

## **FORMS OF YOUTH TRAVEL**

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**Abstract:** Taking into account the suite of motivation that youth has when practicing tourism, it can be said that the youth travel takes highly diverse forms. These forms are educational tourism, volunteer programs and “work and travel”, cultural exchanges or sports tourism and adventure travel. In this article, we identified and analyzed in detail the main forms of youth travel both internationally and in Romania. We also illustrated for each form of tourism the specific tourism products targeting young people and their preferred destinations.

**JEL classification: L80, L83**

**Key words: youth travel, forms of tourism, educational tourism, adventure travel.**

In general, just like tourism, youth travel takes many forms determined by the extremely varied motivations of young people. The following forms are among the most known: educational tourism, volunteer programs, “work and travel” programs, cultural exchanges, sports tourism and adventure travel.

### **SPECIFIC FORMS OF YOUTH TRAVEL**

**Educational tourism** aims to improve the education process, to enrich the educational experiences by offering scholarships abroad, travel packages that include camps, trips, foreign language courses for any knowledge level, including training in any field (medical, legal, tourism, management, etc.) or any category of interest (fashion, design, arts, theatre, dance, etc.). Educational tourism also includes *summer schools* organized at pre-university and university levels, and theme camps organized at national and international levels.

The offer of travel packages is extremely varied and includes programs for children and youth, as well as for their parents and grandparents, for pupils, students, postgraduate students, PhD candidates, young employees, and provides academic studies and preparation programs for admission to prestigious universities all over the world, as well as integration within an interactive, highly qualified environment and international recognition of completed courses. Furthermore, the programs allow options to spend leisure time, to take part in diversely cultural and fun activities with the group of colleagues of other nationalities in attractive locations.

This form of tourism is increasingly developing in Romania also, considering the need imposed by society to know at least two foreign languages and to become familiar with various cultures.

The current form of educational tourism has evolved at the same time with the development of civilizations, the emergence of new technologies and the need to assimilate them. Afterwards, the desire for self-education outside of the school and university environment has created the premises of a new form of tourism – creative

tourism – defined as being related with participative activities in the culture of the host country through interactive workshops and informal learning experiences.

International camps are the best schools for children and youth because new information is assimilated like in a game, facilitating the learning process through similarity, imitation and repetition. The participants of these programs can be accommodated in university campuses, at families selected by the school, in student apartments or hostels and hotels, depending on age, preference and type of program. The programs include educational, social, cultural activities, sports and trips, and may be achieved through intercultural exchanges, meaning the host country will organize these programs in the country of origin of young people also.

The demand for language-learning tourism is growing (over 2% of young tourists are mainly motivated to travel to learn a foreign language and spend for these types of holidays approximately 3.300\$) and the average age of young people who travel for this purpose is declining. The average length of stay for language-learning travels is 5-6 weeks, and the trend is heading towards even longer stays. Great Britain is the most important destination for language-learning tourism, highlighting the dominance of English on the market, but new destinations have started to emerge, such as: USA, Spain, Australia, Japan, Germany, France or Brazil. The suppliers of such type of tourism services signal the existence of convergence points between the products provided by them and other sectors of youth travel, such as providing work experiences, adventure travels, cultural experiences and volunteer work.

In some countries of the world, more rigorous statistics are kept for a certain form of youth travel, namely student tourism, either because the reason of travel is to study in the country of destination or because universities keep records about the number of foreign students. Therefore, in New Zealand, the number of travels for educational purposes grew by 60% between the years 2000 and 2005, reaching over 50.000 arrivals per year<sup>48</sup>. The number of young people who travel for work during the holidays registered an increase in recent years also. The United States Department of Commerce collects statistical data about the tourism practiced by students through the “I-94 traveler” program, a program that identifies travelers, which monitors all types of visas. In 2004, the number of visas for students who came from abroad was 492.000, higher by 3.5% than in 2003 (this figure excludes students from Canada and Mexico, because they don’t need a visa to enter the United States of America).

**Volunteer programs** represent another important form of youth travel. The activity period as volunteers may vary from a few weeks to a year, during which the participant is provided with accommodation, meals, transport and pocket money. These programs don’t include work permits in the host country, because it is a voluntary activity. Young people will also benefit of language courses, health insurance, a few day off each month, etc. A recent study<sup>49</sup> shows that the volume of the volunteer global market is 1.6 million people per year, with a value between 1.7 and 2.6 billion dollars.

Youth volunteering is an important market for some countries, and the areas where it can be practiced are varied: environmental protection, arts and culture, activities with children, young people or elderly, sports and recreation.

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<sup>48</sup> Jarvis, J. and Peel, V.M., Study backpackers: Australia’s short-stay international student travellers. Paper presented at the ATLAS Backpacker Research Group Meeting, Bangkok, September 2005.

<sup>49</sup> Richards, G., WYSE Work Abroad Member - Volunteer Programmes 2008, Publisher WYSE Travel Confederation, 2008.

In Romania, due to the fact that not all young people have access to an adequate education, various volunteer organizations are getting involved in organizing classes on different subjects (foreign languages, IT, environment, etc.). Thus, the Youth Action for Peace Romania association organizes with the help of its volunteers a series of free classes for disadvantaged youth that aim for young people to acquire new knowledge about languages and IT.

