



CHARACTERISTICS OF TOURISTS AND FREQUENCY OF TRAVEL IN SERBIA

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Abstract:

Tourism can be seen as one of the leading and most promising economic branches, so it is necessary to continuously research ways to satisfy the increasingly demanding tourist's needs in order to enlarge the frequency and quality of travel. The subject of the paper refers to the examination of the general frequency with which people from Serbia go on journeys. Also, it is examined to what extent travel is limited to Serbia and to what extent to abroad. In addition, differences between male and female respondents, as well as those of different ages and financial status, were determined. The sample consisted of 200 respondents of different gender, age and income. The data were processed in the SPSS program, version 26. The results indicate that, in general, people from Serbia travel often, on average 2-3 times a year, and mostly choose foreign destinations. When it comes to the frequency of travel there are no differences in the scores between men and women, while certain differences were found between groups of respondents of different ages and material status.

Keywords:

characteristics of tourists, frequency of travel, destinations, gender, age, income.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the essential industries considering that it represents a significant source of income and economic stability (Cvijanović *et al.*, 2021). Besides, tourism improves the balance of payments with foreign countries due to the inflow of foreign currency and enables the design and opening of new jobs, primarily in countries and regions that have considered their potential in this area (Papić *et al.*, 2018). Based on this, it can be said that tourism greatly affects the growth of employment, growth of domestic demand, the inflow of foreign currency from abroad, the growth of wages, promotes the development of less developed regions and has a positive effect on the industries connected with it (Đorđević *et al.*, 2021; Milićević *et al.*, 2013; Selimi *et al.*, 2017). At the global level, tourism is one of the fastest-growing industries (Alkier *et al.*, 2020) and it contributes to accelerated economic growth as it generates exports worth 1.7 trillion dollars, and in addition, one in ten jobs is related to tourism (UNWTO, 2019). Also, a large number of business entities are connected with tourism, such as hotels, restaurants, and carriers, but also individuals who generate income from accommodation and the like.

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Considering the fast lifestyle and high-stress level, both in the family and in the business environment (Čolović *et al.*, 2022), people more often choose different ways of relaxation, where travel also plays a significant role. Traveling can be one of the optimal ways to overcome a midlife crisis (Čolović, 2017; Čolović and Stojković, 2017; Milošević and Čolović, 2019), so people, who do not try to deny the crisis with various activities, or those who do not fall into depression due to the changes that life carries with it, decide to accept their age and find a new meaning in life despite the awareness of its transience and finitude (Čolović and Mitić, 2023).

In one study conducted on a sample of 320 elderly respondents in Serbia, it was shown that the favorite travel destinations are spas and mountains and that the main motive is rest and improving health, while proximity to the destination and travel costs are the most important factors in the process of choosing a destination (Spasojević and Božić, 2016). When it comes to domestic tourists, the most visited destinations are Šumadija and Western Serbia, while the most visited destination for foreign tourists is the Belgrade city (Počuča and Matijašević, 2020). Certainly, the pandemic of Covid-19 had a meaningful influence when it comes to choosing destinations because the large number of tourists from Serbia turned to domestic destinations due to the uncertainty of the situation. Even the interest in rural tourism increased in that period of time. In the line of the same study, due to the impact of the pandemic, a large number of tourists as much as 37.3%, from Serbia gave up their journey.

Rural tourism is becoming more and more relevant, as shown by another research results, according to which tourists from Serbia visit rural destinations once or twice a year, about 36%, while about 40% of tourists visit them at least three or more times per year (Tomić *et al.*, 2020). In addition to untouched nature, the advantages of rural destinations are also traditional meals, which are often much healthier than conventional, due to their organic origin (Mitić and Čolović, 2023a; Mitić and Čolović, 2023b). Therefore, agritourism should be included as one of the main tourist offers, especially since it enables the development of rural areas and agriculture primarily and then the entire tourist offer of Serbia (Wojcieszak-Zbierska *et al.*, 2020).

A more recent research conducted in Serbia in June 2021 on a sample of 569 respondents showed that about 70% of tourists from Serbia choose abroad as a destination, mostly neighboring countries (Zeljковиć, 2022). As for the age categories, as many as 55% of tourists who travel abroad, are working age population from 19 to 60 years old, 22% are high school students, 17% of tourists are students, while only 6% of retired people travel abroad (Stojiljković *et al.*, 2019).

