

— THE TOURIST EXPERIENCE



THE BACKPACKER TOURIST

A contemporary perspective

MÁRCIO RIBEIRO MARTINS
RUI AUGUSTO DA COSTA



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THE BACKPACKER TOURIST: A CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVE

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

To my wife Ana for her extraordinary patience, to my son Afonso who thinks I will get rich with this book and to my daughter Maria who came into the world during the writing of this book and who didn't always let me sleep. When they grow up, I hope they can also discover the world with the eyes of a backpacker.

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CONTENTS

<i>List of Tables and Figures</i>	ix
<i>About the Authors</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xii
1 Introduction: Backpacker Tourism, A Contemporary Overview	1
2 Concepts and Segments of Backpacker Tourists	9
Origin and Historical Evolution	10
The Diverse Backpacker Segments	14
How to Identify and Operationalise Backpackers?	22
Backpackers, Tourists, Travellers or Independent Travellers?	25
3 Backpackers' Sociodemographic Characteristics, Travel	
Organisation and the Impact of New Technologies	29
Backpackers' Sociodemographic Characteristics	30
Travel Planning and Organisation	34
ICT: The Impact on Backpackers	41
Transformations in Supply and the Impact on Backpackers' Experience	45
4 Backpackers' Travel Motivations	51
Motivations – Conceptual Framework	52
Backpackers from Different Cultures and Motivations for Travel	57
Motivations and Travel Experience	59
Differences between Backpackers and Mass Tourism	61
Western and Eastern Backpackers	63
5 Space–Time Perspectives of Backpacker Tourists	67
Identity	71
Freedom	73

Backpackers from Non-Western Countries	74
<i>Backpackers from Asia</i>	76
<i>Israeli Backpackers</i>	80
Changes in the Main International Routes	82
Backpacker Behaviour	85
6 Conclusions: The Future of Backpacker Tourists and Managerial Implications	91
Impact of COVID-19	96
Future Backpacking Transformations	99
Future Agendas for Research	103
<i>References</i>	105
<i>Index</i>	125

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

TABLES

Table 1.1.	Hostels by World Region.	5
Table 2.1.	Backpacker Tourism/Tourist Evolution.	11
Table 2.2.	Backpacker Diversity.	16
Table 3.1.	Backpackers' Age Range.	32
Table 3.2.	Information Sources Used by Backpackers Before Travel (%).	36
Table 3.3.	Backpacker Activities (%).	42
Table 4.1.	Backpackers' Main Motivations to Travel.	54
Table 4.2.	Backpackers Travel Motivation for Travel.	58
Table 5.1.	The Countries Most Visited by Backpackers.	86

FIGURES

Fig. 5.1.	International Backpacker Routes and Number of Hostels by Country.	84
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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Márcio Ribeiro Martins was born in Murça (1979), Vila Real, Portugal. He has a degree in Geography (University of Porto – FLUP, 2002) and, in 2005, completed the Master in Natural Hazards Management in the same faculty. Since 2002, he has been teaching Geography at different secondary schools around the country, and since 2011, he has been teaching as an Invited Assistant in Instituto Politécnico de Bragança. In 2020, he completed his PhD in Tourism at the University of Aveiro with the thesis ‘The backpacker phenomenon and its spatiotemporal movement patterns in Porto urban destination’. At the moment, he holds the position of Adjunct Professor at Instituto Politécnico de Bragança, and he is a Collaborator Member of the research unit on Governance, Competitiveness and Public Policy, working in the group on Tourism and Development. He is also an author and co-author of several articles in national and international journals. Backpacker tourism and tourist space–time behaviour are his main research topics.

Rui Augusto da Costa was born in Oliveira de Azeméis, Aveiro, Portugal. He graduated in Management and Tourism Planning at the University of Aveiro in 1988, completed his Master’s degree in Innovation and Policy Development at the University of Aveiro and a PhD in Tourism at the same University in 2012. He is an Assistant Professor in the Tourism Area in the Department of Economics, Management, Industrial Engineering and Tourism at University of Aveiro. He is a member of the Executive Board of DEGEIT and he is also an Integrated Member of the Research Unit on Governance, Competitiveness and Public Policy in the Research Group on Tourism and Development. He develops his research in the planning and project in tourism, networks, governance and public policy, territorial dynamics of investment and financing of small and micro enterprises in the tourism sector. He participates in several projects of applied research nationally and internationally, and he is an author and co-author of several articles in national and international journals. He is also an Associate Editor of the *Journal of Tourism & Development* and a member of the Organizing Committee of the International Conference INVTUR.

