



THE ESSENCE AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE CONCEPT OF STUDENT TOURISM

Namangan State University, Faculty of Economics,

Department of Management (Lecturer)

Abror Bakhromjon o'g'li Mahamadaminov

Abror.mahamadaminov@gmail.com

Abstract.

Student tourism is one of the tourism segments that has only recently begun to develop and gain recognition. The main purpose of this paper is to provide an in-depth analysis of the theoretical formation and origin of this field and to clarify how student tourism differs from related forms of tourism.

Keywords:

student tourism; academic tourism; educational tourism; youth tourism; terminological description.

As the contemporary tourism sector continues to expand, the internal structure of the industry is also diversifying and improving. In particular, over the past decade student tourism has increasingly taken shape as a distinct direction in the international market. Today it is evolving into a global sector that serves the diverse needs of students who travel within the framework of higher-education institutions, specialized educational programs, international internships and academic exchanges, scientific conferences and seminars, as well as cultural and educational programs. Therefore, studying the essence of the concept of student tourism, its historical formation, and approaches found in academic literature, as well as analyzing the features that differentiate it from traditional forms of tourism, is of both theoretical and practical importance.



Student tourism became especially widespread in the European Union through programs such as Erasmus+. In addition, student and youth travel has expanded in North America and the Asia-Pacific region due to various exchange programs, internships, language learning opportunities, and practical training periods. Student tourism generally refers to travel by individuals aged approximately 18-29 who are enrolled in higher education (bachelor's, master's, or doctoral studies) or in vocational/college programs, and who travel to other regions (internationally or domestically) for academic, educational, research, cultural-enlightenment, or social-project purposes. This form of tourism differs somewhat from classic recreational travel, because learning, educational events, and experience exchange are central.

In the literature, the term “student tourism” (student tourism, youth travel, student exchange tourism) is also encountered under different labels. It may be discussed within “educational tourism”, treated as part of “academic mobility”, described as “study tours”, or framed more broadly as “youth travel”. The key distinction is that “youth travel” is broader because it includes any travel by young people (including those who may be employed), whereas “student tourism” explicitly presupposes student status and a defined educational purpose [1,2].

The emergence of the term “student tourism” is largely linked to Western literature in the 1960s-1970s, when organizations such as Student Travel Bureau, Student Universe, and student exchange programs began to appear [3]. At the state level, international programs such as Fulbright (USA), DAAD (Germany), and Erasmus (EU) were also oriented toward student travel and contributed to the term’s broader institutionalization [8].

The term “student tourism” primarily reflects tourism-related mobility and travel undertaken by students enrolled in secondary specialized or higher education institutions. During the academic year and/or vacation periods, students travel for a variety of purposes: completing educational placements, participating in international or domestic exchange programs, attending scientific conferences and



seminars, completing internships, organizing cultural expeditions, joining foreign-language courses, and taking part in other educational, cultural, or enlightenment activities. To clarify the terminology and academic approaches, Table 1 presents a comparative overview of related concepts.

Table 1. Comparative terminological description of “student tourism”

Term	Description	Source
Academic tourism	Within higher education, students can be part of this segment; however, the concept of “academic tourism” is more closely associated with academic staff (professors, researchers). Student travel can be treated as a subcategory within the broader academic-tourism domain.	Hall (1992); Ritchie & Lewis (2005); UNWTO (2013) [5,6,13,14]
Educational tourism	A broad form of travel for learning. Students are often the most active participants because of their connection to academic programs; however, this form is not limited to students and includes learners of various ages seeking education or professional development.	Smith & Puczko (2014); Richards (2007); UNWTO (2016) [13]
Youth tourism	Youth tourism is not limited to students. It includes purposeful travel by a wider group of individuals aged roughly 14-29, including those who work. In this	Bywater (1993); Richards (2003, 2007); UNWTO (2013) [5,6,13]



	sense, student tourism is one segment within youth tourism.	
Student tourism	A distinct segment located at the intersection of youth tourism, educational tourism, and academic tourism. It is typically characterized by relatively low budgets, the dominance of educational-enlightenment motives, and the aim of meeting the intellectual and cultural needs of young people.	Blackwell (2009); Minnaert et al. (2009); Bolton & Stanford (2019); Bywater (1993); UNWTO (2013) [5,6,13]

As shown in Table 1, each term relates to a particular tourism direction, and the narrowly defined concept of “student tourism” intersects with broader domains such as academic tourism, educational tourism, and youth tourism. Academic tourism relates primarily to scholarly activities and may include professors and researchers; educational tourism involves travel for learning by people of various ages, with students representing a highly active group; and youth tourism covers any young people aged 14-29, where student status is only a partial segment [10]. Student tourism, by contrast, refers specifically to travelers with student status who undertake travel guided by a clear educational and developmental motive [7].

Student tourism differs from traditional tourism first of all in its purposefulness. In this form of travel, recreation and entertainment are not the dominant motives; instead, learning, academic work, internships, language development, and cultural exchange are at the center of attention [8]. From a social perspective, student tourists (often aged 18-30 and frequently supported by parents or scholarships) are typically characterized as financially constrained yet highly motivated and culturally curious travelers [9].



Figure 1. Differences and common features of student tourism and conventional tourism

Student tourism	Shared features	Conventional tourism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrow age range (primarily 18-30-year-old students) • Budget-oriented travel (lower prices) • Mostly academic/educational purposes • Program-based exchanges • Often not financially independent • Typically travel with friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural exchange • Visits to historical sites • Tasting local cuisine • Use of transport and accommodation services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broad age range • Services from low-cost to luxury • Diverse travel purposes • Often organized via travel agencies • Independent income source • Family and group travel

During a student trip, activities typically include seminars, conferences, laboratory work, visiting museums or manuscript collections, participating in summer schools, and attending language classes, which clearly differs from conventional leisure-oriented travel. From a budget perspective, students usually seek low-cost accommodation (hostels or dormitories) and discounted payments (student discounts), and prioritize economical transport and food options. Regarding duration and repeatability, spending an entire semester or even a full study period abroad through exchange programs is far less common in traditional tourism, whereas students may participate in programs annually or each semester [11]. Finally, the outcomes for students are often visible in positive transformations such as professional skills, research capacity, language learning, and personal development, while conventional tourism more often focuses on rest, recreation, and new impressions [12]. Therefore, student tourism is a distinct form of tourism that incorporates a special educational, academic, and cultural component and addresses the economic and social needs characteristic of the youth category.



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