

Introduction

How important is tourism to your county or geographic area? What percentage of the jobs available in your city or town is in tourism-related businesses? How much tax revenue is raised through taxes paid by tourists on goods and services they purchase during their visits to your region? Whatever the answers to these questions, the world-wide economic impact of tourism is massive (see Table 11.1). “According to the World Tourism Organization, an important indicator of the role of international tourism is its generation of foreign exchange earnings. Tourism is one of the top five export categories for as many as 83 per cent of countries and is a main source of foreign exchange earning for at least 38 per cent of countries” (p. 2).¹ In addition, research investigating data in 27 nations of the EU from 1988 to 2009 shows that tourism development positively influences economic growth while reducing carbon dioxide emissions.²

International travelers are a large and growing segment of tourism consumers. Travel to international destinations has been growing at a rapid pace. However, the popularity of the United States as an international travel destination is interesting, because less money is spent per capita promoting tourism to the United States than in any other industrialized nation. According to tourism industry officials, the United States continues to fall in the top-of-mind awareness among international travelers as lawmakers fail to allocate marketing dollars to attract these visitors.³ As might be expected, the largest number of visitors to the United States comes from its neighbors to the north, Canada, and the south, Mexico. These countries are followed in numbers of visitors by Japan, Great Britain, Germany, France, and Italy. As can be seen in Table 11.2, Europe is the major international destination region, but Asian destinations are rapidly rising to the top. Even though the United States is a major international destination, citizens of the United States travel less internationally than their counterparts in other industrialized countries.

As we pointed out in Chapter 1, there are several factors that can influence the level of tourism activity. The current growth and importance of travel into Canada and the United States by foreign visitors, especially Asians and Europeans, helps to highlight several of these factors. First, disposable income continues to rise in these industrialized countries. Second, European workers have longer vacation periods than their American counterparts, usually five weeks. Asian workers are now beginning to have more leisure time and disposable income. Third, these travelers are seeking new adventures away from their traditional vacation spots. Fourth, international airfares have become very competitive and are enticing increasing numbers of travelers to head to Canada and the United States.⁴ Bring all of these factors together and international tourism receipts in the United States are expected to almost triple between 2000 and 2020.⁵

Table 11.1 Top Ten in International Tourism Receipts

Rank	Country	Billions (U.S. Dollars)
1	United States	177.2
2	Spain	65.2
3	China	56.9
4	France	55.4
5	Macao (China)	50.8
6	Italy	45.5
7	United Kingdom	45.3
8	Germany	43.3
9	Thailand	38.4
10	Hong Kong (China)	38.4

Source: Based on UNWTO Tourism Highlights (2015).