

RESEARCH / INVESTIGACIÓN

Profile of the ecological tourist, sociodemographic aspects, expectations and activities of the ecotourist in Spain

Perfil del turista ecológico, aspectos sociodemográficos, expectativas y actividades del ecoturista en España

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Resumen: Esta investigación pretende conocer el perfil del turista residente en España que tiene la intención de realizar ecoturismo o turismo ecológico, así como conocer los principales servicios que éstos demandan y las actividades de interés. España es un país que cuenta con una extensa protección de su territorio y a la vez es uno de los países donde el turismo, y en concreto el turismo de naturaleza tiene cifras muy importantes. Se empleó una metodología cuantitativa a través de una encuesta realizada en línea, se realizaron 403 entrevistas a través de una base de datos electrónica de una empresa especializada trabajando sobre aspectos demográficos, socioeconómicos y sobre los servicios ecoturísticos. Entre otros resultados se aprecia que el perfil del turista de naturaleza es hombre, mayor de 45 años, pose estudios universitarios, vive en localidades de más de diez mil habitantes y tiene un salario entorno a la media. El estudio supone una oportunidad para los operadores turísticos, porque facilita el diseño de planes y estrategias de comunicación y marketing para de cara a los futuros consumidores.

Palabras clave: perfil del turista, España, ecoturismo, residentes.

Abstract: This research is aimed to know the profile of the tourist resident in Spain who intends to carry out ecotourism or ecological tourism, as well as to know the main services that these demand and the activities of interest. Spain is a country that has extensive protection of its territory and at the same time is one of the countries where tourism, and specifically nature tourism has very important figures. We used a quantitative methodology through an online survey conducted 403 interviews through an electronic database of a specialized company working on demographic, socioeconomic and ecotourism services. Among other results it can be seen that the profile of the nature tourist is male, over 45 years old, has university studies, lives in towns of more than ten thousand inhabitants, and has a salary around the average. The study is an opportunity for tour operators because it facilitates the design of communication and marketing plans and strategies for future consumers.

KeyWords: tourist profile, Spain, ecotourism, residents.

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INTRODUCTION

Tourist activity is one of the main economic industries worldwide, although significant changes have been taking place because it has moved from mass tourism to an alternative tourism that respects the environment and where the tourist acquires new experiences in contact with nature, culture and the residents of a territory. In recent years, new forms of tourism have emerged, where there are elements related to rest, enjoyment and protection of the environment or knowledge of local culture, through policies that promote the development because society is increasingly aware of the negative impacts on nature, both for economic, cultural and social reasons.

The opportunity of knowing the profile of people who do ecological tourism or ecotourism in Spain lies in the scarcity of global studies that look for the profile of ecological tourists in the Iberoamerican field.

In this comprehensive review, Kim (2017) points out that there are not many studies that set the ecotourist as a study subject, because, on the one hand, the concept of what ecotourism is unclear. Therefore, it is difficult to investigate the subjects who perform it and because the industry has shown no interest, given the low number of people who do ecotourism. This indicates the need and the opportunity to continue to approach the knowledge of these profiles.

According to Europarc (20116), Spain has 13% of its territory as protected natural areas, a figure that expands if the territories included by the Natura 200 Network are considered. Thus, 27% of the national territory is included. Only the 15 parks with the national category generate more than 10 million visits per year (Cobo & Aparicio, 2014).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Ecotourism

The concern for the environment has also changed the development of tourism as an industry, and has led to the implosion of the so-called sustainable tourism and ecotourism, which seek to combine environmental values and the development of tourism (Dias, 2007; Puhakka & Siikamaki, 2012), and which currently grows three times

faster than conventional tourism, hoping to occupy a more prominent place in the global tourism market (Das & Chatterjee, 2015). Thus, the World Tourism Organization has pointed out that 10% of world tourism is carried out on the basis of ecotourism motivations (Pérez de la Heras, 1999) and that a greater increase in this type of tourism is expected compared to mass tourism.

Authors such as Weaver & Lawton (2007) point out that ecotourism began to appear in international academic texts in the 1980s, and its importance has grown exponentially in the last twenty years. Ecotourism combines, according to these authors, three essential criteria: the first is a tourism whose first attraction is nature, the second in its visitors are linked to the natural environment through education and, thirdly, the experience should be focused through practices that are ecologically, culturally and economically sustainable.

