



## **One in five young travellers put off wanting to study, tour and work in the UK**

- UK falling out of favour while other English speaking countries are proving more attractive to global youth visitors
- Visa controls, currency fluctuations and unfriendly impression following Brexit and controversy over immigration put young travellers off
- Young visitors down to 2014 levels, demand for higher education from foreign students is flat and uptake for English language courses see sharp decline

Britain is losing its traditional reputation as a must visit destination for young travellers wanting to study, tour and work here, an extensive new report has warned.

The inbound youth, student and educational travel sector is currently worth £22.3 billion a year to the economy and the 14.9m young people who visit the UK from abroad represent 38% of all tourists.

However latest visitor statistics show youth travel is no longer growing as it once did. At the same time competitor English speaking countries are thriving.

Unhelpful visa restrictions, the high costs of accommodation and living in the UK and an apparent unfriendly impression caused by Brexit and the controversy over immigration has seen one in five of those initially wanting to come to the UK opt for other destinations.

Last year saw a fall in spending by young travellers for the first time and numbers coming on holiday dropped to below 2014 levels. Enrolment into higher education by foreign students was flat while demand for courses in the USA soared by 44%, in Canada by 51% and Australia by 27%. The UK's global share of those coming to learn the English language has dropped in the four years from 2011 from 31% to 22% and the number of work visas given to young people was down 12% from 2012.

“Thanks to a friendlier visa policy and an increased in-country presence and promotion, the USA, Australia, and Canada have been growing at a quicker pace than the UK, especially in the higher education sector; Ireland's popularity for English language training has also increased primarily thanks to currency fluctuations, “ the report from the British Educational Travel Association (BETA) says.

The report “Unlocking the Value of Youth, Student & Educational Travel”, calls on the Government to review its complicated visa policy and remove international students from net migration figures if we are to continue to attract the brightest and best to our shores.

While Britain is a desired destination with its rich history and culture and its world-class education is still a major draw, the country was no longer seen as outward looking by prospective visitors.

BETA, which represents some of the biggest and best-known businesses in the youth, student and educational travel industry, analysed data from 336 businesses which deal with 1.5 million young and student travellers from 60 countries in drawing up the conclusions.

BETA Chairman, Steve Lowy said: “International travel for the younger generation is not a bucket list wish, it is a high priority, and it provides powerful life experiences, cultural awareness and is an education in itself.

“Travel transcends gender, nationality and age and is proven to provide young people with a better future as a global citizen.

“The UK has a quality product but it is not growing at the pace it once did and competitor destinations are thriving threatening our world class industry.

“It is essential that the UK unlocks the barriers to growth to allow this sector to flourish at the rate of our global competitors, to build upon our reputation as a must visit destination and to grow our market share.”

**End**

## **Notes**

The report highlights the value of young tourists to the economy. They stay a typical 8.2 weeks compared with 7.4 nights for the average tourist, and spent more, much of which boosts local businesses. The average 16-24 year old spends £723 per visit, the highest of any age group. In addition social and cultural links forged through visits can be felt over a lifetime through inward investment, global trade, employment, tourism and the overall competitiveness of Britain in the world.

The research was carried out by StudentMarketing, a market research and industry strategist firm and UNWTO Affiliate Member, who evaluated the size and value of the industry to the UK. An extensive literature review was followed by worldwide research on both inbound UK providers and sending organisations (which represent just over half of all bookings in the sector).

The results draw conclusions from a respondent pool composed of 336 businesses, which cumulatively represent more than 1.5 million youth and student travellers from 60 countries. The study was conducted from September 2016 to February 2017.

## **British Educational Travel Association (BETA)**

BETA members cover the whole spectrum of inbound, outbound and domestic youth, student and educational travel including work exchange, gap years, school visits, language schools, activity holidays, adventure travel, as well as a whole host of specialist agents and operators.

Our main strategic objectives are : to create commercial opportunities between buyers and sellers of youth related products; to highlight the enormous value of youth, student and educational travel to, from and within the UK.

For over a decade BETA has been representing the interests of its growing network of 120+ members providing benchmarking, research, specialist seminars, workshops and events whilst also raising the profile of this fast growing vibrant industry.

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