trip than other types of hostel and accommodation, while the incidence of staying in backpacker hostels was significantly lower among respondents from Hong Kong and South Africa. South African respondents were also unlikely to stay in hotels but were more likely than any other origin country to stay with friends or relatives during their trip. Those from the Czech Republic and Slovenia were least likely to stay with friends and relatives during their trip.

The fact that young travellers seek out budget accommodation or stay with friends and relatives means that a higher proportion of their expenditure is likely to be made with local businesses rather than national or global chains. This may have the effect of increasing their local economic impact in relation to other types of visitors.

The choice of accommodation is also clearly related to travel motivation. Those staying in Backpacker hostels, for example, were more likely to be motivated by a search for excitement, adventure and socialising with fellow travellers. Hotels were most likely to be used by those looking for rest, relaxation and a calm atmosphere and those respondents staying with friends and relatives were most likely to emphasise social motivations.
**How long do they stay?**

The average length of the last main trip in the current survey was considerable at 63.5 days. This illustrates that the average daily spend becomes a lot more significant given the relatively long length of stay.

**Figure 12: Length of last main trip (days)**

Overall, the longest trips were taken by those visiting Australasia (an average of 128 days), North America (90 days) and the Indian sub-continent (84 days), while the regions with the shortest trip durations were Eastern Europe (29 days), North Africa (36 days), Southern Europe (39 days) and Central/Southern Africa (47 days).

Significant differences existed in the length of trip for respondents from different countries. The respondents who travelled for the longest were those from Mexico (86 days), South Africa (82 days) and Canada (73 days), while trips by those from Slovenia were only 38 days long on average. For single destination trips, destinations where respondents stayed the longest on average included Australia (107 days), Canada (90 days) and the USA (87 days), while trips to France (39 days) and Greece (only 20 days) were among the shortest.

**Box 4 - Are younger travellers spending longer on the road?**

Younger travellers (under 26) travelled for 8.7 days longer on average than those travellers over 26 and, although this difference is not statistically significant, it implies that younger respondents travel for longer than their older counterparts.

Controlling for the length of their trip, it is clear that respondents who travelled for longer visited more countries during their trip. This suggests that if young people are travelling for longer than are tourists as a whole, they are also travelling more widely across more countries, hence spreading their spending further geographically.
How much do they spend?

The average daily spend of respondents was relatively low, with over half the respondents estimating their spend to be less than US$20 a day (Figure 11). The level of daily spend is inversely related to the length of stay. However, in terms of total spend, young travellers still make an important contribution to the economy of the destination they visit. The average spend in the destination is US$1,200, which is more than most ‘high-spending’ tourists spend during a shorter stay in their destination.

Figure 13: Average daily spend, by traveller type

The total spend including travel to the destination is almost US$2,200 for a backpacker, which is higher than either travellers (US$1,800) or tourists (US$1,470). Expenditure is also clearly influenced by income, with those on incomes over US$20,000 a year spending almost twice as much on average as those earning less than US$5,000. ‘Travellers’ and those with a longer average trip length were significantly more likely to be earning money during their trip.

The destinations visited, as well as the length of the trip, also heavily influence the level of expenditure. The average total spend for a trip to Australia, including travel, was over US$4,600, whereas the average visitor to Thailand spent US$2,200 and the average spend for Turkey was US$700.

There is also some evidence against the idea that hardened travellers tend to be more careful with their money (Figure 14). In fact, those travellers with more travel experience spend more per day than relatively inexperienced travellers. This is probably because they are older and have higher incomes, and may support the idea that people who travel to countries as relatively poor backpackers return later as wealthier travellers. This was supported by significant differences between over and under 26 year olds in terms of their average daily spending, as well as by the high numbers of repeat visits made.