Volunteer camps represent opportunities to explore the potential offered by an international group of young people who work together to implement a project, to develop dialogue, to have fun and to interact with local communities.

In order to consolidate and promote politics which stimulate volunteering, the European Union declared 2001 the European Year of Volunteering.

Tourism practiced by young people with the purpose of gaining work experience, namely **“work and travel” programs**, represents a market niche that is growing continuously at global level. It is the type of tourism with the most emphasized dynamic within independent travels on the youth travel market. Most “work and travel” programs originate from youth exchanges organized in the countries that have signed partnerships of this kind, being popular in regions like North America, Western Europe and Australasia. By far, the most known destination of this type of programs is the United States of America, followed by Australia, Canada, Great Britain, France, Spain, Greece, etc. According to studies, over 7% of the global youth travel market is related, in one way or another, to working abroad, and these tourists spend an average of 3.200 \$/trip<sup>50</sup>, but over 40% of the total cost is gained by working at the destination. Most young people who participate in work & travel programs take the decision to travel and work abroad based on the information gathered from friends who have experienced such programs, and the average length of such trips is approximately 6 months. The main advantages gained by young people who participated in such programs are:

- Gaining work experience in a different cultural environment;
- Improving a foreign language;
- Establishing contacts with people from all over the world;
- Visiting other places;
- The opportunity to express freely and to have fun with other young people;
- The opportunity to earn a significant amount of money.

“Work and travel” programs are mainly aimed at young students, but also at young graduates who take “a year off” between high school and university. It is estimated that tourism practiced by youth who have a “sabbatical year” is quantified around 1-1.5 million travels per year, and most travels of this type are independently organized.

**Cultural exchanges**, as a form of youth travel, have considerable impact over the attitude of young people, inducing them the spirit of cultural tolerance and understanding, the feeling of interpersonal trust and identification with global problems. In other words, the direct benefits achieved by young people from participating in such exchanges are materialized in: the development of the ability to better understand the culture of other people, their own personality and identity, as well as the feeling of belonging to the common destiny of humanity.

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<sup>50</sup> WYSE Travel Confederation, *Work Abroad Market Barometer*, March 2009, <http://www.wyseworkabroad.org/portal/page/portal/MenuSecSiteWYSEWA/MenuResearch#WYSE%20Work%20Abroad%20Market%20Barometer%202009>

As stated, cultural exchanges among youth have started to develop immediately after the Second World War when the first organizations whose main goal was to facilitate meetings among youth of different nationalities in order to avoid future conflicts started to emerge. The factors with the biggest influence over the development of the intercultural tolerance spirit are the direct contact with young people for the local population and with other youth and the positive practical experience.

Of course, exchanges of this type are directly influenced by the objectives of the youth policies adopted by the government.

Another form of youth travel is **sports tourism and adventure travel**. These types of vacations are an important way of meeting the needs of young people to spend leisure time in an active manner, in the heart of nature. We should emphasize the importance that sports and adventure travels have in terms of shaping youth's personality, the opportunity to discover new regions, new cultures or ways of life or, simply, to achieve a rich life experience.

Adventure travel means more than moving outdoors, it means a little history, culture or contact with local communities, more so than in traditional tourism.

Adventure and sports tourism is increasingly more demanded by youth, gaining new "fashionable" destinations, but especially new activities with a high level of risk. For young people today, who seek thrills, extreme sports (at least they were extreme once) like bungee jumping, snowboarding or surfing in the ocean are not enough anymore. The most "trendy" amusements are much more dangerous, and a top of them would include on the first positions: *volcano boarding* – a type of snowboarding on an active volcano, and not on a snowy slope, *cliff jumping*, *AirKick* – young people are thrown in a pool filled with water by using a catapult, *Zorbing ball* – young people enter a giant ball and roll, etc.

The activities suggested for sports and adventure stays take into account the development of team spirit, of communication and adapting abilities by considering the specific skills of each participant.

Currently, there is a growing importance of leisure-orientated tourism activities aimed at young people with an active lifestyle, who are the partisans of original and authentic products focused, among others, on discovering nature (flora and fauna observation – bird watching, contemplating landscapes – road trips, etc.)<sup>51</sup>. Because of vast beaches, sacred mountains and eco-friendly road-trips, Southeast Asia is and will remain the number one destination for youth seeking adventure.

In addition to these forms of youth travel, there are certainly others with a bigger or lesser importance within the area of tourism.

## CONCLUSIONS

The youth travel sector has been through a rapid transformation during the last decade in terms of a series of phenomena taking place, such as: increased supply and demand, the emergence of new market segments, diversification, professionalism and greater acknowledgement of this form of tourism by the governments of various countries. The youth travel market has certain specific features, and the most important is complexity and heterogeneity in terms of the motivations of young people, which are reflected in the practice of various forms of tourism, and in terms of the supply, which is extremely diversified.

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<sup>51</sup> *YTI Magazine*, July 2010, [http://issuu.com/yti-magazine/docs/yti\\_june\\_2010](http://issuu.com/yti-magazine/docs/yti_june_2010)

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