Student Travel

BUSINESS BAROMETER

SYTA
The Voice of Student & Youth Travel®

ANNUAL
REPORT
2019

BONARD

Student Travel
Business Barometer
Annual Report 2019

Foreword

Late in 2018, SYTA recognized that there is a lack of data to measure the global performance of student group travel. In line with SYTA's mission to assist our members and the student group travel industry to achieve state of the art business practices, we set out to build a quarterly barometer that would accomplish these key goals: identify patterns in domestic and international youth travel, establish benchmarks for measuring growth year over year, and assist student tour operators (STOs) to forecast their future business.

Our goal was to reach out to 500 global senders of travelers around the world. In early 2019, we began building our database, and published a report on the Q1 and Q2 results in August and December 2019, respectively.

In late February of 2020, midway through gathering data for Q3 and Q4 2019, the storm clouds of the coronavirus were gathering, and by March of 2020 it became apparent that our Business Barometer participants were in dire trouble as the world closed the doors on student travel and most business ground to a halt.

SYTA and our research partner BONARD determined that once recovery began in the student travel sector in late 2020, 2021 and beyond, benchmarks from 2018 and 2019 would be crucial to measure and forecast growth. Therefore, we resumed gathering Q3 and Q4 data in May of 2020, albeit from a smaller than hoped-for base.

What follows in this Annual Report is an important, first-ever quarterly survey of SYTA members and tour operators and travel agencies around the world. In addition to SYTA members, BONARD built a database of 426 tour operators representing 36 countries. Of that database, we received responses from 149 unique STOs, for a healthy 12% response.

In light of the present state of student group travel we believe that this report provides an important domestic and global benchmark by which STOs can measure their growth as the industry recovers from the devastating worldwide pandemic, and envision a set of goals for the future.

Carylann Assante, CAE
Chief Executive Officer
SYTA and the SYTA Youth Foundation

Carylann Assante

Introduction

The Student Travel Business Barometer is the latest initiative developed by the Student and Youth Travel Association (SYTA) and BONARD. It has brought much-needed insight into contemporary global student and youth travel, backed by consistent and relevant market intelligence. In line with its determination to represent tour operators and agencies that create products for young people, and to support the sector by providing advocacy, SYTA contracted BONARD to conduct this quarterly research on student group travel among SYTA members and international tour operators and agencies.

This annualized report summarizes the results of the year-long initiative and outlines an overall picture of the student and youth travel market in 2019.

The research mapped student group travel patterns in the following areas:

- Three key performance indicators: number of students traveling, average trip duration, and average group size
- Preferred trip types in correlation to seasonality
- Popularity/availability of 11 selected destinations for youth travel across the world
- Specific issues that affect the global travel industry (safety, technology, and sustainability)
- Year-on-year business performance comparisons
- Stakeholders' anticipation of developments over the upcoming seasons

The research covers the following mobility types:

- Domestic travel, which refers to any trip conducted within the students' own country;
- International travel, which refers to any trip which includes traveling from one country to another; and
- Global aspects, under which different topics resonating among tour operators and agencies are discussed each quarter.

Research was conducted on a quarterly basis, with the exception of Q3 and Q4, for which a merged survey was released. Operators and agencies expressed their preference for less frequent surveys, therefore Q3 and Q4 surveys were launched as a single data collection scheme. Due to the turmoil caused by the Covid-19 outbreak, data collection for the second half of 2019 had to be extended until May 20, 2020.

For the purpose of this project, student group travel was defined as student tours composed of at least two people aged 10-18, traveling out of their day-to-day environment on the same dates and following the same itinerary, usually accompanied by a group leader.

2019 FACT

THIS REPORT BRINGS THE MUCH-NEEDED INSIGHT *INTO CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL STUDENT AND YOUTH TRAVEL, BACKED BY CONSISTENT AND RELEVANT MARKET INTELLIGENCE.*

Methodology

The survey builds on the primary research method. Data were collected through an online quantitative survey distributed to SYTA members and pre-selected international tour operators and agencies from 36 countries specializing in products for students and youth travelers.

English, German, and Chinese versions of the questionnaire were distributed.

Note: Rounding accounts for any percentages not exactly adding up to 100%.

About Us

SYTA is the non-profit, international professional trade association that promotes student and youth travel and seeks to foster integrity and professionalism among the student and youth travel service providers. It is "the Voice of Student and Youth Travel ®".

If you would like to learn more about SYTA, its activities, and its advocacy for safe and professional group student travel, or get more information about membership, please visit *www.syta.org*.

For news and important information on student and youth travel follow SYTA on

BONARD is an independent market research provider with 12 years of experience in the student travel industry. Leveraging evidence-based solutions, it assists governments, destinations, and individual providers to create bespoke strategies and policies. The company is a United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Affiliate Member as well as a member of ESOMAR World Research.