The term ecotourism, as pointed out by Jiménez (2009), takes light from the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, where eco-development appears. The Mexican Héctor Ceballos Lascuráin (1987), initially defined ecotourism as:

"Traveling to visit relatively unaltered natural areas, including protected areas in order to enjoy, appreciate and study natural attractions (landscape, flora and wildlife), as well as any cultural manifestations of the present and the through a process that promotes conservation, has low negative environmental and cultural impact, and fosters active and socio-economically beneficial involvement of local communities" (p. 120).

The ecotourist

In the tourist field, Dolnicar (2008) points out that each tourist is different, so the destinations they prefer are also different, although these may have common characteristics with others. This author points out that market segmentation is a strategy that involves people with similar characteristics being grouped together. In the same vein, Neuts et al. (2016) point out that the tourism market is heterogeneous, so it is necessary to segment it in order to concentrate on the interest groups the actions that are intended from marketing by the organizations that carry out ecotourism.

For Beaumont (2011), segmenting requires segments to be measurable, accessible, and substantial. Thus, a segmentation will be effective if there is an ease to access different and relevant groups (Molina et al., 2007). Santes-

mases (1999), developed a classification of the segmentation criteria by dividing into a table of four entries, between objective, subjective criteria and between general and subjective criteria.

Table 1: Market segmentation criteria

	General	Specific
Objective criteria	Demographic: age, sex Socioeconomic: income, occupation, educational level, etc. Geographical: region, habitat, etc.	Consumption structure (large, medium, etc.) Product use Fidelity/loyalty to the brand/company Type of purchase: first or repetition Purchase situations. Place of purchase
Subjective criteria	Personality: leadership, authority, autonomy. Lifestyles: Centers of interest, opinions, etc.	Advantages/benefit sought Attitudes Perceptions Preferences

Source: Santesmases (1999).

The classic notion of ecotourism, as a specialized trip linked to nature, emphasizes sociodemographic considerations when segmenting the market. Following the authors Meric & Hunt (1998), in their research on the ecotourist in the United States (North Carolina) the ecotourist, once behaved as such, which means enjoying his journey with minimal environmental impact, is a consumer with income higher than the general population, middle-aged and with above-average education. However, this sociodemographic classification varies in the different studies, which has caused part of the academy to consider that this data is not the most suitable for differentiating between ecotourists and those who are not (Dolnicar & Long, 2009).

The most common profile, according to Nel.lo & LLanes (2016), it corresponds to a person with studies, active, educated, intelligent, curious, adventurous and with previous knowledge of the place to visit. The ecotourist seeks the new, wishes cultural exchange, learning and prefers a personalized and quality service. The ecotourist also seeks freedom, exclusivity and privacy. In relation to the activities he develops during his trip, bird watching, photography, botanical studies, diving observation, compared to the generalist or recreational activities carried out by

the traditional tourist. Regarding the way they behave, it should be noted that they choose to move in small groups with specialized guides. their purchases are usually mostly through tourist packages with a high expense per day.

In relation to the activities carried out by ecotourists, Nel.lo & LLanes (2016), mention a WWF study in 1998 conducted in Latin America and the Caribbean, where they point out that the main activities in the natural environment that visitors did, as a form of classification were: bird watching (58%), wildlife watching (55%), boat rides (42%), botany (31%), trekking (28%), knowledge of local cultures (25%), jungle walks (23%) and climbing (22%).

METHODOLOGY

An online research was proposed in Spain through a questionnaire in collaboration with the database of a market research company. The initial characteristics of the sample were: a) Tourists who mentioned their status as an ecotourist, b) Over 15 years and c) Spanish nationals residing in Spain.

In order to generate an adequate filter for the sample, the first premise was to obtain ecotourism individuals, after

a complete explanation of the concept. In the following terms "we understand by ecotourist, as that person who has performed one of the following activities: having visited nature parks, reserves, bird or whale watching, visits to indigenous communities; mountaineering, trekking, hiking, ethnic or indigenous tourism, safari, agrotourism, rural tourism, having been housed in an eco-friendly hotel, etc., with respect for nature, for learning and those who, at least, have developed one of these activities over the past year, assimilating these criteria to employees by online research on specific tourism," based on Han et al. (2016).

