

## Description and course of backpacking trips depending on the nationality of the tourists

### Abstract

The following article discusses the differences between backpackers and mass tourists. Its objective is to describe the nature of backpacking trips and to present the dependencies between the course of a trip, the reasons for taking the trip and the nationality of the respondents. The study is based on the results of a survey carried out among backpackers from Israel, Japan, Poland and Germany. Well-defined differences were revealed by the responses given by the Israeli and Japanese backpackers.

### Keywords

Backpacking • survey method • Japan • Israel • Poland • Germany

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### Małgorzata Brzózka

Institute of Regional and Global Studies,  
Faculty of Geography and Regional Studies,  
University of Warsaw  
e-mail: [malgorzata.brzozka@student.uw.edu.pl](mailto:malgorzata.brzozka@student.uw.edu.pl)

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### Introduction

Backpacking is not a new form of tourism. It is an individual, unorganized type of tourism, most often characterized by long-lasting trips to several countries or even several continents. Sometimes it is considered a kind of adventure tourism. Backpackers usually travel in small groups, their trips are based on the ideas of exploring and unpredictability. Often there is no fixed plan or even precisely defined length of the trip. The trips are organized at the lowest possible cost and the participants do not resort to services of travel agencies. Backpacking requires physical, psychological and mental activity. Many other types of tourism do not provide the experiences provided by backpacking (e.g. close contact with everyday life of local communities). Additionally, backpackers have the opportunity to determine the course of their journey (based on: Dłużewska 2004; Górka 1998; Łobożewicz 1997; Mielcarek 1997; Sochacki 1997).

Many scholars – not only from Poland but also from other countries – have devoted their attention to the study of backpacking. They include G. Richards and J. Wilson who have written on this subject and were the editors of the 2009 study "The Global Nomad. Backpacker Travel in Theory and Practice". According to them, backpackers are "one of the cultural symbols of this increasingly mobile world (...). Backpackers are to be found in every corner of the globe (...). They carry with them not only the emblematic physical baggage that gives them their name, but their cultural baggage as well" (2009, p.3).

Works by M. Hampton, R. Scheyvens and A. Sørensen also deserve our attention. Hampton lists travelling by local means of transport, looking for the cheapest lodging and using Lonely Planet guides as features that are typical of backpackers (1998). Scheyvens adds the tendency to seek out extraordinary experiences and rarely-frequented places, as well as the fact that difficult-to-reach routes are considered more attractive (2002). Sørensen, on the other hand, emphasizes that backpackers differ in many respects; not only in their motivations, social background, age or financial status, but also in their denomination and education. For these reasons he believes that this diverse group should be studied according to social categories (2003). Other researchers on backpacking include N. Uriely, Y. Yonay and D. Simchai (2002), L. Loker-Murphy and P. L. Pearce (1995), S. Larsen (2011), T. Øgaard and W. Brun (2011), T. Elsrud (2001).

Backpacking requires more commitment than organized mass tourism. Mass tourism is organized tourism characterized by short trips (usually no longer than two weeks), with a detailed program. Mass tourists travel in groups and their trips are organized by travel agencies. Their leisure is often passive and their activity is limited to trips that last up to several hours offered by hotels. Mass tourists rarely take any interest in local culture, their lifestyle is typical to their social background and they value comfort (Różycki 2006).

Mass tourism is also called hard tourism as juxtaposed with soft tourism (Alejziak 1999). In terms of the nature of the trip, backpacking is closer to soft tourism. Backpackers usually possess some knowledge about the regions they visit and show interest in them. They seek contact with nature and local communities. They are eager to participate in the daily life of the local people and to learn their language. They are also prepared for inconveniences, physical effort and dangers resulting from cultural differences and the unpredictability of nature. For some tourists, the idea of taking risks, a lack of a plan for the journey and the uncertainty of tomorrow are advantages that provide a great opportunity to escape every-day life. A backpacking trip offers the opportunity to see the world as it is, and not from the perspective of a mass tourist who is confined to the hotel and separated from the authenticity of the place that they are visiting.