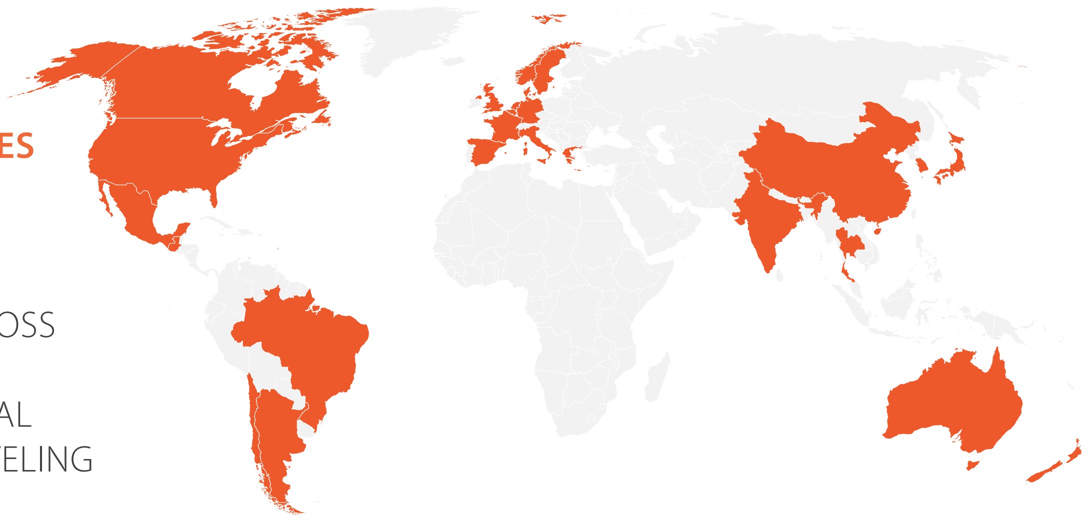
To find out more about BONARD, please visit *www.bonard.com* or connect with us on

For more information about the Barometer, please contact us at *barometer@bonard.com*.

Respondent Profile

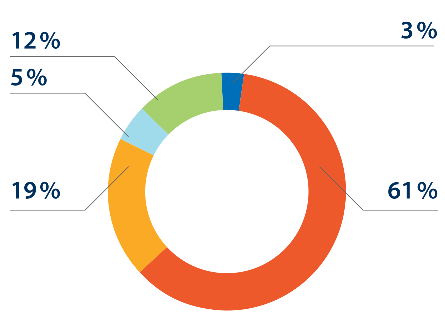
Respondents' country of origin

IN 2019, THE BAROMETER RECEIVED **RESPONSES FROM 149 TOUR OPERATORS AND AGENCIES IN 26 COUNTRIES** ACROSS THE GLOBE. THESE REPRESENTED A TOTAL OF 1.8 MILLION TRAVELING STUDENTS.



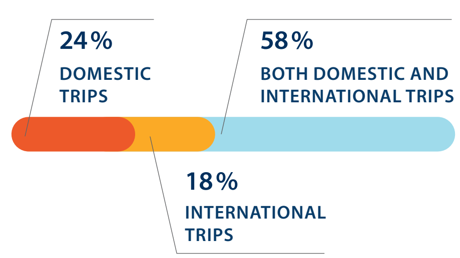
Respondent typology

- **Student Tour Operator**
  Tour operator specializing in organizing tours for students
- **Tour Operator**
  Tour operator also organizing tours for students
- **Travel Agency**
  Agency offering mostly travel products for young people
- **Education Agency**
  Agency offering mostly international education programs



Respondent type	Percent	Count
Student Tour Operator	61 %	91
Tour Operator	19 %	28
Travel Agency	5 %	8
Education Agency	12 %	18
Other	3 %	4
Total number of unique respondents	100 %	149

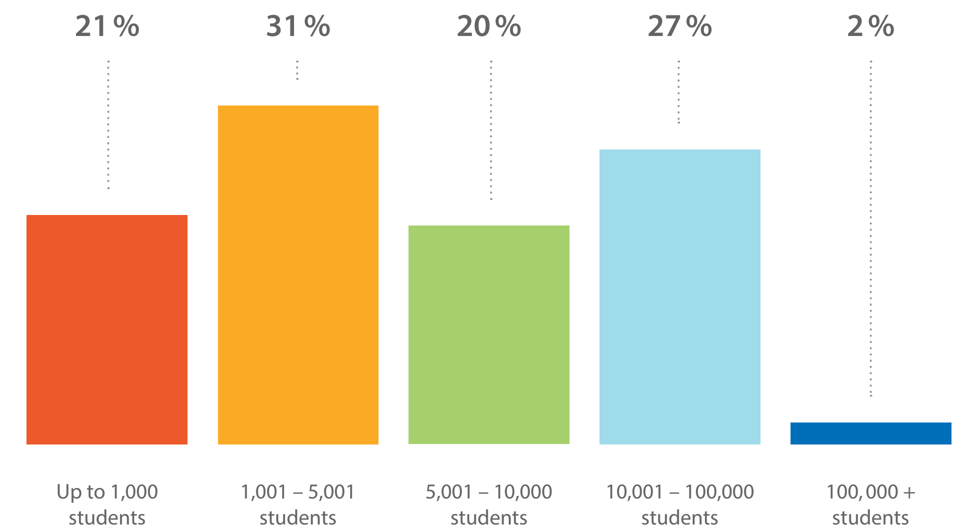
Type of travel



- **Domestic travel** refers to any trip conducted within the students' own country.
- **International travel** refers to any trip which includes traveling from one country to another.