Some other socio-demographic characteristics of tourists seem to have an impact on the frequency of trips by tourists from Serbia, so people with higher income travel more often than those with lower income (Božović *et al.*, 2022; Djeri *et al.*, 2014; Mijatov *et al.*, 2016; Stojiljković *et al.*, 2019; Vuksanović *et al.*, 2017). When it comes to gender, no statistically significant difference was obtained among tourists from Serbia in a sample of 673 respondents (Vuksanović, *et al.*, 2017).

The aim of this paper is to examine the general frequency with which people from Serbia go on journeys. Also, it is examined to what extent travel is limited to Serbia and to what extent to abroad. In addition, differences between male and female respondents, as well as those of different ages and material status, were determined. The major problem and goals of the research were tested through the next hypotheses: People from Serbia travel often, on average 2-3 times a year (H1); Usually a foreign destination (H2) is chosen for the journeys; Women travel more often than men (H3); Middle-aged people travel most often (H4); People with higher income travel more often (H5). The sample consisted of 200 respondents of different gender, age and financial status. The data was collected online through a Google Form questionnaire, which was specially constructed for this research purpose. The respondents were informed that the obtained data would be used exclusively for scientific purposes, they were guaranteed anonymity and only after giving their consent on understanding and accepting the above ethical norms they could continue their work. The SPSS program, version 26, was used for the processing of data. In addition to descriptive statistics, Mann-Whitney U was applied to determine the differences in scores between 2 groups of subjects, as well as the Kruskal-Wallis test to determine the significance of the differences in scores between more groups of subjects.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to test the first hypothesis, the travel frequency realized by tourists from Serbia was observed (Table 1).

Table 1. Travel frequency.

Travel frequency	Frequency	%
I don't travel at all	18	9
I travel once a year	63	31.5
I travel 2-3 times a year	95	47.5
I travel more than 3 times a year	24	12
Total	200	100

Source: Author's.

On the basis of the obtained results, the first hypothesis can be confirmed. It was revealed that even half of the respondents travel 2-3 times a year (47.5%). They are followed by people who go on journeys once a year (31.5%), while there are fewer people who travel more than 3 times a year (12%), that is, those who do not travel at all (9%). The current results are not in line with those by Spasojević and Božić, 2016, according to which almost 38% of people do not travel at all. In the current research, that number is significantly smaller. However, it should be kept in mind that compared to the period when that survey was conducted (2016), nowadays is easier to get visas and travel documents so it is much easier for tourists from Serbia to travel. Besides, the offer of available tourist destinations has been enriched by domestic travel agencies, so now domestic tourists have more possibilities to choose from. Also, the investment of the private sector has improved and increased the accommodation capacities and enriched the accompanying content at the tourist destinations, although this is still not at a satisfying level as it should be. The results of this study are consistent with another research (Tomić *et al.*, 2020), according to which even 40% of tourists visit at least three tourist destinations during the year.

Table 2. Tourist destination.

Destination	Frequency	%
Serbia	67	33.5
Abroad	133	66.5
Total	200	100

Source: Author's.

Based on the obtained data, the second hypothesis (H2) can be also confirmed. The largest number of tourists from Serbia decide on a destination outside the country, as many as 133 respondents (66.5%), while 67 of them (33.5%) declare that they choose one of the destinations in Serbia for their journeys (Table 2). The largest number of tourists from Serbia travel to foreign destinations, which is in line with research (Zeljko, 2022) according to which around 70% of Serbian tourists choose foreign destinations as their destination. A potential reason for this could be the fact that the majority of tourists travel to the sea for vacation or for health reasons, which itself implies a foreign destination. In addition to that, there is a much greater offer of cultural content, tourist attractions, historical monuments, types of food and the like abroad, so Serbian tourists who want to experience new things, as their main preference, often choose foreign destinations.

When it comes to the frequency of travel in order to determine the gender differences, the Mann-Whitney U test was applied.



Table 3. Gender differences in travel frequency.

	Travel frequency
Mann-Whitney U	31570.000
Sig.	.361

Source: Author's.

The results show that there are no statistically significant differences between male and female respondents when we talk about the travel frequency, so the 3rd research hypothesis was not confirmed, which means that men and women have approximately the same frequency of travel. The results are in line with another research (Vuksanović *et al.*, 2017) according to which gender is not statistically significant when it comes to the frequency of travel, i.e. that men and women travel approximately equally.

In order to determine the differences that exist in the scores of respondents of different ages, that is, to test the 4th hypothesis that middle-aged people travel most often, the Kruskal-Wallis test was applied.

Table 4. Result of Kruskal-Wallis test – significance of obtained differences.