Box 5 - Exploding the myth of young people and students as budget travellers

While the average daily spend for young travellers in a local destination may be low (around US$20 per day), their total spend in the destination is around US$1,900, which spread over their longer stay is more than most older ‘high-spending’ tourists spend during a shorter stay in the destination. Additionally, because the length of stay is longer and most spending is done in local destinations, there tends to be a lower leakage factor than with other types of tourists. This illustrates the economic potential of the youth and student market and is concurrent with the findings of several other studies of the economic impact of youth and student travel.
Those visiting Australia and New Zealand, Central/South Africa and South America had the highest total budgets for their trip, although a major part of these budgets may have been spent on the air fare to these longer haul destinations. This is supported by the fact that those visiting Europe and the Mediterranean regions had the lowest budgets. As such, it is useful to look at daily spend instead, where the story is slightly different. North Africa has the highest percentage of those spending under US$20 per day – a figure that may be skewed by those on package holidays. The Indian sub-continent and Eastern Europe had the next largest proportions of respondents spending under US$20 per day. These three regions also had no respondents at all spending over US$50 per day. The regions with the largest proportions of higher spending respondents were North America, Northern Europe, China/Japan and Australasia.

Differences in daily spend by region were only significant for stays of less than 30 days. This indicates that for longer trips young travellers tend to budget more carefully wherever they are in order to maximise their length of stay. On longer trips, therefore, the difference between destinations is not so much in terms of levels of daily spending, but the degree of luxury or range of activities that travellers can afford within their budgets.

**Box 6 - Developments in how young people and students are financing their travel**

The importance of saving for a major trip is clear, as the respondents’ average expenditure approached their usual annual income in many cases. Those calling themselves 'travellers' and those with a longer trip length were significantly more likely to be earning money during their trip.

Chadee and Cutler (1996) found that 65% of their student respondents would be using past savings to finance their trips, while 9% anticipated taking a bank loan. This implies that students plan and save for their trips well in advance and often undertake employment for a short period leading up to the trip. They also noted that only 8% planned to borrow from relatives and that this did not fit with assumptions that students can only travel thanks to parental financial support.

**What do they do on their travels?**

The most popular activities are visiting historical sites and monuments, walking and trekking, sitting in cafes and restaurants and shopping, which are all undertaken by over 70% of respondents (Figure 15). The least popular are academic study and learning a language during their trip (28%). It is clear that culture forms an important element of the activities undertaken by young travellers, in contrast to the hedonistic image that youth travel often engenders.

As a search for experiences features strongly in the motivations of young travellers, it is not surprising that most respondents indicate they had undertaken a very wide range of activities during their trip. Backpackers in particular tend to undertake more different activities than other travellers (even when controlling for length of stay), perhaps pointing to the expectation that backpacker trips are likely to be seen as a ‘once in a lifetime’ experience which requires that every possible experience be sampled.
There is also a relationship between the motivation of the respondents and the number of different activities undertaken during the trip. In general terms, those motivated more by experience-seeking motivations such as exploring other cultures or developing skills are more active than those with relaxation-related motives, such as avoiding hustle and bustle and seeking physical relaxation.

In spite of the argument that backpackers are keen to distinguish themselves from other types of tourists, their activities tend to be fairly similar to those that might be expected of tourists in general. Observing wildlife and nature is a far more popular activity for backpackers, perhaps indicating the tendency for many to go trekking in wilderness areas. Backpackers are also more likely to indulge in fairly passive activities such as ‘hanging out on the beach’, as well as more ‘extreme’ sports and adrenaline-inducing experiences. This suggests that the backpacking experience consists of relatively long periods of passive activity interspersed by intervals of more active and intense experience. The time backpackers spend apparently ‘doing nothing’ or ‘hanging out’ may also be an important part of the backpacking experience, providing time to reflect on life and ‘find oneself’, although this is difficult to confirm via a quantitative survey. This also underlines the need to combine different research methods to gain a fuller picture of the experience of youth and student travel. This will be an area to be considered in future research by the ATLAS Backpacker Research Group, which has already begun to employ a wide range of methods to examine different aspects of the backpacker experience.

