

## TRENDS IN TOURISM RESEARCH

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### Article Outline

The study of tourism as an academic field is a recent phenomenon and, over the last few decades, the field has experienced rapid changes in research focus and methodological sophistication ([Xiao and Smith 2006](#)). Tracking these changes provides insights into the growth and development of research in the field, as well as highlighting areas for further attention. This paper extends analyses of the evolution of tourism research ([Dann et al., 1988](#), [Sheldon, 1991](#) and [Xiao and Smith, 2006](#)) to incorporate a range of journals that have become increasingly influential over the past decade.

Twelve major tourism journals were selected from the list published by [McKercher, Law and Lam \(2006\)](#): *Tourism Management*; *Annals of Tourism Research*; *Journal of Travel Research*; *Journal of Vacation Marketing*; *Tourism Economics*; *Journal of Recreation Research*; *International Journal of Tourism Analysis*; *Tourism Analysis*; *Current Issues in Tourism*; *Journal of Tourism Studies*; *Tourism Geographies*; and *Tourism Culture and Communication*. McKercher et al used peer assessments to derive quality ratings (on a 1–5 scale) and importance ratings (which combined awareness and quality as a percentage of the total possible score). The 12 selected journals all received a mean quality rating above 3.0, and represented a range of importance ratings, from 16% (*Tourism Culture and Communication*) to 79% (*Annals of Tourism Research*). All of the selected journals are accessible electronically. The contents of the 12 journals from 1994 to 2004 (a total of 2868 articles) were categorised into 21 topic areas ([Table 1](#)). These topic areas were derived inductively from a pilot analysis of a sample of approximately 200 articles, taken from across the 12 journals. The first three journals (as listed above) contained the most articles (together accounting for over 50% of all articles published), and have been consistently ranked as the top Tourism journals ([Pechlaner et al., 2004](#), [McKercher et al., 2006](#) and [Ryan, 2005](#)). Six of the journals commenced publication after 1994.

Table 1.

Change in volume of articles by topic

	% of all articles in 12 journals	% of all articles in top 3 journals		Change
	1994–2004	1994–96	2002–04	
Tourist/Visitor Studies	11	11	16	++ *
Destinations	9	11	8	--
Tourism Planning	9	9	5	-- *
Marketing	8	7	10	++
Cultural Tourism	6	9	5	-- *
Economic Issues	6	7	5	-
Tourism Impacts	6	5	7	+
Tourism Trends	6	5	5	=
Tourism Research Issues & Methods	5	4	5	+
Hospitality	4	4	3	-
Ecotourism	4	3	4	+
Sustainable Development	4	3	4	+
Special Events	3	2	5	++
Transport	3	2	3	+
Management	2	2	3	+
Human Resource Management	2	2	2	=
Environmental Interpretation	2	2	1	-
Tourism Policy	2	2	1	-
Tourism Education & Training	2	2	0	-
Business Tourism	1	2	1	-
Sport and Leisure	1	0	1	+

+ or - indicates a small change; ++ or -- indicates a larger change.

\* Significantly different from other topic areas (using chi-square test of independence).

The most frequently published topic area, Tourist/Visitor Studies (articles that focus on the behaviours, preferences and perspectives of tourists/visitors), accounted for 11% of all articles. Tourism Planning (tourism development, strategies, predicting and forecasting); Destinations (destination image, management and development) and Marketing (marketing, segmentation and promotion) each accounted for 8–9% of the articles. Together these top four topics represented 37% (over one third) of all articles ([Table 1](#)).

Tourist/Visitor Studies, Marketing and Special Events showed the greatest growth during the 11-year period, while Destinations, Tourism Planning and Cultural Tourism showed the greatest decline ([Table 1](#)). To some extent, this decline was due to these topics shifting out of the three major journals and into specialist journals such as the *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, *Tourism Geographies* and *Tourism Economics*.

In order to further explore changes in research approaches over time, a stratified random sample of 144 articles was selected from the top four topics, in the top three journals, across three time periods (1994–97; 1998–01; and 2002–05). This sample represents approximately 10% of all articles published in these journals during this period, and 25% of all articles in the selected topics. Two topics demonstrated above average growth over the last decade (Tourist/Visitor Studies and Marketing) and two demonstrated below average growth (Destinations and Tourism Planning). The sample of 144 articles was subjected to a more detailed analysis of research design, research methods, scale of the study, and country of origin. Descriptive statistics were calculated, and the data were analysed for changes over time, differences between topics, and differences between journals.

The majority of articles (59%) used quantitative research designs, the survey being the most frequently reported (39%). A much lower proportion of articles took a qualitative (19%) or mixed method approach (6%), and the remainder (16%) were review or theoretical articles. Most articles used statistical analysis (70%), including some qualitative designs. Qualitative data were collected in 38% of the articles, and most of these analysed the data inductively. Tourist/Visitor Studies was strongly quantitative, Destinations was more likely than the other topics to use qualitative designs, and Tourism Planning was more likely to use a range of methods. The *Journal of Travel Research* had the highest proportion of articles with quantitative designs (74%), *Annals of Tourism Research* had the highest proportion of articles with qualitative designs (28%), and *Tourism Management* had the highest proportion of articles with other (unclassified) designs (26%), most of these being review or theoretical papers.

Approximately half of all the sampled articles collected data from a single site or limited geographical area. *Annals of Tourism Research* had the highest proportion of studies (27%) where data were collected from more than one country. The percentage of articles reporting research conducted by USA or UK-based authors/institutions decreased from 48% in the first period to 22% in the last. Research conducted by institutions in Australia/New Zealand, Asia


and other European countries increased from 33% of articles in the first period to 59% in the last period. The *Journal of Travel Research* published predominantly USA-based studies (47%); *Tourism Management* published articles from the UK (24%), Europe (22%) and Asia (24%); and *Annals of Tourism Research* published equally across the range of countries.

The results of this study provide qualified support for the patterns identified by [Xiao and Smith \(2006\)](#) focussing solely on *Annals of Tourism Research*. In particular, the present study confirmed the increasing importance of research on tourists and tourist experiences; the decline in economic and hospitality studies; the rise in marketing and management topics; the gradual erosion of the dominance of North America; the increasing contribution of Australia, New Zealand and Asian countries; and the emerging contribution of the interpretive paradigm in some established topic areas.

The three major journals selected for in-depth study differed in the nature and source of the articles they published. Thus, the *Journal of Travel Research* tended to focus on small scale quantitative research using inferential statistics, with a large proportion of articles originating in the USA. *Tourism Management* had the highest proportion of applied and non-empirical articles, with the most articles sourced from Europe and Asia. *Annals of Tourism Research* encompassed a range of research designs (including qualitative designs), countries of origin, and both small and large scale studies.

This brief analysis has tracked the rise and fall of various research topics and approaches within the broad area of tourism. It suggests that as the field has grown, research approaches and locations have become more diverse, although there is still a need to challenge some of the established and traditional methods. In particular, further attention is needed to ensure that diversity is encouraged in the early stages of development of a topic area. The findings presented here highlight the tendency for newer topic areas to preference a quantitative approach. This is surprising given the need for exploratory studies in the early stages of a topic's development, as well as the increasing importance of qualitative methods in Social Science research. Further research might explore the roles played by editorial boards as gatekeepers and champions of particular research approaches and topics. In particular, the extent that editorial policies and decisions by the major journals can shape the nature and development of tourism research merits careful consideration. †

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