### Study objective and research methods

The objective of the study was to describe backpacking trips in terms of their duration, countries visited and motives for undertaking the trip. The backpackers' preferences regarding the size of their travelling group, as well as the preferred type of lodging and food services were also studied. Tourists were also asked about what they associated with backpacking and whether they planned to travel this way in the future.

The study was conducted among respondents of four selected nationalities: Israeli, Japanese, Polish and German. The selection was made in order to verify potential differences in the behaviour of backpackers and in the nature of their trips depending on their nationality. The respondents came from different cultural circles and were subject to various stereotypes.

Backpackers from Israel constitute a very distinctive group. Their national military service, which can last for several years, is obligatory to both men and women. According to these respondents, in Israel it has become a tradition to go on a backpacking trip after completing military service. On the other hand, Japanese tourists are usually commonly associated with mass tourism and great commitment to their career, while Polish and German tourists belong to the Western-European cultural circle, yet the Germans are better grounded in it.

The study was conducted by means of a survey, which has its basis in sociological research and is broadly used in research on tourism. A.J. Veal, among others, paid attention to this method in the study "Research methods for leisure and tourism. A practical guide", which was published for the first time in 1992. Similarly, it was also described by E. Sirakaya-Turk, M. Uysal, W. Hammitt and J.J. Vaske in „Research Methods for Leisure, Recreation and Tourism”, a study published in 2011 as well as by G. Richards and W. Munsters in "Cultural Tourism Research Methods" published in 2010.

The survey was designed in order to learn about individual behaviour of the respondents and their motivations during backpacking trips. The questionnaires were sent via the internet, through the Hospitality Club social network. This network unites people who use their mutual, selfless help while travelling around the world. In total, 3428 questionnaires were sent

(780 to Israeli backpackers, 1440 to Japanese backpackers, 588 to Polish backpackers and 620 to German backpackers). A total of 378 completed surveys were returned, or 11% of what was sent out, and they were provided by the most active members of the Hospitality Club from the aforementioned four nationalities. The number of completed questionnaires according to nationality was as follows: Israeli (N=90), Japanese (N=74), Polish (N=126) and German (N=88).

The survey was divided into two parts. The first gathered data about the respondents, while the second consisted of eight open- and closed-ended questions concerning the backpacking trips of the respondent.

It should be emphasized that the research was conducted on a random sample. Completed questionnaires were received from people who visited the Hospitality Club site within a week from the end of the period during which the questionnaires were sent out, and who decided to participate in the anonymous survey (so the author cannot assign completed questionnaires to a particular Hospitality Club member). As such, the results are not representative, but that does not affect their value and an appropriate degree of caution was maintained during the interpretation of the results.

### Description of the respondents

Except for the Israeli respondents, the division by gender was relatively equal. In the case of Japanese backpackers, 53% of respondents were women and 47% were men. In the case of Polish backpackers, 55% were men and 45% women; German backpackers - 47% men and 53% women. It was less balanced in the case of the Israeli respondents who numbered more men (70%) than women (30%).

Both the age and education of the participants deny the commonly-held belief that backpacking is usually preferred by students as the majority of the respondents were between 25 and 34 years of age (Fig. 1). The percentage of respondents between 35-39 years of age, and those above 40 was higher than that of participants under 25.

The vast majority of backpackers who participated in the survey were university graduates; Israel - 86%, Japan - 90%, Poland - 93% and Germany - 85%.

### Study results

The duration of the longest backpacking trips differed depending on the nationality of the respondents (Fig. 2). For almost every third backpacker from Japan (31%), the longest trip is still less than 1 month. The situation is completely different with Israeli backpackers where more than half of the respondents (51%) chose '6-12 months' as the longest duration of a backpacking trip.

The respondents were asked to specify the countries they visited during their past backpacking trips. The first fifteen countries listed by the respondents from Israel, Japan, Poland, and Germany were included in the analysis (see Table 1).