Figure 15: Activities done on last big trip

Some activities do show stronger differentiation, for example by travel experience, length of stay and types of travellers. Backpackers, for example, tend to do more of everything, whereas tourists are the least active. This is probably related to an expectation among backpackers that they need to experience a lot in order to justify their trips. As travel experience increases, so do the number of activities undertaken, which may mean that the need to justify the travel experience increases with the number of trips taken. For example, those who had made 10 trips or more were 25% more active (in terms of the number of different activities undertaken) than those who had made less than 3 trips. This finding tends to support the idea of backpackers in particular as ‘experience-hungry’ tourists. However, as we know little about the home context of the young people and students it is difficult to say whether the search for experience is driven by alienation, as many researchers have suggested. The motivations stated by the respondents tend to emphasise a search for difference in other cultures, rather than alienation from their own. In general, the activity patterns of ‘backpackers’ and other respondents are not as different as one might expect.
There were several significant differences in the activities undertaken by males and females in the ISTC/ATLAS survey. Women are more likely to go walking or trekking, participate in cultural events, sit in cafes and restaurants and shop than men, who are more likely to either watch sport or participate in sport/adrenaline activities, reflecting some traditional differences between leisure preferences of males and females. However, women are also more likely to earn money during their trip than men. This concurs with Reisinger and Mavondo’s (2003) research, which also found significant differences in the activity preferences of male and female young travellers. However, Carr (1999) found very few gender differences in terms of the leisure activities of young tourists in the UK.

There were some differences between younger and slightly older travellers, for example: 95% of those earning money during their trip and 90% of those undertaking academic study are under 26. This supports the idea that younger travellers often take paid work while travelling to fund their trip as they go, or travel as part of academic study programmes. They are also more likely to visit nightclubs than over 26ers, while those over 26 are significantly more likely to participate in wildlife/nature observation.

South African and Czech respondents are much more likely to undertake academic study on their trip than others, although South Africans are much less likely to do cultural/heritage/museum-based activities than all other origin countries, with those from Slovenia, Mexico and Canada being especially active in cultural and heritage pursuits. Respondents from South Africa and Hong Kong are less active in walking/trekking than all other origin countries, but much more likely to go shopping, while South Africans and UK-based respondents were slightly more likely to participate in sport than others.

Wildlife/nature activities are more popular with those from Eastern Europe, Slovenia and the Czech Republic. Those from the Czech Republic did by far the least shopping, sitting in cafes/restaurants and going to nightclubs (i.e. relatively expensive activities), which relates directly to their average total trip budget – lowest of all the originating countries at US$824 (and far less than the average of US$1,900 per trip, including travel). This is supported by the fact that they were also far more likely to be earning money or studying during their trip, and that the budget for their trip was considerably lower than half of the average budget of all origin countries.

Activities are also highly differentiated according to the destination visited. Hanging out on the beach is a popular pastime for those visiting Thailand, Greece, Australia, India and South Africa, and walking and trekking are most popular among those visiting Australia, Austria, South Africa, Japan, Thailand, Egypt, Mexico and Spain. Ireland was the destination with the highest percentage of respondents going to nightclubs, followed by Australia and Thailand. Apart from the latter, all of the destinations with higher participation in nightclubbing are westernised countries. Cultural events are most popular among those visiting Japan, with Sweden, Egypt and the UK being the main destinations for visiting museums and Egypt, Germany, China and Ireland the main destinations for visiting historic sites. South Africa and Australia have the largest percentages of respondents undertaking wildlife and nature-based activities, while sitting in cafes and restaurants is popular with those visiting Egypt, Thailand and Ireland and shopping more popular in Sweden, Thailand and Japan than in other destinations. India has the highest percentage of respondents working as volunteers, followed by Japan and South Africa. Respondents are more likely to earn money in the UK and Sweden than elsewhere, and are more likely to be studying in Ireland, the USA, Sweden and Australia – three of which have an English language orientation that, of course, facilitates study in a foreign country.

Visitors to Australia, Thailand, India, Ireland, Egypt, Canada, and South Africa participated in more activities overall, indicating that these are more ‘active’ destinations. Those with the lowest levels of activity participation are Finland, Turkey, Croatia, France and Austria.

Relationships also exist between traveller motivations and activities at the destination. More recreational and diversionary motivations, such as ‘having a good time’ and ‘excitement’, are linked with more recreational and diversionary activities such as shopping, nightclubbing,
watching sport and hanging out on the beach. However, more ‘vocational’ motivations such as ‘contributing to the places visited’ and knowledge-seeking motives such as ‘exploring other cultures’, were linked with more vocational and personal development activities like volunteering and learning a language.