STOs by number of students sent on domestic trips in 2018

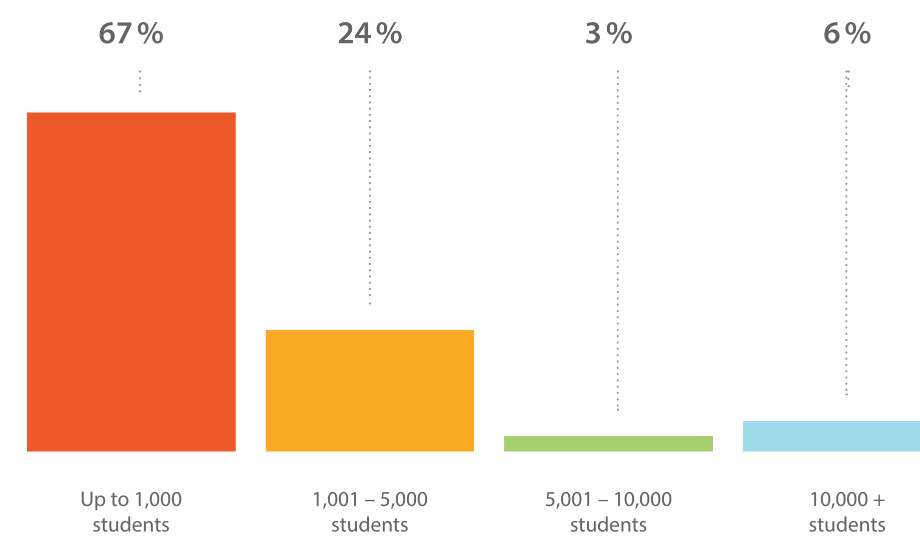
According to data provided by respondents, tour operators and agencies sending up to 10,000 students per year on domestic trips constituted two thirds of the market, with a 72 % share. Twenty-seven percent of survey respondents moved between 10,000 and 100,000 students per year, and 2 % catered for more than 100,000 students a year.



Note: Rounding accounts for any percentages not exactly adding up to 100 %.

STOs by number of students sent on trips abroad in 2018

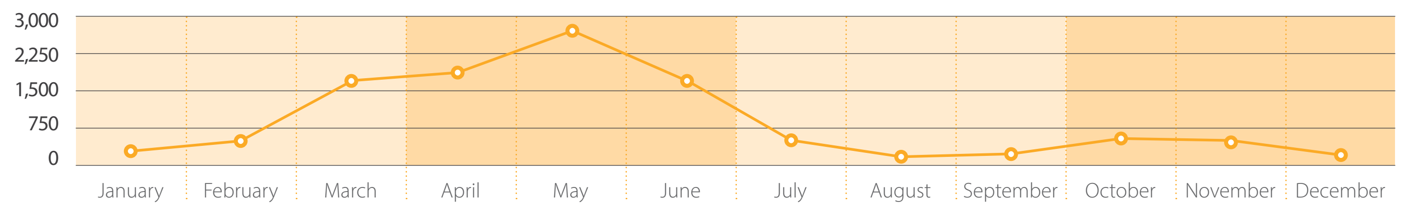
As regards international travel, smaller tour operators and agencies sending abroad up to 1,000 students yearly represent two thirds (67 %) of the market. The remaining share is divided between mid-size companies (27 %) moving between 1,000 and 10,000 students and big tour operators (6 %) sending 10,000+ students per year.



