

# Tourism and Demography

6

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## Generation Y and Travel Futures

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 Published by Goodfellow Publishers Limited, Woodeaton, Oxford, OX3 9TJ  
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# 6

## Generation Y and Travel Futures

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### Objectives

The purpose of this chapter is to:

- ◆ Focus on a generational cohort most often referred to as Generation Y or its abbreviation Gen Y;
- ◆ Review what is known about its key defining characteristics;
- ◆ Explore research specifically into the travel behaviours of Generation Y;
- ◆ Analyse Generation Y perspectives of their own future with a focus on understanding future travel consumption;
- ◆ Suggest future trends for Generation Y as travellers.

## Introduction

The future growth of tourism will depend to some extent on how well the tourism industry understands the social and demographic trends influencing traveller behaviour. Age has long been recognised as a major demographic variable, but some authors have argued that it is important to consider not only chronological age, but also life cycles and generational cohorts (Stevens *et al.*, 2005). The notion of generational cohorts provides a major research paradigm for considering the implications of social and demographic change for tourism.

Generation Y has been heralded as the next big generation, a potentially powerful group that has the sheer numbers to transform society both as consumers and producers of goods and services. While there is some variation in the literature the majority of definitions of Generation Y see members being born between 1977 and 1995 (Donnison, 2007). This generational cohort is now reaching adulthood. Within the next decade members of this generation will become the leaders, managers and consumers of tourism experiences and this raises a number of intriguing questions. Are the claims currently made about Generation Y true? What are the implications of these claims for tourism managers? Will Generation Y travel more or less compared to other generations? What types of products will Generation Y demand? These questions, among others, have sparked interest in the characteristics, values, attitudes and consumption patterns of the Generation Y cohort.

The concept of generational cohorts is not new and has a long history in the social sciences. Mannheim introduced the concept in the 1920s and it has subsequently been used in sociology, psychology and related areas such as political science throughout the following decades (Mannheim, 1952; Ryder, 1965; Elder, 1975, 1994; Braungart and Braungart, 1986; Whittier, 1997). Generations or generational cohorts can be defined as 'proposed groups of individuals who are born during the same time period and who experienced similar external events during their formative or coming-of-age years (i.e. late adolescent and early adulthood years)' (Noble and Schewe, 2003: 979). It is argued that these shared formative experiences influence the world view, behaviours and values of an entire age cohort throughout their life span (Mannheim, 1952; Lyons *et al.*, 2005). These formative experiences are significant because they help to shape specific preferences, beliefs and psychographic tendencies. They influence how individuals from a particular cohort feel about authority, what their work-related values are, and how they might behave in order to satisfy their values and desires (Gursoy *et al.*, 2008). The purpose of this chapter

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