



## Niche Marketing for Sustainable Tourism

Understanding the market for sustainable tourism involves understanding the tourists. Market strategies designed for the mass market often result in products, prices, and promotions that are not appealing to potential customers. Recreation marketing may be more effective if it is based on market segmentation and target marketing. Market segmentation is the process of

- (1) grouping existing and potential visitors with similar preferences into groups called market segments,
- (2) selecting the most promising segments as target markets, and
- (3) designing marketing mixes that satisfy the special needs, desires, and behaviors of the target markets.

Sustainable tourists may be grouped into at least 4 different categories, each with different goals, desires, and philosophies. (These categories apply widely in North America. Other nations may have additional categories.)

1. **Ecotourism** - travel to appreciate and learn about wild environments. Ecotourists seek to increase their knowledge about the natural environment. Typical activities are nature tours, short hikes with guides knowledgeable in flora and fauna, bird watching, whale watching, and other wildlife viewing. Ecotourists are personal and reflective. They actively seek guides or other people who help the ecotourist to find, observe, and understand wild nature. They demand guides that are extremely knowledgeable. Other travelers who make the trip cost-efficient are tolerated. Ecotourism is primarily concerned with an individual search for learning and for the associated personal development, and no specific level of social contact is required to make the experience worthwhile. Ecotourists are of all ages, though many tend to be older, and both sexes participate equally. High levels of formal education, and the associated income levels, are influencing factors for those of mature ages.

2. **Wilderness travel** - Primitive travel through wild, natural environments that are devoid of human disturbance. Typical activities are overnight hiking trips and canoeing. Wilderness enthusiasts like solitude, often with a small group of friends. Large groups are intensely disliked. Where possible, wilderness enthusiasts prefer to hike without guides. Wilderness enthusiasts are predominantly young males with high education and moderately high incomes. Because there is strong and continuous dedication to the activity, the average wilderness user has high levels of previous experience

3. **Adventure travel** - Dangerous or exciting sports pursued in natural environments for the sake of personal accomplishment. Typical activities include mountain climbing, white-water rafting, and deep-sea diving. These activities are intensely social and usually pursued in large groups. Adventure travelers, like wilderness travelers, tend to be young and male, but adventure travelers are more social.



4. **Car camping** - Safe family travel in attractive campgrounds, at the interface between the wild and the civilized. Car campers are intensely social and like to have family and friends around. Car campers are of all ages. Both sexes participate equally. All income levels are represented, except for the poor. Car campers, once they have found their favorite spot, return frequently.

#### **Attracting the Older Tourist**

The changing population demographics, both in North America and in Northern Europe, will have profound implications for sustainable tourism. The median age of the population is increasing as the large baby boom generation moves into late career and retirement ages. Age is an important factor in recreation participation. As people age, active, dangerous recreational activities become less attractive, while appreciative and passive outdoor recreational activities are more attractive. Facility-based (skating, skiing, swimming in pools), snow-based recreation (skiing, sledding), and recreational sports (waterskiing, climbing) will decline in participation as the tourist market ages. Conversely, participation in bird watching, pleasure walking, pleasure driving, and sightseeing will increase (Foot 1990). Ecotourism will benefit the most from the demographic changes. It is attractive to older citizens and is well designed to handle their needs. Older people are not willing or able to be involved in strenuous and dangerous activities to the same extent as younger people. If increases in services levels designed specifically for the senior market and changes in accommodations are undertaken, the older person demand can be captured.

The Sage Group (1993) and Tourism Research Group (1990) report that "The environment is a high priority with people of all ages, worldwide." With adults over the age of 65 in Canada, the top three travel interests are history and culture (85 percent), environment (82 percent), and outdoors (70 percent). For a similar U.S. population, the highest levels of travel interest are history and culture (100 percent), environment (95 percent), and outdoors (75 percent). Older Germans say that outstanding scenery is the number one factor influencing their choice of overseas vacation destinations. In a different survey approach, older Japanese reported that nature and environment are the top reasons for visiting Canada. Older people in France and Britain reported that Canada was high on their list of potential destinations because of national parks, outstanding scenery, and interesting wildlife. Clearly, the older adult nature travel market is large, and the associated tourism market may be underdeveloped. Tourism Canada is moving aggressively to help Canada take advantage of the older traveler market for learning about nature (Randolph Group 1994).

Excerpted from:

*Understanding the market for sustainable tourism*, Paul F. J. Eagles, 1995.