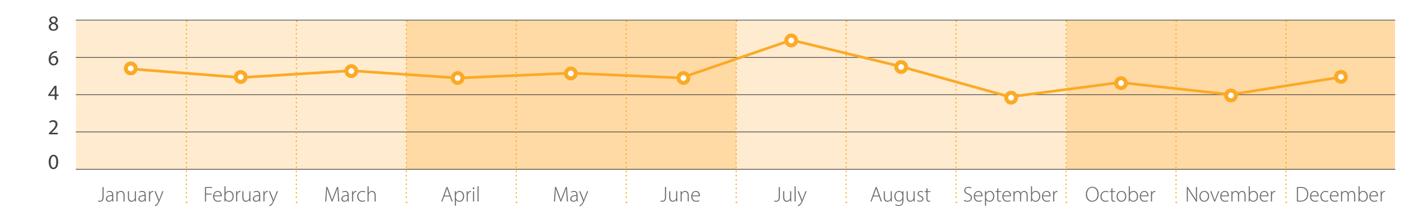
Key Performance Indicators

Domestic travel

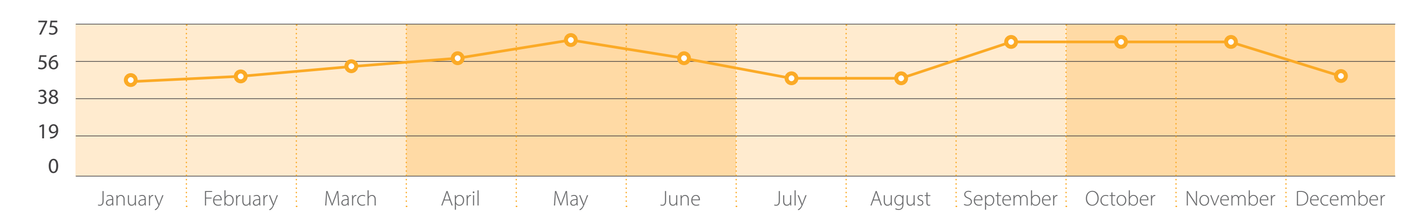
AVERAGE NUMBER OF STUDENTS TRAVELING



AVERAGE TRIP DURATION (DAYS)



AVERAGE NUMBER OF STUDENTS PER GROUP



For the first time since the SYTA Digest published in 2016, this research tracked monthly development in three key performance indicators. The results quantify the seasonality of the industry and confirm that spring and early summer are the most travel-heavy periods for both domestic and international student group travel.

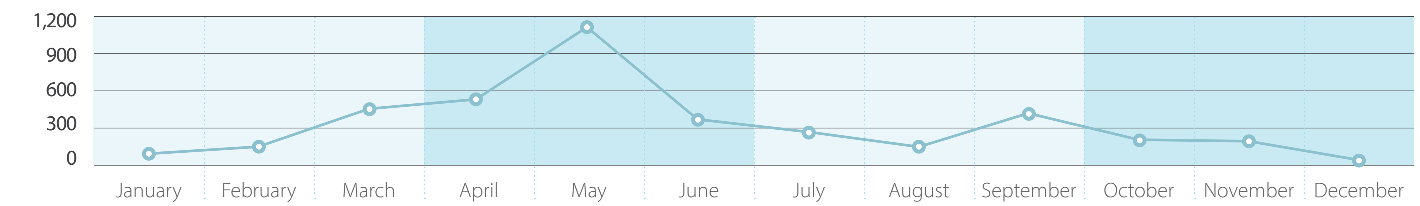
May significantly outperformed other months in terms of student volume, reaching an average of just below 2,800 traveling students per tour operator. April, March, and June followed, accounting for 1,759, 1,662, and 1,584 students on average, respectively. August, September, and December turned out to be the months with the fewest students on the move, reaching averages of only 101, 137, and 207, respectively.

Trip duration remained fairly stable in the first half of 2019, with the average oscillating between 5.0 and 5.7 days. The average trip length peaked in July, when students spent an average of 7 days per trip. Conversely, in September and October students were embarking on the shortest trips, of 3.9 and 4 days, respectively.

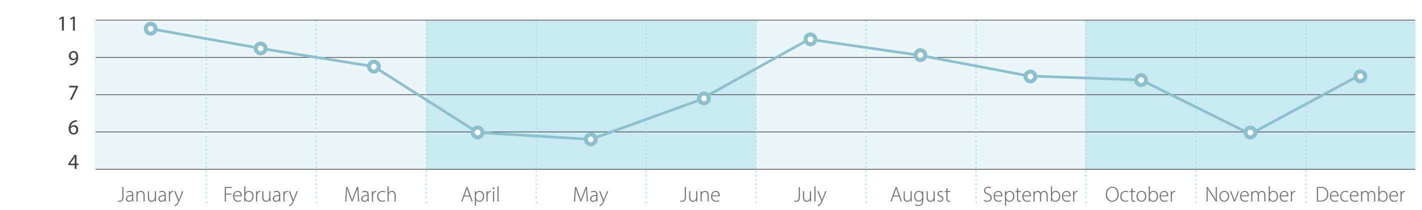
Compared to the previous two indicators, average group size did not record any significant shifts throughout the year, remaining within the range of 48 to 65 students per group. The highest number of students traveling in May also translated into the biggest groups for this month.