Backpacking is usually associated with travel to developing countries that are considered exotic by a person from the de-

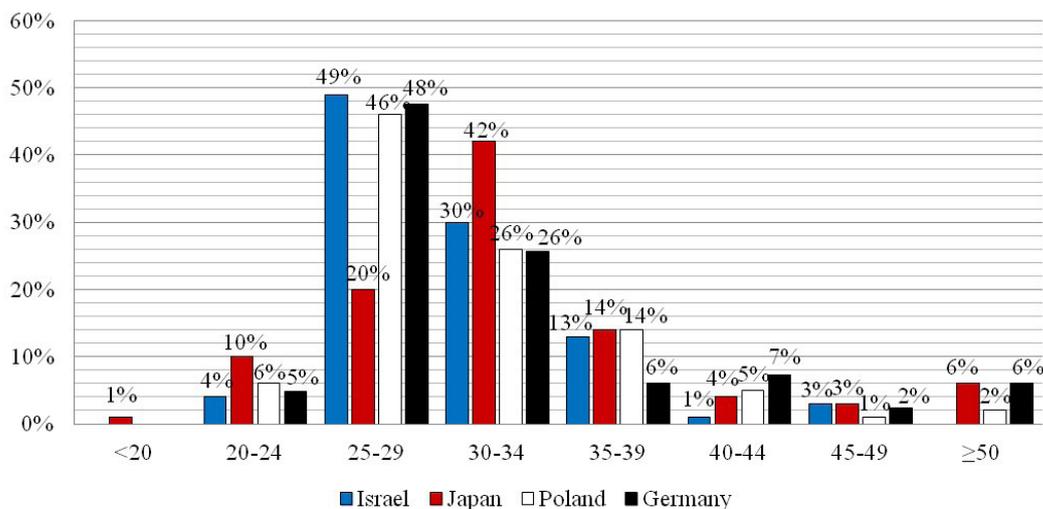


Fig 1. Respondents' age groups. (Source: own data)

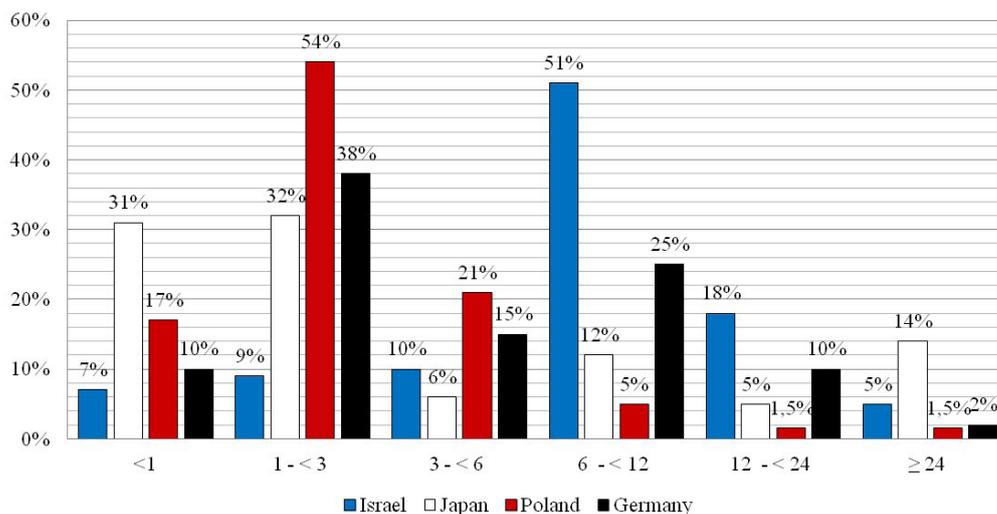


Fig 2. The duration of the longest backpacking trips (months). (Source: own data)

Table 1. Countries most frequently visited by the respondents (EU countries in bold).