	Travel frequency
χ^2	11.892
df	2
Sig.	.000

Group variable: age

From the table above, it could be seen that when the frequency of travel is taken into account, differences in scores between respondents of different ages exist.

Table 5. Result of Kruskal-Wallis test – significance of obtained differences.

	Age	N	MR
Travel frequency	18 – 24 years	56	312.96
	25 – 39 years	54	271.81
	40 – 64 years	67	345.79
	Over 65 years	23	192.12
	Total	200	

Source: Author's.

This means that middle-aged respondents really travel the most compared to the remaining categories of respondents (MR=345.79). They are followed by young respondents, aged 18 to 24 years (MR=312.96), then those aged 25 to 39 years (MR=271.81), while by far the fewest journeys were recorded by older respondents, over 65 years old (MR=192.12). The results of current research are in accordance with the research of Stojiljković, *et al.*, 2019, according to which people aged 19 to 60, travel more often than older people. Possible reasons why older people travel less compared to younger people can be problems with health and lower mobility, then lower income compared to the working-age population, and a certain number of them were left alone due to the death of their spouse, so they are not motivated in that measure for traveling as a younger person. In addition, we could assume that there are many elderly who have probably already visited almost all the tourist destinations they want, gotten to know different cultures and locations they were interested in, as well as everything else that is available in the tourist offer, so they don't have as much desire to travel as younger people.



To test the 5th hypothesis, the Kruskal-Wallis test was applied, which is used to investigate the difference in scores among more groups of respondents, in this case between respondents of different financial statuses (income).

Table 6. Result of Kruskal-Wallis test – significance of obtained differences.

	Travel frequency
χ^2	17.254
df	2
Sig.	.000

Group variable: income.

The results obtained using the Kruskal-Wallis test showed that there are statistically significant differences in the scores of respondents with different income when it comes to travel frequency ($\chi^2=17.254$; $p<0.001$).

Table 7. Result of Kruskal-Wallis test – significance of obtained differences.

	Income	N	MR
Travel frequency	Below average	43	202.66
	Average	93	351.23
	Above average	64	291.74
	Total	200	

Based on the obtained results, it can be seen that people with average income travel most often, which is to a certain extent contrary to the 5th hypothesis. This is followed by people with above-average income, while people with below-average income are least likely to decide to travel. The results are partially in accordance with the group of research (Božović *et al.*, 2022; Djeri *et al.*, 2014; Stojiljković *et al.*, 2019; Vuksanović *et al.*, 2017) according to which people with the highest income travel most often because current research has shown that people with average income travel most often, more than those with below-average income, but still less than those with high income. It can be assumed that the reason for this is the fact that people with the highest income cannot allocate so much time for traveling and visiting tourist destinations due to business obligations, while people with below-average income do not have the conditions, that is, their finances prevent them from traveling.

CONCLUSION

Tourism is one of the leading and most promising economic branches, which is growing more and more. With the opening of the world, and the availability of an increasing number of destinations, it seems that tourists have become increasingly demanding. They strive to get the most possible enjoyment for their money. This forced hoteliers, catering facilities, transporters and travel agencies to comply with ever-increasing standards and fulfill various criteria and preferences of tourists. Only a satisfied customer returns and uses the hotel's services and the entire tourist offer, so in the competition for a position on the market, the stakes are increasing when it comes to nature, destination, but also when it comes to providing accommodation, food, transportation, travel services organization.

In the current research, a cross-section of some main preferences was obtained from a relatively small sample from Serbia, so the data of this paper must be taken with a grain of salt. However, its value and importance is scientifically and practically justified. Numerous implications arise from these results. Based on this research, certain socio-demographic characteristics of tourists from Serbia can be considered, so all those entities that are directly or indirectly associated with tourism could better design their offer and create adequate strategies



for attracting tourists. In addition, it can be concluded that the majority of tourists decide to travel abroad, so the state could be more actively involved in promoting tourism and animating the large number of beautiful tourist destinations that our country has.

In this research, it has been shown that people from Serbia travel often, on average 2-3 times a year, and for that purpose mostly choose foreign destinations. There are no differences in travel frequency between men and women, but age has been shown to play a role. So, in Serbia, we have a situation where middle-aged people – between the ages of 40 and 64 travel most often, followed by young respondents between the ages of 18 and 24, and those between the ages of 25 and 39, while the oldest respondents are the least likely to decide to travel. When it comes to financial status, it can be seen that people with average income travel the most, then those with above-average income, while those with below-average income travel the least.

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