International travel

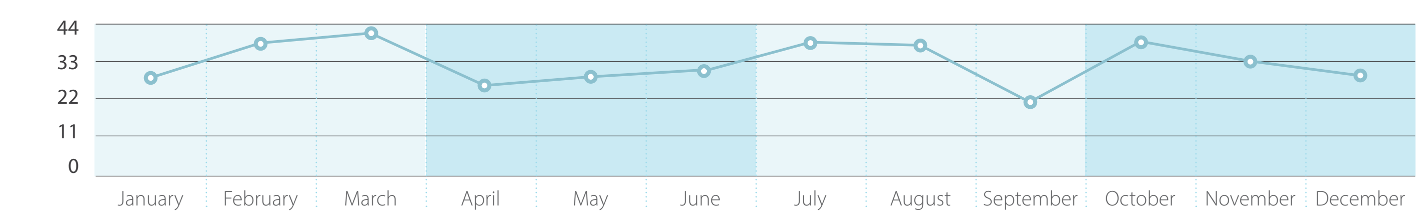
AVERAGE NUMBER OF STUDENTS TRAVELING



AVERAGE TRIP DURATION (DAYS)



AVERAGE NUMBER OF STUDENTS PER GROUP



As regards the average number of students traveling, international travel follows a similar pattern as domestic travel. March, April, and May represent the high season for tour operators. Going into the summer period, the number of traveling students decreases before picking up again slightly in September.

Q1 and Q4 otherwise represent a hibernation season for international student group travel. For December, January, and February, the number of students travelling per tour operator averaged 51, 89, and 139.

Furthermore, the average length of international trips fluctuates to a greater extent than is seen in the case of domestic travel. Students enjoy a bigger window of opportunity to travel in January and July, as a result of which they spent 10.9 and 10.3 days abroad, respectively. This compares to 5.2 days in May.

The smallest groups embarked on international adventures in September, exhibiting an average of 20 students, while the biggest groups were put together in March (43), February (39), and October (37).

Generally speaking, groups on international trips were almost half the size when compared to domestic travel (32 and 56 students, respectively).

Change in the Key Performance Indicators 2019 vs. 2018

Domestic travel

	AVERAGE NUMBER OF STUDENTS TRAVELING	AVERAGE TRIP DURATION	AVERAGE GROUP SIZE
Q1	54 % / 31 % / 14 %	24 % / 73 % / 3 %	31 % / 57 % / 11 %
Q2	65 % / 14 % / 21 %	14 % / 79 % / 6 %	35 % / 42 % / 23 %
Q3	50 % / 48 % / 2 %	11 % / 89 % / 0 %	26 % / 72 % / 2 %
Q4	60 % / 30 % / 10 %	20 % / 74 % / 6 %	31 % / 60 % / 9 %

Note: Rounding accounts for any percentages not exactly adding up to 100 %.

Increase · No change · Decrease

According to the responding organizations, the student group travel industry was in a healthy condition in 2019. Comparing business volume to 2018, most of the tour operators and agencies noted increases in the number of students traveling in all four quarters.

More than half of STOs reported growth in Q1 2019. However, at 65 %, the biggest percentage of tour operators saw their bookings increase in Q2. At the same time, 21 % of respondents noted a greater decrease in student volume in Q2 than in any other quarter. Q3 represented the most stable quarter in terms of number of students traveling, while 60 % of businesses saw growth in Q4.

Compared to 2018, the average length of trips remained the same for more than 70 % of respondents. Nonetheless, 24 % (Q1) and 20 % (Q4) of tour operators reported sending groups out for more days than in 2018.

Average group sizes experienced more notable shifts than average trip duration. In all quarters one third of respondents reported bigger groups than in 2018.

The majority of tour operators in Q1, Q3, and Q4 did not register a change in group size; however, 11 % and 23 % of respondents noted sending smaller student groups in Q1 and Q2 of 2019.

International travel

	AVERAGE NUMBER OF STUDENTS TRAVELING	AVERAGE TRIP DURATION	AVERAGE GROUP SIZE
Q1	46 % / 36 % / 18 %	11 % / 79 % / 10 %	23 % / 64 % / 13 %
Q2	52 % / 17 % / 30 %	11 % / 75 % / 15 %	26 % / 56 % / 19 %
Q3	56 % / 41 % / 4 %	4 % / 93 % / 4 %	30 % / 67 % / 4 %
Q4	40 % / 56 % / 4 %	20 % / 80 % / 0 %	19 % / 77 % / 4 %

Note: Rounding accounts for any percentages not exactly adding up to 100 %.

Increase · No change · Decrease

Similar to domestic travel, the volume of students traveling abroad rose in comparison with the previous year. In the second and third quarter more than half of the respondents (52 % and 56 %) noted an increase in number of students traveling in comparison with 2018.

The last quarter saw less of a boom; however, 40 % recorded an increase in the volume of students and 56 % reported no change in this indicator.

Conversely, numbers faltered in the first and second quarter as 18 % and 30 % of tour operators, respectively, reported fewer students traveling.

The other two indicators, average trip duration and average group size, are less prone to changes than volume of students, as demonstrated by the research. Most of the respondents did not note any major changes in trip duration or group size when compared to 2018.

The number of students per group remained the same as in the previous year for the majority of tour operators and agencies.