	ISRAELI		JAPANESE		POLISH		GERMAN	
1	Thailand	36%	<b>Germany</b>	33%	<b>Spain</b>	32%	<b>Spain</b>	32%
2	India	25%	USA	29%	<b>France</b>	29%	Argentina	26%
3	Argentina	23%	Thailand	23%	Ukraine	28%	<b>France</b>	25%
4	New Zealand	21%	China	21%	Thailand	26%	Chile	24%
5	Peru	21%	<b>Italy</b>	21%	<b>Italy</b>	25%	India	24%
6	Australia	20%	Australia	19%	India	24%	<b>Italy</b>	23%
7	Brasil	20%	<b>Austria</b>	19%	<b>Czech Republic</b>	23%	Bolivia	22%
8	Bolivia	19%	<b>Czech Republic</b>	19%	Marocco	22%	<b>Germany</b>	22%
9	Chile	19%	<b>France</b>	19%	<b>Germany</b>	22%	USA	22%
10	China	19%	India	19%	<b>Slovakia</b>	22%	Australia	20%
11	USA	19%	<b>Hungary</b>	19%	China	21%	Thailand	20%
12	Laos	18%	<b>Belgium</b>	17%	Turkey	21%	Peru	19%
13	Nepal	16%	<b>Great Britain</b>	17%	Russia	20%	<b>Portugal</b>	19%
14	Mexico	15%	Turkey	15%	<b>Hungary</b>	19%	<b>Poland</b>	18%
15	<b>Germany</b>	14%	<b>Spain</b>	13%	Cambodia / Romania	18%	<b>Great Britain</b>	18%

Source: own data

veloped world. The study shows, however, that the respondents visited highly developed European countries as frequently as they visited regions of South East Asia or South America. In Table 1, the EU member states are underlined in order to emphasise the contribution of those countries to all the countries most visited by backpackers.

In the case of Israel, the only EU country mentioned among the 15 most visited countries was Germany and it appears in 15th place. In the case of Japanese, Polish and German backpackers, the EU member states accounted for approximately half of the most visited countries, while Asia (Thailand, India, and China), the USA, Australia, and South America were mostly visited by Israeli and German backpackers. It is worth mentioning that Polish respondents travelled to East European countries (Ukraine, Romania) and Russia more often than other tourists. Considering the number of indications by tourists from Poland, Romania was placed in 15th position together with Cambodia.

The reasons that the respondents provided for going on a backpacking trip were classified according to the travelling motives specified by Przeclawski (1997). Out of 9 categories proposed by this author, four were considered to be the most important by the respondents (Fig. 3). These were: reasons related to leaving the place of residence for some time (the desire to visit other places, to see the world; reasons related to the desire to meet new people; reasons related to fulfilling emotional and esthetical needs (need for contact with nature, other cultures, the desire to live and adventure, to take risks and test oneself and; reasons related to biological needs and regeneration (rest, detachment from everyday life, need for a change and to feel free and independent).

The Japanese and Israeli backpackers usually travelled alone (67% and 61%, respectively) (Fig. 4) and 24% and 34% of them respectively travelled with one other person. Almost half (48%) of German respondents travelled alone or with another person (47%). Polish tourists usually travelled with one person

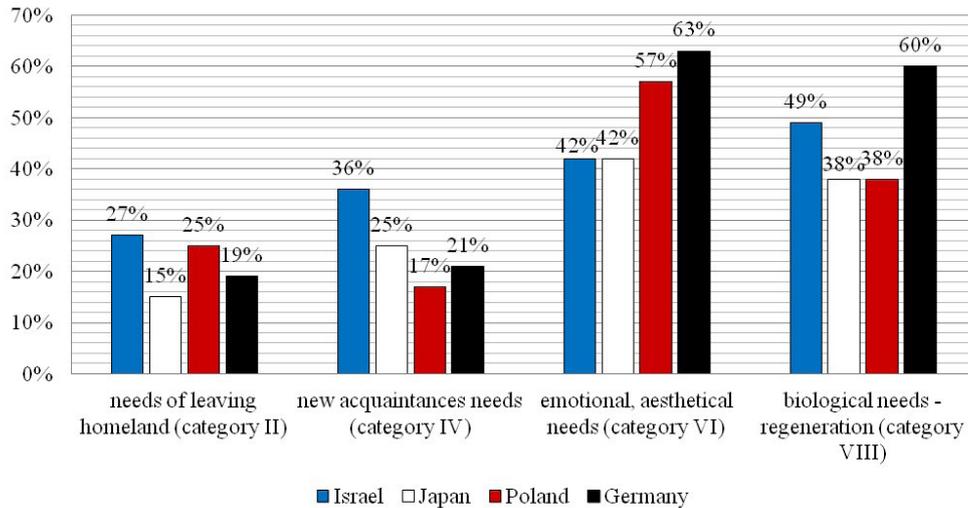


Fig 3. Reasons for going on backpacking trips based on the classification of travelling motives by Przeclawski (1997). (Source: own data)