First, the collection and analysis of the bibliographic references on ecotourism and consumer behavior were taken into account, in order to identify the most important literature on these subjects, research methods and the main results of other studies, as well as the spaces to develop our work.

The questionnaire consists of the following parts:

- Demographic variables, in which we have included: age, sex (man/woman) and place of residence (more/less than 100,000 inhabitants).
- Socioeconomic variables, where questions about monthly salary and household income, as well as the educational level

Subsequently, a pretest was applied to validate the questionnaire, through industry experts and ecotourism con-

sumers. The original questionnaire was distributed to 31 Spanish visitors, from the Natural Park the Lagunas de Ruidera, on April 15, 2017. The purpose was to check the good understanding of the questionnaire and to know the time spent in its completion. Throughout that day, the questionnaires were completed by 16 women and 15 males, aged over 15 years. Its completion provided no doubts to all the persons who took the questionnaire, except what had to do with the extension of the questionnaire and the duration.

According to the students, the main difficulties of the questionnaire were:

- In question 7. The term Snorkeling was removed due to its ignorance, and opted for the generic name diving.
- Regarding the economic variables, some doubts aroused with the gross or net concept of the income.

In this research it was opted for an online survey to a consumer panel of the market research company Netquest, which is available from panelists in Spain. This brings us closer to the consumer group in which we are interested in the online format. We are also looking for greater interest and participation of respondents. On the other hand, it was considered that in the online survey the anonymity of the interviewees is broader and surely it can facilitate the authenticity of the answers, as well as improves the comfort of the users to fill it out.

Table 2: Research data sheet.

Data sheet	
Date of completion	October 17
Data collection method	Online format with company support.
Data analysis techniques	Univariate techniques; descriptive and frequency.
Universe	Spanish tourist population.
Sample	403 National tourists from Spain.
Sampling error	95%, 5% per sample.
Confidence level	p=q 0.50
Sample procedure	By quotas: age and sex of tourists.
Methodology	Quantitative.
Scales	Likert of 5 points.
Control measures	Pretest: April 15, 2017 Ruidera, Royal City (Spain).
Place of completion	Spain.

The sample is based on the results of the survey of tourist movements of Spaniards (Familitur), carried out in 2016 by the National Institute of Statistics (2016). This collects data related to the trips made by residents in Spain. The calculation was performed

the by gender and age. The questionnaire begins with the questions of age and sex, and with a broader question aimed to exercise a filter in relation to ecotourism activities in a previous period of time. See Table 3.

Table 3: Filter question for questionnaire.

Ítem	Measure
Which of these activities have you carried out in the last year?	Visit national Parks, reserves, safaris, bird or whale watching.
	Mountaineering, trekking or hiking.
	Ethnic or indigenous tourism.
	Agrotourism or rural tourism.
	Visit a large city.
	Go to a concert or music festival.
	Sun and beach tourism.
	Visit cultural or heritage places.
None of the above.	

RESULTS

This research was focused on different sections. On the one hand, to understand the demographic and socioeconomic aspects. It can be observed that both genders (men and women) are represented in the sample in equal parts, as seen in Table 4.

Table 4: Sample distribution by gender

	Spain
Man	208
Woman	195
Total	403

In the sample, 208 men and 195 women completed the questionnaire. The p-value for the Pearson chi-square test reveals that the distribution between genders is equitable.

Table 5: Sample distribution by country and age

Age range	Frequency in Spain	Spain percentage
16-29	82	20.35%
30-44	134	33.3%
45-64	141	35%
>=65	46	11.4%
Total	403	100%

It was found that, among the respondents, in Spain 81% live in cities with more than 10,000 inhabitants. In relation to tourists living in municipalities of less than 10,000 inhabitants, in Spain, the percentage is 19%.

Table 6: Distribution of the sample grouped by residence.