Nonetheless, in all four quarters, between 19 % and 30 % of respondents reported an increase in average group size in comparison with 2018. On the other hand, 13 % of respondents in Q1 and 19 % in Q2 noted a decrease in number of students per group.

Preferred Programs

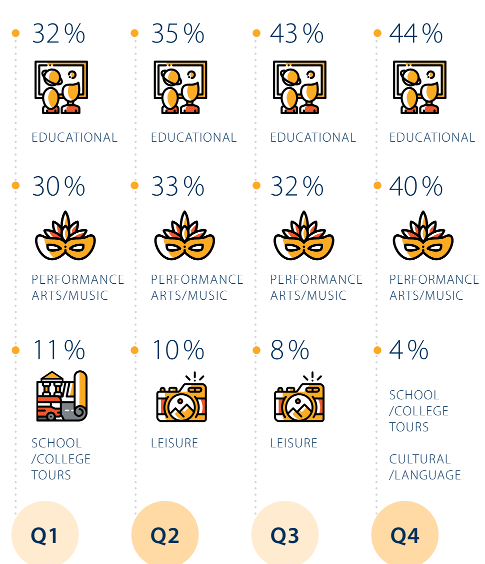
Domestic travel

Trips with an educational component were, by a considerable margin, the most popular domestic travel type across all four quarters, with those offering a performance arts/music experience the next favorite among student travelers. School/college tours, leisure travel, and trips offering a cultural/language program came in third.

Program	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Educational	32%	35%	43%	44%
Performance Arts/Music	30%	33%	32%	40%
School/College tours	11%	3%	4%	4%
Cultural/Language	9%	7%	5%	4%
Leisure	7%	10%	8%	3%
Adventure/Discovery	4%	4%	4%	3%
Community service/Volunteering	4%	3%	2%	1%
Sports	3%	3%	1%	1%
Other	0%	3%	2%	1%

Note: Rounding accounts for any percentages not exactly adding up to 100%.

Top domestic programs by quarter



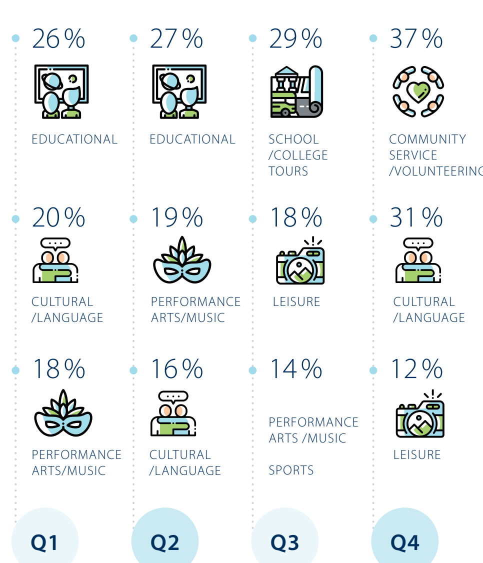
International travel

Programs preferred by international student group travel turned out to be more diversified than those within domestic travel. In the first two quarters, educational programs ranked first, with 26% and 27% of respondents noting these were the most popular. However, in the second half of the year, educational trips lost their lead to school/college tours (29% of all trips in Q3) and community/volunteering programs (37% in Q4). As expected for international trips, cultural/language programs were students' second most popular choice in Q1 and Q4, and the third most popular in Q2. However, in the summer months, leisure, sports, and performance arts/music programs enjoyed greater popularity.

Program	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Educational	26%	27%	3%	9%
Cultural/Language	20%	16%	11%	31%
Performance Arts/Music	18%	19%	14%	2%
School/College tours	10%	9%	29%	1%
Leisure	9%	11%	18%	12%
Adventure/Discovery	6%	4%	7%	0%
Community service/Volunteering	5%	5%	1%	37%
Other	3%	7%	3%	0%
Sports	3%	1%	14%	7%

Note: Rounding accounts for any percentages not exactly adding up to 100%.

Top international programs by quarter



Destination Performance 2019 vs. 2018

The Barometer measured the popularity of 11 selected destinations. Tour operators and agencies were asked to evaluate quarter-to-quarter changes in the performance of the selected destinations by choosing one of the following options:

