CHARACTERISTICS OF FREE INDEPENDENT TOURISTS (FIT) AND ORGANIZED TOURISTS: A COMPARISON

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Abstract - In recent years independent tourism has captured an increasing share of international tourism. The characteristics of Free Independent Tourists(FIT)differ from those of organized tourists. The purpose of the current research is to identify the characteristics of FIT tourists in order to encourage this type of tourism and increase the effect on tourists' expenses. The current research is based on a data set collected from 748 tourists at the conclusion of their visit to Israel in 2016.Initial results indicate that FIT tourists usually are more educated than organized tourists yetthe groups do not differ in age. The results of the current study imply that suppliers of independent tourist services should appeal to customers with higher education.

Index Terms - Expenses, FIT tourists, organized tours, tourism.

I. INTRODUCTION

International tourismis growing every year. In 2012 the number of international tourists reached one billion,andtheir expensestotaled 1.5 trillion dollars. This number is expected to continue to increase to 1.8 billion tourists in 2030 (UNWTO, 2013). About two-thirds of these tourists are independent tourists (FIT). For example, in 2012independent tourists accounted for around 70 percent of all tourists in China(Kristensen, 2013). The number of international tourists in Israel is also increasing. In 2017 a record 3.6 million tourists came to Israel (Israel Ministry of Tourism,2017), generating 5.5 billion dollars in income. In the past most tourists to Israel came on organized tours , but recently the number of independent tourists increased significantly and is now about two third of the tourism to Israel. Understanding the different characteristics of those two groups of tourists is crucial for the Israeli ministry of tourism and for the tourism suppliers. The characteristics of independent tourists differ from those of organized tourists, yet most research does not differentiate between the two types. Independent tourists often have more experience with destinations and more knowledge of foreign travel.
The independent touristare more educated and are looking for challenges and self-realization. Moreover,independent tourists spend more money during their trip and therefore have a greater impact on the economy. The purpose of this research is to focus on the different characteristics of the independent tourist and organized tourist visiting Israel in order to allow the Israeli ministry of tourism and the tourism suppliers to address the proper market when advertising Israel.

II. METHODS

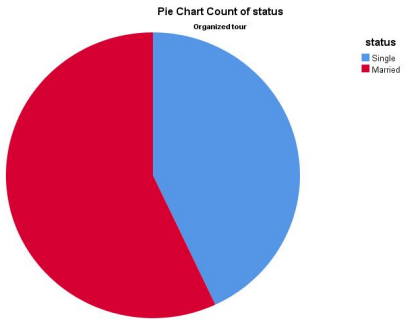
This researchused a questionnaire distributed among tourists at the conclusion oftheir trip to Israel. The survey included tourists that stayed in Israel at least one night. A company that conductssurveys forthe Israel Ministry of Tourism administered the surveyat Ben Gurion Airport, the main entry point to Israel, after the tourists had cleared passport control and were waiting to board their plane.

The survey was conducted between July and August 2017. Respondents were told that participation in the study was voluntary. According to company reports, the response rate was 95 percent.

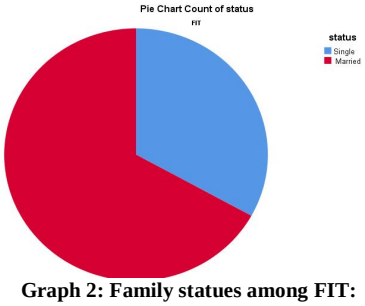
III. RESULTS

The survey included 748 tourists: 464 independent tourists and 284 tourists that came on organized tours. Tourists that come on organized tours usually come for touring or for religious purposes. However, tourists that come as FIT come for variety of reasons: touring, religious, visiting friends and family, recreation and business.

The source of information is also very different between those two groups. Tourists that come on organized tours get their information from travel agent or their church and community while the FIT relays mainly on the internet as their source of information.
Graph 1 and 2 present the distribution of male and female in the two groups.



Graph 1: Family statues in organized tours:



Graph 2: Family statues among FIT:

As can be seen on the graph most of the tourists that come as FIT are married (about 70 percent), while singles prefer to come on organized tours. In order to identify the differences between the groups we performed T-test for independent variables. The results of T test of the difference between FIT and organized tourists are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: T-test results.

	Type	N	Mean	STD
Length of stay	Organized	177	10.54	11.45*
	FIT	429	14.70	39.97
Return visit	Organized	284	1.21	0.41*
	FIT	429	1.46	0.5
Gender	Organized	283	1.58	0.495*
	FIT	429	1.49	0.5
Age	Organized	284	4.26	1.62
	FIT	429	4.24	1.4
Party size	Organized	284	1.52	0.91
	FIT	429	1.45	0.82
Level of education	Organized	177	3.53	1.153*
	FIT	429	4.07	0.924
Change the perception of Israel	Organized	284	2.74	0.456*
	FIT	429	2.52	0.545
Intend to return	Organized	284	4.11	0.972*
	FIT	429	4.38	0.929

The results indicate that most of the tourist to Israel are between the ages 35 to 45 and that there is no significant difference between the two groups. Nevertheless, most tourists that come to Israel have an academic degree. However, independent tourists had a higher level of education than tourists that came on organized tours. More women than men visit Israel. However, women prefer organized tours while men prefer to come as FIT. Independent tourists tend to stay for a longer periods. The independent tourist usually stays for 15 days while the tourist that come on organized tours usually stays 10.5 days. For more than third of the tourists (thirty six percent) this is a return visit to Israel. First-timers usually come on organized tours, while repeated visits are made as FIT. Most of the tourist that visited Israel indicate that they will re-visit it in the future. The FIT had significantly higher intention to visit Israel in the future. Surprisingly the party size in organized tours is larger than in FIT tours (1.52 and 1.45 respectively). Most of the tourists to Israeli said that the trip improved their perception of Israel. There is a significant difference between FIT and organized tour. More tourists that come on organized tours changed their perception positively.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Due to the increase number of international tourists in the world today and in Israel specifically and therefore the increased importance in the country's economics it is extremely important to understand the characteristics of those tourists. In the past most tourists to Israel came on organized tours , but recently the number of independent tourists increased significantly and is now about two third of the tourism to Israel. Understanding the different characteristics of those two groups of tourists is crucial. The study resultsindicate that FIT tourists indeed differ from organized tourists, both in their demographic characteristics and in their trip characteristics. The FIT usually stays for longer period of time (and therefore probably spends more money), gets most of the information regarding the tour on the internet. For more independent tourists this is not the first visit to Israel and they intend to visit it again in the future. More men and married tourists come as FIT. The party size of FIT is smaller than the average party size of tourists that come on organized tours. The results of the current study imply that tourist suppliers should aim advertisements of independent tourism to those who are male, marriedand have ahigherlevelof education. The internet should be used as the main platform of advertisement, as this is the FIT main source of information. In addition, the advertisements should distinguish between first-timers who often come on organized tours and those that have visited Israel before who tend to come as FIT. This study has some limitation. In order to fully understand the different effect of the two groups on the country's economics, it is important to understand the amount each group spends on its trip. Unfortunately, the survey did not include valid data regarding the tourists spending. Future research should include more data regarding the tourists spending. The surprising result the party size on organized tours are larger should be more carefully examined. In addition, due to the fact that a less FIT positively change their perception of Israel it is important to understand why. The survey did not include information regarding the satisfaction level, such information might be able to explain this difference between the groups

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