

# THE RECOGNIZING OF THE VALUE OF EDUCATIONAL TOURISM

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**Abstract:** *today educational tourism is one of the fastest growing types of the tourism and one that is too often overlooked by tourism professionals and marketers. Many meetings and conventions have either an educational component to them or serve their members by being educational instruments. This article highlights the value of educational tourism in tourism industry and shows that education and tourism directly associated with each other.*

**Keywords:** *education, tourism, educational tourism, training institutes, English centers.*

Internationally, educational tourism has been recognized as an important market segment in the tourism industry. Although definitions of educational tourism abounds, the best way to conceptualize the market segment is to look at the broad range of activities. These include the classic education-like school trip and study tours (referred to as a model for benign tourism by some scholars, vacation and exchange programs, under and postgraduate study programs, short courses, and language courses. Nowadays, the definition is broader.

For many in the world of education, the months of June and July represent the end of the academic year and the start of tourism's high season. Thus, from the perspective of the tourism industry as the academic year wanes, new tourism educational opportunities begin to wax.

Educational tourism is one of the fastest growing areas of the travel and tourism and one that is too often overlooked by tourism professionals and marketers. For example, many meetings and conventions have either an educational component to them or serve their members by being educational instruments. Often educational tourism is called by other names, such as career enhancement, job development or self-actualization experiences.

As defined in this report, educational tourism focuses on students pursuing their post-secondary education in Europe (aged roughly between 21-26), as well as adults mastering a new skill. Seniors who take learning holidays are also analyzed.

Educational tourism generates revenues for the travel industry, either directly or indirectly, and while hard data are hard to come by – educational tourism is a tiny niche market – it is worth looking at the factors that govern the movement of people around Europe to further their higher education (in the case of students) or to learn something new (adults).

Educational tourism then comes in a wide variety of formats, yet despite the differences all forms of educational tourism have a number of points in common. Among these are, the idea that travel is as much about self-improvement as it is about relaxation, that learning can be fun, and that learning is for people of all ages. Here are just some of the opportunities for your location to attract educational tourism income.

The educational tourism sector is generally an overlooked sub-sector of the tourism market. This is largely due to a lack of understanding about the concept of educational tourism, its value to the visitor economy and associated impacts.

Although the concept of educational tourism may be regarded as an emerging phenomenon, tourism motivated by the desire to learn is not. Academic literature provides a wealth of evidence to support the view that people have been undertaking education-related tourism in one form or another for millennia.

Special interest tourism is simply a typology of tourists categorized according to their specific motivation which is usually linked to a past-time, hobby, leisure pursuit or other interest. The focus of this interest can be recreational, educational, or in some cases, a combination of both.

Auliana Poon's (1993) visionary and influential book, *Tourism, Technology and Competitive Strategies* [1], claims that changes in the marketplace have given rise to a tourism metamorphosis. She argues that new tourism consumers, or new tourists, are remarkably different from the old homogenous mass tourists. In particular, new tourists reflect a growing, segmented trend towards more flexibility, involvement and participation. This segmentation of the tourist market, allied to product differentiation, has led to the development of a number of special interest tourism sub-sectors – including education tourism – which offer a wide range of products, services and experiences.

Given its importance to the economy, there is surprisingly limited understanding of the concept of educational tourism as well as a lack of research into the various educational tourism market segments. There is also lack of recognition of the consumer needs and travel requirements of education tourists.

This potential growth market is frequently characterized as one where people have a relatively high tendency to travel as well as the time to visit destinations and attractions. The travel and tourism industry cannot, therefore, afford to ignore the needs of market segments such as universities and colleges, schools, English language centers and training institutes.

The most in-depth and rigorous exploration of some of the key conceptual themes in this special interest tourism sub-sector was published by Brent Ritchie in 2003 [2]. His seminal text *Managing Educational Tourism* enabled tourism practitioners, destination marketers and academics to gain a better understanding of the various forms of educational tourism.

Educational tourism is therefore not a homogenous group of products. There is wide variety in terms of both the degree of learning involved and the type of tourism experience. Nevertheless, there are some general characteristics which are common to many educational tourism products. These may involve a greater or lesser level of learning. As outlined earlier, Ritchie presents a simplistic model which classifies the different products as being:

- tourism first – where some form of education or learning is an integral, and in some cases a motivating component of the tourist experience. This may include ‘edu-tourism’ products such as cultural or heritage attractions.
- education first – whereby the actual tourist experience is considered to be secondary to the core educational element. This may include exchange programmes, language schools and university/college courses.

An interesting observation is that potential tourism marketing opportunities are rarely leveraged effectively as the tourism industry or destination managers do not regard them as viable tourism segments. It is important to remember that as a composite offering, educational tourism comprises a core tourist product which is then augmented with additional secondary or facilitating elements, and delivered by a variety of organizations.

The growth and prominence of both tourism and education as key industries over the past few decades has led to growing recognition of these sectors from both an economic and social perspective. It may also be argued that developments in the tourism industry during this time, allied to changes in education, have seen the convergence of these two industries. Education increasingly enables or facilitates travel mobility and learning has become an important part of the contemporary tourist experience.

No matter whether students are primarily motivated to travel to destinations for ‘education first’ or tourism first’ purposes, it is important to ensure that visitor experiences are packaged, promoted and delivered.

For some destinations educational tourism may initially appear to be relatively low-yield. However, this perception is usually due to a lack of understanding about the learning aspects derived from the myriad of available tourism products, as well as a failure to fully appreciate the economic and social benefits of the distinct markets.

### *References*

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