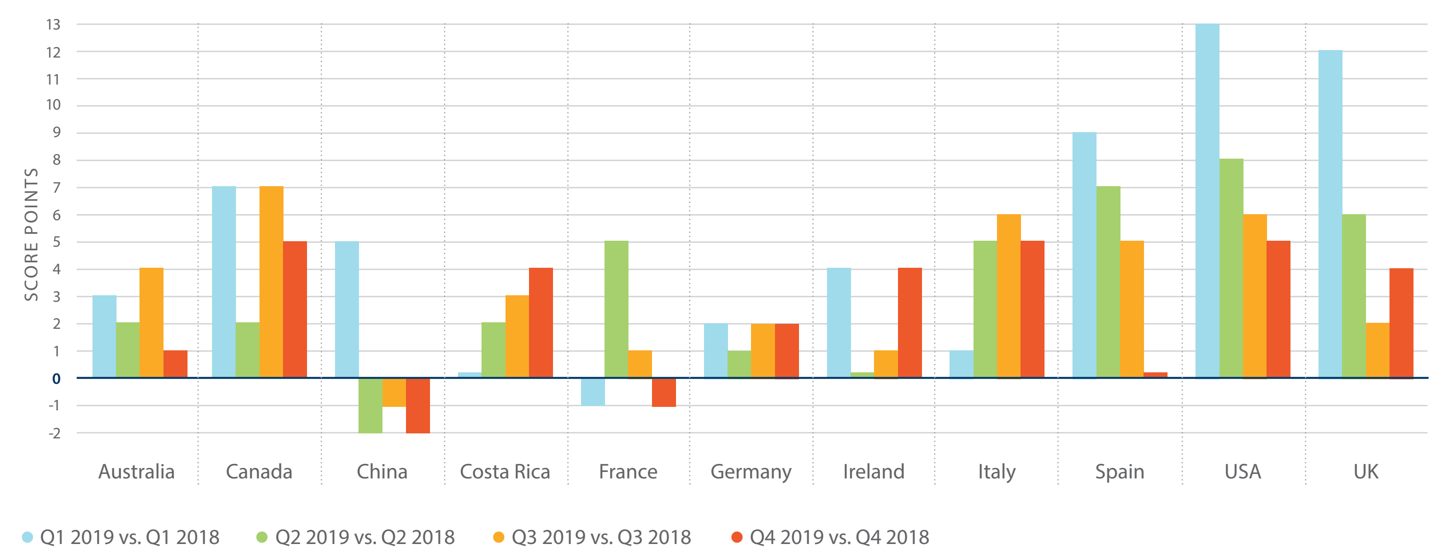
- More popular
- No change
- Less popular
- We do not offer this destination

To indicate the overall popularity of the selected destinations over the course of 2019, a point-based scoring system was devised.

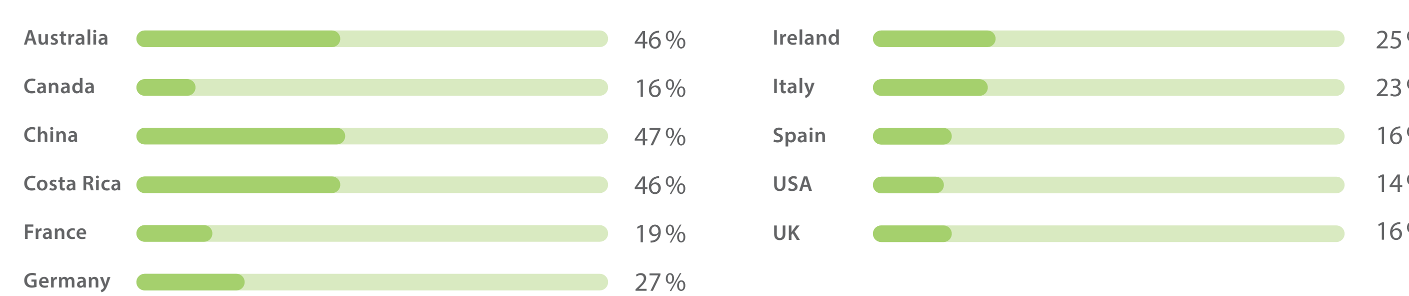
Final values displayed in the graph below illustrate the rise and fall of students' interest in traveling to these destinations. The results indicate preferences and do not represent a headcount measurement.

STOs noted the highest increases in students' interest in case of the USA and the UK, although such preference flattened towards the end of 2019. Canada and Italy also performed well, especially in Q3 and Q4. China and France were the only two destinations where STOs reported a decline in popularity.

Year-on-year changes in destinations' popularity



Percentage of STOs not offering the following destinations



Note: The percentages are influenced by a higher number of responses from tour operators based in the USA.

Industry Feedback on Critical Global Issues in 2019

Safety

Customers continued to place financial and content aspects as their top priorities in 2019. Nonetheless, health and safety has become a top global concern in 2020 and the tourism industry will have to turn this massive new challenge into meaningful change in order to regain trust from their customers in a post-Covid travel world.

Drawing a comparison between SYTA membership and other STOs, **SYTA members claimed to be better prepared for critical situations.** When surveyed in June 2019, prior to the Covid-19 outbreak, 54% of SYTA members said safety and risk management did not represent a challenge, while 59% of international STOs admitted difficulties handling safety and risk requirements. Furthermore, 57% of SYTA members implemented new safety procedures in 2019, of which almost 90% prepared a crisis management plan in the last 12 – 24 months. This compares with 45% and 66% of non-SYTA members, respectively. Increasing demand for safety assurances and the need for global recognition of safety management were more often reported by SYTA members than by non-members.