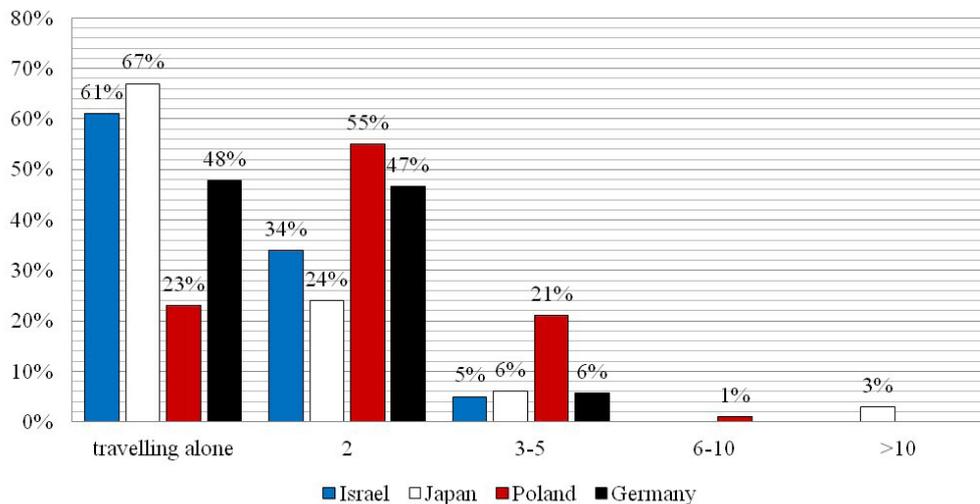


Fig 4. Number of participants of backpacking trips. (Source: own data)

(55%). 23% of Polish backpackers usually travelled alone, 21% in a group of up to 5 people, and 1% in a group of 6-10 people.

Hostels were the most popular type of lodging during backpacking trips (Fig. 5) and were indicated by 89% of the Israeli backpackers, 83% of the Japanese, 81% of the Polish, and 78% of the Germans as their most frequent lodging. Free lodging offered by members of Hospitality Club was also popular and was used by 68% of Polish tourists, 62% of German tourists, 42% of Israeli tourists and 39% of Japanese tourists. Camping sites were used by less than half of the respondents. Only 17% of Japanese respondents stayed in hotels during their trips and in the case of Polish, German and Israeli backpackers, the percentage was even lower.

Large stores (supermarkets) were the most common choice for obtaining food during backpacking trips (Fig. 6) and this is most evident in the case of the Japanese (66%). Small local stores were the second most popular place to buy food (this answer was chosen by 39% of backpackers from Poland,

28% of those from Germany, 25% of those from Israel and 18% of the Japanese). As many as 31% of the respondents from Israel said they ate mostly in restaurants, while 18% of the Polish respondents usually bought their food was usually bought in small bars.

Backpacking evokes certain connotations and the respondents most commonly mentioned “curiosity of the world” (Israel-56%, Japan - 68%, Poland - 74%, and Germany -70%). The second most frequent choice was “freedom” (67%, 58%, 54% and 57% respectively), followed by “adventure” (45%, 45%, 56% and 36%), “independence” (46%, 29%, 35% and 66%), and “spontaneity” (43%, 20%, 33% and 50%).

The majority of the Polish, Israeli, Germans, and Japanese respondents declared an intention of going backpacking in the future (92%, 74%, 74% and 63% respectively). At the same time, 27% of the Japanese respondents, 19% of the Israel respondents, 16% of the German respondents and only 8% of those from Poland said they do not wish to do any backpacking