	Frequency in Spain	Spain percentage
Locality with more than 10,000 Inhabitants	326	81%
Locality with less than 10,000 Inhabitants	77	19%
Total	703	100%

In relation to the employment situation by country (see Table 7), it was found that the percentage of employees is 58.56%. On the contrary, the number of self-employed or self-employed workers is 0.96% of the Spanish ecotourists. On the other hand, the unemployed account for 5.96%. For businessmen, the figure is 0.99%.

Regarding people who work in the household, the figures are similar, 2.33% and 2.71%. Students are more numerous in the sample, with 8.44%. Finally, in the case of retirees, these represent 14.9% of the sample.

Table 7: Distribution of the sample grouped by labor situation and country. P-value

	Frequency in Spain	Spain percentage
Employee	236	58.56%
Independent/autonomous	24	5.96%
Unemployed	34	8.44%
Businessman	4	0.99%
Household work	9	2.23%
Student	34	8.44%
Retiree	56	13.90%
Others	6	1.49%
Total	403	100.00%

In relation to the educational level, please see table 8. It can be mentioned that the largest group is that of university graduates, with 45.66% in Spain. In relation to people with postgraduate degrees or higher, in Spain the percentage is 15.38% of the sample. For people with higher technical qualifications the percentage reaches 15.88%. The percentage of people without studies or these are basic level is 2.48%. Finally, people with average qualifications are, in the case of Spain, 20.60% of the sample.

Table 8: Distribution of the sample per country and educational level.

	Frequency in Spain	Spain percentage
Without education	0	0.00%
Primary education	10	2.48%
Secondary education	83	20.60%
Higher technician	64	15.88%
University level	184	45.66%
Postgraduate	62	15.38%
Total	403	100.00%

Regarding the self-consideration by the ecotourists surveyed and their income level in Spain – with an average monthly salary of 1,500 euros- it was found that there is a significant part of the sample, 11.47%, that decides not to provide that data, as shown in Table 9. Among those who do facilitated them, the majority group are people who

self-locate close to that figure (31.025%), above it, 24.57% and well above it, 1.74%. On the opposite side it was found that people who do not have their own income, represent 8.44% and those who self-locate far from the average figure, represent 22.83%.

Table 9: Distribution of the sample of Spain by monthly salary.

	Frequency	Percentage
Without own income	34	8.44%
Well below the figure	92	22.83%
Close to the figure	125	31.02%
Above the figure	99	24.57%
Well above the figure	7	1.74%
I prefer not to answer	46	11.41%
Total	403	100%

In relation to the total gross household income in Spain, as shown in Table 10, a high percentage of non-answers was found (15.1%). Among those who do respond, the largest group are households with total gross incomes over 2,700 euros per month, which account for 9.5%, very close are those that enter between 2,001 and 2,700 euros, which represent 9.4% and those that claim to have between 1,301 and 2,000 euros, which is 8.3% of the people surveyed. In lower figures, people whose gross household income is between 901 and 1,300 euros (5.1%) are found, as well as those who point out that they have household incomes between 0 and 900 euros. This represents a collective of 2.5% of respondents.

Table 10: Distribution of gross income by household: Spain.

	Frequency	Percentage
0 to 900 euros per month	20	4.96%
901 to 1,300 per month	41	10.17%
1,301 to 2,000 per month	67	16.63%
2,001 to 2,700 per month	76	18.86%
More than 2,700 per month	77	19.11%
I prefer not to answer	122	30.27%
Total	403	100%

Regarding the question, already used by Juric et al. (2002), with whom ecotourism is made (see Table 11) respondents show that they travel independently by 69.98%, through a tour organized by 0.99% and combining both forms, 29.03%.

Table 11: Statistics on how to travel by country.

	Frequency in Spain	Spain percentage
Independently	282	69.98%
Though an organized tour	4	0.99%
Both	117	29.03%
Total	403	100%

Accommodation during the trip is one of the essential issues when doing tourism. In this case the option of being able to point out several types of more usual accommodation was possible. On the other hand, rural accommodations were the most used (see table 12).

Table 12: Statistics about accommodation during the trip by country .

	Frequency in Spain
Hotel	151
Hostel/lodging	191
Eco-friendly hotel	43
camping/tent/cabin	146
Rural accommodation	267
House of friends or acquaintances	99
Others	18

In this case, the first question asked is aimed to collect information on how to travel, alone or accompanied. This is a multiple-choice question, listed in Table 13, already used by Juric et al. (2002). These authors note that the most common form is to travel as a couple.