**Box 7 - ‘Watching’ or ‘Doing’?**

Those motivated by wanting to contribute something to the places they visit and those wanting to avoid hustle and bustle tend to have more conviction about deliberately avoiding certain activities that do not fit in with their needs and wants. For example, there is a relationship between those wanting to avoid hustle and bustle and avoidance of museum visits, watching and participating in sport and studying or learning a language (all quite communal activities), while those motivated by wanting to contribute to the places they visit seem to deliberately avoid sitting in cafes and restaurants. This point is interesting, as it implies that for those who want to contribute to places, the emphasis is on *doing*; i.e. participating in local life.

By contrast, for those motivated by ‘exploring other cultures’, the emphasis is slightly higher on *watching* (as there was a link between exploring other cultures as a motivation and sitting in cafes and restaurants, e.g. for ‘people watching’, indicating a thirst to watch the daily life of other cultures rather than participate in it).

In any case, as mentioned in the section above on motivations, there is a strong relationship between some motivations relating to interaction of respondents with the places visited. Those who stated that contributing to local culture was a very important motivation and also that exploring other cultures was important were much more likely also to have said that interacting with local people was very important to them.

**What information sources do they use during their trip?**

The importance of guidebooks is underlined by the fact that 60% of the most experienced travellers had a guidebook with them during their trip, indicating that increased experience does not automatically lead to lower information requirements. As was the case with the information used in trip planning, more experienced travellers may need more information because the destinations they often visit are located further off ‘the beaten track’ and hence more specialist guidebooks are required to travel through such countries. Similarly, over 26 year olds were significantly more likely to use guidebooks during their trip than younger travellers, once again implying a higher requirement for orientation and knowledge regarding their destinations.

The only significant difference between males and females and the information used while travelling is that males are more likely to use the Internet than females, supporting the idea that Internet use has been more of a male dominated activity in the past, even if this is now beginning to change.

Many of the differences between backpackers, travellers and tourists in information sources chosen for trip planning (see the ‘planning the trip’ section above) are also maintained in terms of the information sources consulted during the trip, with almost 70% of backpackers using guidebooks, compared with almost a third of tourists. This suggests that backpackers are far more likely to buy a guidebook prior to travel and then use the same guidebook as an information source while travelling. The portability of guidebooks is clearly one of the major advantages for backpackers. Not only was Lonely Planet the most frequently used guidebook, but backpackers are far more likely to use it than other travellers. Backpackers were also more likely to use accommodation providers and fellow travellers for information, which emphasises the prevalence of information and story swapping on the backpacker ‘scene’. Internet use while travelling was highest in Canada, the USA, Australia, Mexico and Thailand and was lowest in Turkey, France and Austria, suggesting that the level of Internet use is largely controlled by the availability of Internet cafes (for example, there tends to be a higher number of Internet cafes in areas with a developed backpacker infrastructure, such as backpacker ‘enclaves’).
Respondents visiting Australia, Italy and Canada are more likely to use a guidebook while travelling, and the Internet is also popular as an information source during trips to Canada, USA, Germany and Australia. In visits to Italy, Spain, Germany and Australia tourist information centres are used during the trip. Perhaps most interestingly, there is a very low preference for using fellow travellers as an information source during trips to the UK and the USA, despite the English language orientation of these countries.

As was the case while planning trips, the intensity of information use while actually travelling was considerable, with most respondents using a range of different information sources during their trip. Again, more experienced travellers consult significantly more different sources on-trip and backpackers are also likely to consult more sources of information than other respondents, which is linked to their higher use of personal recommendations from fellow travellers.

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**Box 8 - Staying in touch: Communication channels on trip**

How are youth and student travellers keeping in contact with their friends and relatives while ‘on the road’? Overall, email and the Internet were the main communication channels used during the trip (with 68% of respondents using them). Over 26ers were significantly more likely to use a phone booth with a locally purchased phone card than younger travellers.

Significant differences can also be noted depending on the destination visited. International phone calls are more popular for communication in non-European destinations, and letters and postcards are less popular in English-speaking destinations and Northern Europe (the Netherlands, Germany, and Scandinavia).