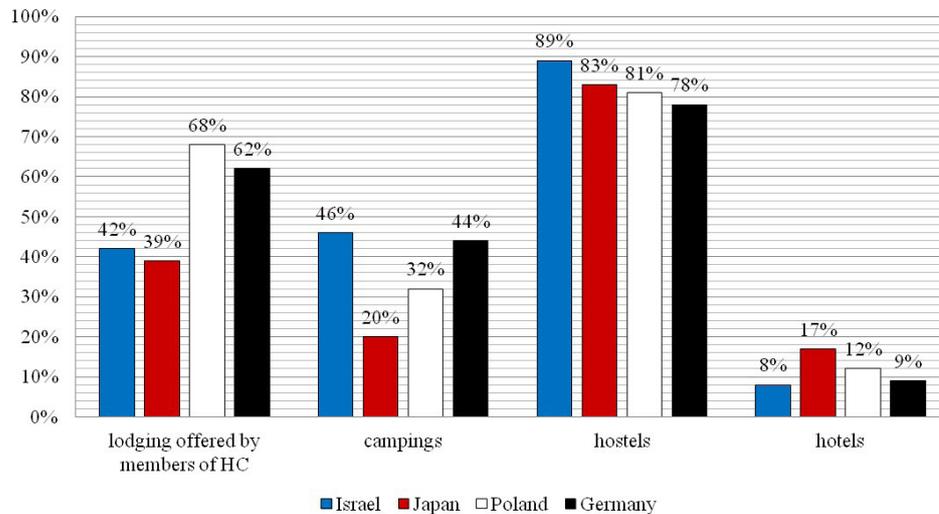


Fig 5. The most popular type of lodging during backpacking trips. (Source: own data)

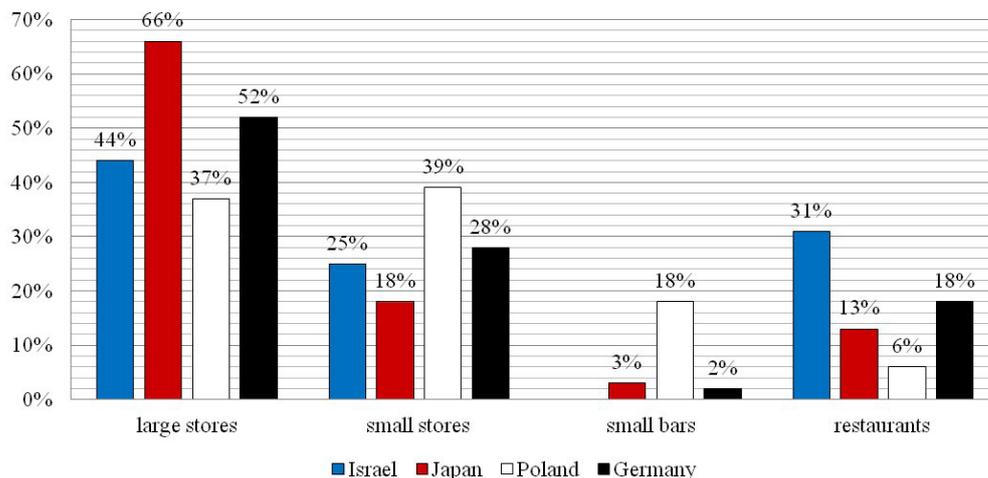


Fig 6. The most common choices for obtaining food during backpacking trips. (Source: own data)

in the future. Some respondents were not decided on this matter: 10% of Japanese respondents, 10% of the German respondents and 7% of the Israeli respondents.

### Interpretation of study results

The study reveals certain differences in the character of the trips and the preferences of backpackers depending on their nationality. The first well-defined difference can be seen in answers to the question on the duration of their longest journey.

The trips taken by the Israeli tourists are definitely the longest (for 51% of the respondents the longest trip lasted 6-12 months). This proves that they can afford a longer absence. For Israeli tourists, this is often a trip taken after the completion of their obligatory military service and before going to university or finding a job. The Japanese spent the least time on travels which is, in fact, in accordance with the stereotypes of this nation that they are very hard-working people, and their career is very important for them. As the Japanese themselves insist, it is difficult for them to apply for a longer vacation. None of them would resign from a job in order to go on a longer trip, because it is very difficult to return to their post afterwards. Further, it is a Japanese custom to start working immediately after graduation and any break during their studies (e.g. in order to travel around the world) is very expensive. The study shows that the duration of backpacking trips can be very different. In almost all cases, however, such trips were much longer than those of organized mass tourism and in some instances (even for as many as 14% of the Japanese respondents), it lasted over 2 years.