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In 2014, I started doing my first academic research on backpacker tourism. Since then, I had the opportunity to publish some scientific articles and finalise my PhD thesis on the spatiotemporal behaviour of backpackers in an urban destination, under the supervision of my co-author Rui Augusto da Costa. This book is the result of six years of ongoing research.

Some years ago, I had the opportunity to start working with my colleague and co-author Márcio Ribeiro Martins, which presented me the backpacker world! During these years, we had the opportunity to work together and to ‘build’ a very good friendship. Research is more than publishing papers ... is to create ties between people!

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INTRODUCTION: BACKPACKER TOURISM, A CONTEMPORARY OVERVIEW

In this introductory chapter, there will be a brief presentation of backpacker tourism as a form/type of tourism whose visibility and popularity have increased all over the world, with a highlight in the summary on its economic relevance to destinations and some of its main environmental and sociocultural impacts. The main purpose of the book will be presented before a brief summary of all chapters, with a complete and consistent synthesis, emphasizing how contemporary backpacking has evolved.

Tourism is an economic activity that is at the heart of the globalisation process. It has benefitted and continues to benefit from technological developments and the emergence and spread of innovations in telecommunications, transport, marketing and management, among others. Nowadays, tourism is responsible for a significant increase in economic growth in many countries, and according to World Travel & Tourism Council (2021) in 2019, the best year ever for world tourism, travel and tourism accounted for one in four of all new jobs created across the world, 10.6% of all jobs and 10.4% of global GDP, and it represented 7% of world exports and 28% of total service exports (World Tourism Organization, 2020). In 2019, 1,460 million international tourist arrivals were also registered worldwide (World Tourism Organization, 2020) – the highest number ever, and more than 336 million were youth travellers based on the WYSE Travel Confederation (2021) website. These figures illustrate the relevance of young travellers as one of the current trends with great impact on tourism activity and among them are the backpackers, the main subject of this book.

Although it is not an easy task to present the economic impact of backpacker tourism quantitatively due to the lack of systematic collection of statistical

data worldwide (Martins & Costa, 2017), it is possible to directly assess its economic relevance from data collected in countries such as Australia or New Zealand, where the backpacker market is well established and indirectly from information regarding youth tourism. For example, in 2020, Australia registered over 2 million international backpackers (Statista, 2021a) with the cities of Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane accounting for 39.4% of this figure.

Therefore, according to the WYSE Travel Confederation (2016) report, the market value of international youth tourism increased from 190 billion USD in 2009 to 286 billion USD in 2014 and is expected to reach the extraordinary amount of 400 billion USD by 2020. In 2014, youth tourism was responsible for 200 million international trips (Tourism Research and Marketing, 2013) and for generating revenues of 286 billion USD (World Tourism Organization, 2016). Data from the WYSE Travel Confederation (2019) regarding backpackers indicate that they were responsible for 44 million trips in 2017.

It is broadly accepted that young tourists are an important market for the future because they sometimes spend more money than other tourists, are more likely to return to the same destination and are also described as more resilient to potential crises. They spend most of their money in local communities, making an important contribution to other economic activities, and have the ability to attract other visitors to the places they visit (UNWTO, 2016; UNWTO & WYSE Travel Confederation, 2010).

However, this book is about backpacker tourists, a complex and heterogeneous group of travellers, which over the last five decades has been transformed from a marginal phenomenon into a global one. Described as a modern trend, 'backpacker tourism comprises the activities carried out by a complex and heterogeneous group of travellers, consisting predominantly of young people who travel for longer periods than usual and with flexible and informal travel itineraries' (Martins & Costa, 2021a, p. 1).

In the study of backpacker tourism, E. Cohen's (1973) contributions are fundamental and provide the basis for contextualising behaviour in terms of society and change. Constituted in the past by a relatively small group of errant travellers described by E. Cohen (1973) as drifters, over recent decades backpackers have become a powerful tourist segment made up of predominantly young travellers who plan and prepare their own trip, looking for direct cultural contact, novelty, spontaneity and risk all around the globe.

Riley (1988) classifies these tourists as educated, belonging to the European middle class, single, travelling alone and concerned about their small budget, travelling with backpacks on their backs and a small daily budget.

A complex and multifaceted form of tourism (Sørensen, 2003) and the lack of consensus among researchers on the current conceptualisation of