Internet and email communication is highest in longer haul destinations such as India, Thailand, Mexico and Japan (with the exception of China, where Internet and email use is much lower). It is also relatively high in Sweden, the Netherlands, South Africa and English speaking countries, including the USA, Australia, Canada and the UK, while the destinations with the lowest levels of communication by Internet/email are Turkey, Croatia and Austria.

The general pattern that emerges is that young people tend to be in contact with ‘home’ or with their friends elsewhere or on the road. Travel is therefore becoming integrated into the ‘connected lifestyles’ of young people around the globe.

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**4. Reflecting on the trip**

**What do they gain from their travels?**

The main benefit gained by young people and students from travel is a thirst for more travel (Figure 16). As the most popular motivation for travel was ‘exploring other cultures’, the main benefit seems to come from the journey of exploration itself rather than the specific culture visited. This may also mean that once people start travelling they find it difficult to stop, underlining the importance of attracting backpackers early in their ‘travel careers’, as they are likely to remain avid travellers (see Box 2). Those who undertake more activities also feel they gained more benefits from their travel. Active, varied trips therefore seem to be the most beneficial.

Culture appears to play an important role in the satisfaction that people get from travelling, which is not surprising given that ‘exploring other cultures’ was the most important motivation. Those with more travel experience in particular say they gain more appreciation of other cultures through their travel and are more likely to be motivated by interaction with local people. The fact that visits to historical sites and monuments are the most frequent activities underlines the importance of culture in the travel experience, but tends to indicate a fairly traditional view of cultural experiences.
The respondents’ ages did not affect the benefits they gained, but when looking at the benefits gained from a trip according to gender, it is clear that females gain more from their trip as they scored significantly higher than males on every single benefit they were asked about.

Appreciation of other cultures was clearly scored lowest as a benefit for those visiting Europe and North America, which is not too surprising given that the cultures of these Western regions are among the most ‘globalised’ and familiar anywhere in the world.

However, self-knowledge and awareness as benefits of travel were scored highest by those visiting Central America, Central/South Africa and the Indian sub-continent, and self-confidence as a benefit was scored highest by those visiting North and Central/South Africa, the Indian sub-continent, Central America and Southeast Asia – all of which are relatively ‘difficult’ and ‘exotic’ destination regions with more distinctively ‘different’ cultures to the average Western country. This suggests that the consumption of ‘difference’ by young people and students is linked to confidence building.

Figure 16: benefits gained from travel

‘Thirst for more travel' was also scored highest by those visiting these more ‘difficult' and ‘exotic’ destination regions, particularly in Southeast Asia, the Indian sub-continent, Central and South America and Central/South Africa. This finding again supports the idea of a travel career (see Box 2), where the chosen destinations for young people and students become increasingly more challenging and exotic in order to feed their increasing thirst for travelling.

Those regions that had the most ‘reflective’ impact on respondents in terms of how they understood their own culture following a visit were two of the poorest regions in the world – Central/South Africa and the Indian sub-continent. This could be due to the stark contrast of spending time in a place with a much poorer economic situation, so respondents returned from these regions understanding their own positions of relative wealth and privilege within their home culture.

Finally, ‘increased cultural tolerance’ and ‘an interest in learning about other cultures' are the only benefits from travelling not significantly different according to the region visited. This suggests that cultural impacts on youth and student visitors are a relatively constant effect of travel irrespective of the region visited. In contrast, however, there are significant differences in terms of the degree of reflection on the home culture according to the region visited. Those visiting destinations with a relatively large cultural distance from their home culture, such as India, South America and Africa, agree more that they had benefited from an increased understanding of their own culture.
Those visiting more ‘Western’ destinations such as Europe and North America are much less likely to have increased their understanding of their own culture, perhaps because a relative lack of cultural difference cushions the ‘culture shock’ that might cause people to re-evaluate their home culture.

**Can youth travel contribute to peace and understanding?**

Many previous studies have pointed to the benefits of travel in opening and broadening the minds of travellers and making them more tolerant to different cultures. This very idea is basic to the ‘Peace through Tourism’ movement, which seeks to promote travel as a means of creating cultural dialogue and lessening conflict.

The current survey shows that youth and student travel is propelled by a desire for contact with other cultures, building friendships and appreciating the value of the everyday life of other cultures. This indicates that youth travel has the potential to contribute to building international peace and understanding, a suggestion that seems to be supported by the fact that the young people and students surveyed were most reflective about their experiences in relatively poor and unstable regions of the world.