The most popular destinations for backpacking trips among European respondents were South East Asia, India and South America. The most distinctive classification of the most popular destinations of backpacking trips is the one made based on the answers of the Israeli respondents, where Asian and South American countries (i.e. the countries whose culture is very different from European culture) dominate. The Japanese travelled most frequently to the countries of the western culture circle and other Asian countries (Thailand, China, and India). European countries were popular among Polish and German backpackers. Hitchhiking, offering very cheap or even free transportation possibility, lowered the costs of travelling around the continent for European tourists.

The Israeli and Japanese backpackers were most likely to travel alone (61% and 67% respectively) which could result from a variety of reasons, e.g. the need to escape every-day life or, more likely in case of the Japanese tourists, the difficulties of organizing a long trip for several people simultaneously. Hostels were undeniably the most popular form of lodging. In the case of the Japanese respondents, hostels clearly dominate over other types of lodging. Only every fifth Japanese tourist used camping sites and almost the same number of the respondents preferred the most expensive lodging type – hotels (the highest percentage among backpackers staying in hotels of all surveyed nationalities). According to the comments of the Japanese respondents, they value hygiene and cleanliness as well as safety, which can influence their preferences. The

percentage of the Polish and Germans using lodging opportunities offered by members of Hospitality Club is also worth mentioning. Hospitality Club is a German social network which could explain its popularity among German tourists as well as their Polish neighbours. In terms of the global membership of Hospitality Club, with over 41,000 members the Polish members occupy fourth place, after Germany (over 89,000 members), France (52,000) and the USA (over 45,000). It is important to remember that the population of Poland is significantly lower than the populations of these other countries.

Backpackers usually buy food in supermarkets (where they can be found) and in small local stores. The reasons for this are not only that supermarkets have the lowest prices, but also thanks to the wide selection of travelling equipment available on the market, like e.g. light titanium mess tins, cutlery, clasp bowls, stoves, or small portable gas bottles for meal preparation.

The most common connotation of backpacking for the Japanese, Polish, and German tourists is “curiosity of the world”. Israeli backpackers were an exception as they most often associate backpacking with freedom, which should be interpreted in the light of the fact that in many cases, backpacking is a response to obligatory military service, during which for many months or even years, young people were subordinate to other people and had to obey orders. This tendency could be seen in the reasons for going on a journey provided by this group of tourists. The Israeli respondents were the ones with the most frequent physiological motives for backpacking (related to rest, regeneration and the need to change the rhythm of life as well as feeling free and independent).

The vast majority of all respondents (from 63% for Japanese respondents to 92% of the Poles) intended to go on another backpacking tour in the future. As the respondents themselves emphasised, backpacking is addictive. One of the participants said that after someone tries backpacking, it is difficult for them to find satisfaction in other forms of tourism. A Polish backpacker wrote that her first journey was mostly related to the curiosity of the world, the desire to escape reality and to do something extraordinary. The following trips only “fed the addiction”.

### Conclusions

The analysis of the survey results showed certain differences between the four groups of respondents, which influenced the nature and course of their backpacking trips. In general, the following types of backpacking trips can be proposed:

1. Israeli backpackers: undertake the longest journeys, usually alone; prefer the cheapest lodgings (they stay at homes of Hospitality Club members less frequently); visit restaurants visibly more frequently; visit countries outside of Europe; associate this form of travelling with freedom.

2. Japanese backpackers: undertake the shortest journeys, usually alone; stay in more expensive lodgings more frequently than other respondents; buy food most often in supermarkets; visit Europe and other highly-developed countries.

3. Polish backpackers: undertake journeys of average length, usually with another person; stay for free at the homes of Hospitality Club members more often than other nationalities; most frequently buy food in small local shops; visit European and Asian countries.

4. German backpackers: undertake average length journeys,

alone or with a companion; often stay for free at the homes of Hospitality Club members and on camping sites; usually buy food in supermarkets; visit European, South American and Asian countries.

English translation: Agata Staszewska

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