British pack in traditional package holiday

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While 'a place to relax and unwind' (61%) is the number one priority, it turns out that the typical British tourist is in fact more of a 'culture vulture' than we are often led to believe. Indeed, 'an interesting landscape' (42%), 'experiencing a different culture' and 'cities, heritage or architecture to see' (both 40%) make up the top three wishes, following 'a place to relax and unwind'. These preferences are some way ahead of 'a beach or pool' (36%) and considerably more important than 'good shopping' (14%), 'familiar food' (13%) or having 'other Brits around' (7%).

"British holidaymakers have in the past received bad press and are often portrayed as simply wanting to live their British lifestyles in a warmer country when they go abroad. But this research shows that Brits abroad do want more from their holiday and many clearly do take an interest in the country they are visiting as well as the local people and culture," comments Silvia Bartels, senior leisure analyst at MINTEL.

British are doing it for themselves

This year we will book some 24 million independent holidays, which equates to 55% of the holiday bookings market. This is up from fewer than 22 million just last year. Between 1998 and 2004 the number of independently booked holidays has risen by an impressive 60%, but what is even more astounding is that the expenditure on these holidays has more than doubled over the same period from a little over Â£5.5 billion in 1998 to an estimated Â£11.7 billion this year.

"The increased popularity of independent holiday owes almost everything to the Internet Essentially the Internet has brought the travel agent to most people's sitting rooms and it can no longer be argued that booking a package holiday is necessarily more convenient, as the greater use of the Internet has simplified the process for the independent traveller. Low cost airlines have also helped, especially as three-quarters of all independent holidays are taken from the UK by air," explains Silvia Bartels.

Exclusive consumer research carried out for MINTEL also supports this, as almost two in four (38%) adults had booked a holiday independently in the last year, compared to just one in four (25%) who had booked a package holiday. What is more, the popularity of independent holidays is expected to continue to increase further, with expenditure on these holidays forecast to rise by a massive 78%, to reach a value of just over Â£21 billion by 2009.

ABTA (The Association of British Travel Agents) confirms that these changes are already having a significant impact on the travel industry. "These predictions for independent travel are impressive and underline the reason why our members are adapting quickly to offer very flexible booking arrangements for those customers who want to remain relatively independent," comments Keith Betton, Head of Corporate Affairs for ABTA.

British holidaymakers easy to please

Surprisingly, when it comes to enticing those Brits to book independently, British travellers have simple demands. More appealing than discounts on the hotel or car hire, freebies or vouchers is the option to stay in the hotel room until it is time to leave or at least have a late check-out time.

"Convenience is obviously very important to British holidaymakers and in many cases it is more important than saving money. Having spent time unwinding away from home, it seems that when it comes to heading back to the UK, many want to keep things as simple and stress-free as possible," comments Silvia Bartels.

Internet is the key

Some 40% of those who had been on an independently booked holiday had arranged it on the Internet compared to fewer than three in ten (27%) who had used a travel agent. Interestingly men (31%) are far more likely than women

(24%) to use a travel agent.

"Most significantly, the Internet was used by independent holidaymakers more often than any other method when purchasing the holiday. As there is a clear connection between independent holidays and short breaks, it is likely that a large proportion of these consumers accessed the low cost airline websites, or even one of the more popular third parties for travel, such as lastminute.com, expedia.co.uk or travelocity.co.uk or scheduled airline websites such as British Airways," comments Silvia Bartels.

The Internet will continue to play a large part in the distribution chain of all holidays, but in particular independent holidays. Consumers are certainly becoming more confident in booking their transport and accommodation separately.
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