However, relatively little specific empirical research has been conducted in this area. As a response to this gap and building on the findings of the independent traveller survey, ISTC and ATLAS are currently undertaking a major study of the effect of cultural tourism experiences on the attitudes and values of young travellers towards other cultures. This research examines the extent to which the travel experience itself modifies their cultural perceptions and changes their attitudes, not only to the culture they visit but also to wider questions of cultural diversity, tolerance and xenophobia. A report containing the results of this study on the effect of cultural tourism experiences on the attitudes and values of young travellers will be available in 2004. Please contact ISTC (details below) for further information on this new study.

**Conclusions**

The picture that emerges from this first transnational survey of youth and student travellers is that generally, they are experience-thirsty people, seeking contact with other cultures, local people and other travellers. They pack their long duration trips with a wide range of activities, spending a great deal more money over their whole trip than other types of tourists. Previous travel experience is a major factor in determining travel styles and destinations. Their trips tend to be sophisticated, carefully planned and have a lasting impact on their personal and professional lives. It is clear that those young people who invest the most time and energy into their experiences by undertaking more activities also gain the most from them.

Youth travellers are often seen as ‘time rich, money poor’ visitors, who are not as beneficial to the places they visit as other tourists. What this research highlights, however, is the fact that the major trips taken by young people are far from ‘budget’ holidays in terms of total spending. Relative to their incomes, young travellers spend a lot of money on travel, and will happily save and work to do so. Perhaps because they are ‘time rich’, they also reach the parts that other tourists do not – pioneering new destinations and spending money in areas outside the conventional tourist circuits.

Although young travellers have much in common, such as generally high levels of education, this group is clearly heterogeneous, with different motivations, attitudes, activities and understandings of their own styles of travel. Differences in how young people define their style of travel (backpacker, traveller or tourist) are underlined in their differing motivations, destinations, accommodation and activities chosen.
In some circles it seems that the word ‘tourist’ is increasingly to be avoided – the term ‘traveller’ in particular seems to be the current label of choice for the majority of young people.

The market is also changing rapidly, with increasing participation by women, increasing contact with home via the Internet and the growth of specific backpacker and youth tourism products. Such products are increasingly to be found in ‘enclaves’ in major youth travel destinations, such as the Khao San Road in Bangkok or King’s Cross in Sydney. Such ‘enclaves’ are no longer just functional intersections or resting places for independent travellers, but instead have taken on the function of an attraction themselves. Young people and students travel also for enclave experiences/social interaction motives. Those who state that ‘building close friendships’ and ‘associating with other travellers’ is an important motivation for their trip are much more likely to use fellow travellers as an information source, underlining the high levels of social and communal activity.

The rapid growth in student numbers around the globe highlights the optimistic prospects for youth and student travel. This is evident because the international student population consists of avid travellers who are prepared to save up to ensure their trip meets the ‘once in a lifetime’ requirement, even if the trip does not end up being a one-off (which – judging by the high number of repeat visits – it is clearly not).

The long term potential is also clear. Young people often develop a thirst for more travel during their major trips, which may stimulate them to travel more widely and more frequently in the future. Older, more experienced travellers tend to visit more distant regions or more ‘adventurous’ destinations, spending more money as their age and experience increases. This indicates that many young people and students are building a ‘travel career’. Driven by this thirst for more travel, they expand their horizons by choosing increasingly challenging destinations as they become more experienced travellers. This ‘development trajectory’ indicates the need to develop new products to meet the demands of this market in the future.

Additionally, youth and student travel has the potential to contribute to international peace and understanding, as evidenced by the strong propensity of young people to seek experience and appreciation of other cultures and fellow travellers.

This report has challenged some of the established wisdom of youth and student travel, as well as building new arguments as to the dynamics of this internationally growing market in terms of the experience, sophistication and thirst for travel of young people, as well as the lasting impact that travel can leave on their future lives.

**Where can I get more information?**

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Youth and student travel bibliography


Carr, N. *An Assessment of the Use and Trust of Different Tourism Information Sources Amongst University Students*. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Tourism Research.


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