Table 13: Statistics on people with whom travels are made by country.

	Frequency in Spain
Alone	51
Couple	245
Family	144
Friends	193
Others	6

This question is aimed to collect data regarding the activities that can be carried out in an ecotourism experience. This is a multiple-choice question presented in Table 14, already used by several authors (Weaver & Lawton, 2002; Toselli, 2014; Ballesteros-Pelegrín, 2014; Marchena, 2015; Nel.lo & Llanes, 2016). The three ecotourism activities (see Table 14) are: hiking, landscape observation and visit to natural parks.

Table 14: Ecotourism activities by country.

	Frequency in Spain
Camping in nature	99
Marine diving, in rivers, lakes or eco-diving	41
Cycling andy mountain bike	100
Eco-archeology	21
Climbing	35
Scientific studies or scientific expeditions	9
Geological or speleological exploration	31
Mountaineering	191
Whale and turtle watching	32
Wildlife observation	173
Wild flora observation	155
Observation of natural landscapes	297
Bird watching	109
Horseback riding for natural areas	41
Sport fishing	22
Trekking and tours for delimited paths	361
Land and sea photographic trips or safaris	34
Visit to indigenous communities and knowledge of local cultures	30
Visit to national and natural parks	314
Visits to tropical forests and indigenous shrubs	41
Others	6

With regard to belonging to an environmental, animalist or animal protection association, as shown in Table 15, the majority of respondents (85.4%) declare they do not belong to any of these entities.

Table 15: Belonging to an ecologist association or similar.

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	118	14.6%
No	691	85.4%
Total	809	100%

By country, in relation to data of belonging or not to an ecologist association or similar, it was found that this figure is 11.91%.

Expectations about the services received from ecological tourism

Regarding the expectations of the ecological tourism services, 5 questions were asked using a 5-point Likert scale, which corresponds to a multiple-choice question used by Lewis et al. (2014).

The questionnaire asked for five exceptions about the quality different services of the tour guide, quality of information, ecological importance of destination, accessibility of the destination and facilities of the destination. The average scores of these expectations vary depending on the different claims. On the one hand, the importance of the quality of the tour guide is the least valued, subsequently we find that the second least valued element are the facilities, the third the accessibility of the service and the quality of the information. On the other hand, the most valued element is the ecological importance of fate (see table 16), as do other classical studies in developed countries, such as Fennel & Eagles (1990) and Lewis et al., (2014). However, they differ from these in the values so low that the Spanish sample has of the role of the importance of the quality of tour guide, which takes it away from the approach of Lewis et al., (2014).

Table 16: Expectations about tourist services.

Ítem	Media
Item	Mean
What matters most to me in the ecological trip is the quality of the tour guide.	3,34
What matters most to me in the ecological	

trip is the quality of the information provided by the tourist destination.	3,85
What matters most to me in the ecological trip is the ecological importance of the tourist destination.	4,04
What matters most to me in the ecological trip is the accessibility of the tourist destination.	3,52
What matters most to me in the ecological trip is the facilities of the tourist destination.	3,43

CONCLUSIONS

At present, postmodern society yearns for and esteems about nature in its leisure time, which is driving different forms of alternative tourism, including ecological tourism or ecotourism. This increase in the number of visits represents an opportunity for tourism and ecotourism companies to combine economic growth and nature protection.

o knowing in a better way the profile of people who practice ecological tourism or ecotourism, and more specifically of the expectations in relation to certain services, involves providing information to the tour operators which facilitates that they can develop plans, strategies and outreach campaigns. Among other things, these improve the tourist experiences of ecotourists before, during and after their tourism activity, contributing to the improvement of environmental education experiences that this typology of ecotourism carries with it.

The quantitative limitation of this study indicates the opportunity to carry out new studies about the quantitative variables of this type of tourism and to do so over time beyond the transactional character of the questionnaire. On the other hand, it is possible to improve the quality of the sample used.

The investigation of ecotourism profiles can be equally carried out globally as in this research and be applied to more specific territories or areas of research that may be useful for the tourism industry.

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