

Study: U.S. travelers looking for recreation destinations

By Scott Kauffman, World Property Channel

While the most popular U.S. states retained their tourist appeal this year (Florida, California, Hawaii, N.Y. and Alaska) among American travelers, the allure of several other domestic destinations has increased.

For example, Louisiana, Michigan, Oregon and Washington, D.C., were the beneficiaries of increased tourism, while states like Alaska, Hawaii, Arizona and Tennessee saw slight decreases in interest. At least that's what travel experts at MMGY Global/Harrison Group learned during their newly released survey, 2012 Portrait of American Travelers.

Meanwhile, many destinations that feature outdoor recreation now enjoy a statistically significant rise in interest – namely mountain areas such as the Utah mountain resorts, Lake Tahoe, Gatlinburg (Tenn.), and Pocono Mountains (Pa.). Coastal spots like the Mississippi and Florida Gulf coasts, Atlantic City, the Outer Banks (N.C.) and South Carolina shoreline also showed rising tourism interest.

According to MMGY/Global Harrison Group, other destinations with rising popularity are those that offer unique visitor experiences such as historic Colonial Williamsburg (Va.) and St. Augustine (Fla.), wine-focused Napa Valley and Sonoma Valley and glitzy hotspot Las Vegas.

International destinations with rising interest in visitation include Africa, the Middle East and Oceania (Australia, New Zealand and Pacific Islands, etc.). However, fewer U.S. travelers are interested in international trips overall, dropping to 9 percent of all leisure travelers today compared with 11 percent last year.

In an interesting juxtaposition of interests, MMGY Global adds, more travelers enjoyed both trips focused on outdoor activities as well as city-based vacations last year, with each type of getaway reflecting a two percentage-point rise since 2011 (46 and 25 percent, respectively). And while trips focused on outdoor activities rose in popularity, less-active general sightseeing vacations declined significantly, dropping from 29 percent in 2011 to just 26 percent today.

Gambling vacations and trips to see sporting events also declined in popularity.

If you're wondering how technology factors into today's tourist mindset, MMGY Global/Harrison Group reports the usage of tablets has exploded during the past two years.

While less than one in 10 leisure travelers accessed the Internet through an iPad or tablet computer in 2011, this has increased nearly four-fold to 27 percent in 2012. When comparing the activities performed by leisure travelers on tablets versus smart phones, travelers now use tablets more frequently when comparing prices, making air travel, lodging reservations, or purchasing tickets to attractions and other activities.

Smartphones are more likely to be used for activities on the go, according to MMGY Global, such as finding nearby restaurants and shops, navigation, scanning QR codes, or using check-in features or apps such as Facebook Places and Foursquare.

Overall, MMGY Global/Harrison Group sees a promising tourism future. After several years of being "cost-conscious" travel consumers, Americans are starting to place greater meaning and emphasis on the value of vacations. In other words, Americans are spending more freely and their starting to travel more freely.

Consequently, leisure travelers are doing less of the things

that characterized the economic hardship of recent years and are now adopting more behaviors that confirm the importance of travel in their emerging lifestyles, according to the study of 2,527 U.S. households (respondents had annual household incomes of \$50,000 or more and at least one overnight trip of 75 miles during the previous 12 months).