Role of Technology

Results reveal that all STOs make use of mobile applications and social media to communicate with school, parents, and also students during trips.

A consensus was noted in relation to using GPS and devices that track students during trips. A majority of both SYTA and non-SYTA affiliated respondents did not use GPS and devices that track students during trips. The latest global shifts in the use of technology sparked by the outbreak of Covid-19 show that technological progress will likely play a more important role in tourism than was previously expected. Working remotely, going online, using technological gadgets and applications, digital payments, telehealth and robotics – these technologies facilitate curbing the spread of the coronavirus and will help make society more resilient in the face of the current pandemic and its aftershocks.

Sustainability

Neither SYTA members nor non-members recorded high demand from customers for sustainable elements in group travel. Furthermore, both noted consumers' reluctance to bear the higher costs incurred by such elements if included in a trip itinerary.

More than 90% of all respondents did not follow the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals at the time the research was conducted, with 30% expressing no interest in doing so. **The only operators that are already following the U.N. goals are SYTA member STOs.**

In light of the repercussions of Covid-19 on sustainable development, the U.N. has called for a scaling-up of the response to suppress the spread of the virus, saying that a swift 'response and joint action on the ground' to help the most vulnerable countries and communities is more necessary than ever.

Neither should the ongoing climate debate be overlooked. Following a rise in global commitments to more environmentally-friendly travel behavior, some tour operators cancelled their promotions of long-haul destinations and replaced them with ones that are reachable by more eco-friendly means of transportation than air.

Based on the responses, the results position SYTA as a progressive force within the industry. In the coming years, particularly in light of the effect of a pandemic, the industry is likely to be urged to reconsider travel habits and incorporate more sustainable elements into travel experiences. However, the financial aspects of such travel will still play a crucial role.

89 % SYTA members	have a current crisis management plan (prepared in the last 12-24 months).
66 % non-SYTA member STOs	
Safety and risk management represent challenge to	**46 % SYTA members.**
	59 % non-SYTA member STOs.
57 % SYTA members	have implemented new safety procedures in the last 12 months.
45 % non-SYTA member STOs	
An increasing demand for safety assurances from the customers was noted by	**62 % SYTA members.**
	52 % non-SYTA member STOs.
78 % SYTA members	are seeing a need for global recognition/ understanding of safety management.
68 % non-SYTA member STOs	

Conclusions

In comparison to other tourism or other international student mobility-related sectors, student group travel is under-documented and lacks a data-driven foundation that is regularly updated to reflect current business developments and the needs of stakeholders.

The Student Travel Business Barometer is a dedicated initiative that brings together SYTA members and international student tour operators and agencies to document the state and performance of global student group travel. Research sought to identify student group travel patterns in domestic and international travel, tied in with seasonality, and present stakeholders with a foundation for future benchmarks.

The survey shows that student tour operators and agencies sending students on both domestic and international trips account for 58% of the market, while those with domestic-only and international-only portfolios account for 24% and 18%, respectively.

Results point to spring as the most travel-heavy season and to May as the month with the highest average number of students traveling per student tour operator. These findings apply to both domestic and international travel.

However, the average number of students traveling in May is slightly under 1,200 for international travel, while for domestic travel this number doubles. The higher number of students traveling domestically is also reflected in the ratio of tour operators, based on their sending power. Tour operators moving up to 5,000 students per year domestically constitute 52% of the market in comparison to the 91% share such operators have in international travel.

In year-over-year comparison for both types of travel, the majority of the tour operators and agencies reported an increase in the number of students traveling in comparison with 2018. This indicated that the industry was in a healthy condition prior to the Covid-19 outbreak.

Domestic trips with an educational and performance arts/music background were the top two most popular types, with other programs trailing significantly. Programs in international travel varied more as the top two spots are shared by educational, cultural/language, performance arts/music, leisure, and school tours.

Closing remarks

This research represents the latest snapshot of the global market prior to the Covid-19 outbreak that began affecting travelers in February, 2020. As such, the survey recorded the state of the student group travel sector before the disruption caused by the global pandemic. Many tour operators had set high expectations and had it not been for the coronavirus outbreak, which threw the travel industry into survival mode, 2020 would likely have outperformed 2019.

Evidence-based data and consumer insight are a cornerstone for maneuvering through the complexities of the current situation. Market feedback that swiftly reflects changes in consumers' behavior and expectations, empowers decision-making and helps stakeholders to adapt to new realities with an innovative attitude and effective solutions is vital. We believe that having these data from 2019 will be particularly important as a benchmark for companies to measure against as we move into a recovery phase in 2020, 2021 and beyond. SYTA and BONARD will continue bringing invaluable data and market insights to maintain a source of accurate business intelligence.

Thank you very much for being there with us.

ANNUAL REPORT 2019

STUDENT TRAVEL BUSINESS BAROMETER

STUDENT TRAVEL
BUSINESS BAROMETER

ANNUAL REPORT 2019