



Domestic and international visitors stay in a range of accommodation while travelling in Australia. This snapshot presents information on the backpacker accommodation sector and a profile of domestic and international visitors who used backpacker accommodation in 2009.

**Definition**

A backpacker is a person who spends at least one night in either backpacker or hostel accommodation. Visitors do not necessarily spend all their nights in backpacker accommodation; they may also stay in other types of accommodation. ‘Other visitors’ are defined as domestic or international visitors who do not stay in backpacker or hostel accommodation while in Australia.

**What are the recent visitor trends?**

International backpacker visitation has grown by approximately 3% each year since 2000, to reach 570,000 in 2009. Total international visitation grew by an average annual rate of 1% over the same period.

International nights spent in backpacker accommodation have increased since 2000 (average annual growth of 2%) while nights spent in Australia by these visitors have increased at an average annual

**Table 2 International visitors, nights and expenditure by backpackers, 2009**

	Visitors ('000)	Nights in Australia ('000)	Average stay in Australia (nights)	Nights in backpacker accommodation ('000)	Average stay in backpacker accommodation (nights)	Expenditure (\$ million)	Average expenditure per trip (\$)
New Zealand	29	714	25	271	9	78	2,682
Japan	22	2,103	98	477	22	177	8,232
Korea	27	4,059	151	729	27	278	10,339
USA	50	2,470	50	603	12	372	7,462
Canada	25	1,947	77	751	30	212	8,423
United Kingdom	128	8,735	68	3,929	31	983	7,660
Germany	57	4,546	80	1,975	35	456	8,005
France	37	3,237	88	1,343	37	301	8,193
Scandinavia	30	1,925	65	832	28	236	7,910
Netherlands	16	1,141	72	587	37	137	8,571
Other Asia	47	4,572	97	981	21	459	9,714
Other Europe	75	6,052	80	2,053	27	735	9,775
Other countries	27	2,303	84	532	19	247	9,027
<b>Total</b>	<b>570</b>	<b>43,803</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>15,064</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>4,670</b>	<b>8,193</b>

rate of 3%. This was lower than the average growth in total international visitor nights in Australia of 5% over the same period.

Domestic backpacker visitor numbers increased by 6% in 2009. Since 2000, domestic backpacker visitation has remained flat. Nights spent in backpacker hostels decreased by 7%. The decline in total visitor nights was larger than the national decline (6% compared to 1%).

**Who were they?**

International visitors from Europe comprised 60% of the international backpacker market in Australia, increasing by 9% on the previous year. The United Kingdom (23%) and Germany (10%) continued to be the strongest backpacker markets in 2009. These markets recorded year on year changes of 13% and 7% respectively, despite total visitation from both these countries decreasing by 1%. Decreases were recorded in backpackers from New Zealand (-22%) and Asia (-9%) in 2009, despite these markets remaining flat in terms of total visitation.

International visitors aged between 20 and 29 were the main backpacker market representing just over two thirds (68%) of all international backpacker visitors. While international backpacker visitors aged between 15 and 19 years and 50 years and over were the strongest growth demographic, they only accounted for 8% and 6% of all backpacker visitors respectively.

Domestic backpacker age profiles have been shifting over the past few years. The largest backpacker market, 20–29 years, has been declining at an average annual rate of 3% since 2000, now representing 33% of all domestic backpackers. The 30–39 years age group has also seen a decline (average annual decline of 2%) to now represent 10% of all domestic backpackers. Backpackers aged 40–49 have seen the strongest growth during this time, increasing at an average annual rate of 7%. The 50+ years age group also increased during this period (2%) to make it the second largest backpacker market or 19% of all domestic backpackers.

**Table 1 Visitors and nights spent in backpacker accommodation**

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Average annual change
<b>International</b>											
Visitors ('000)	453	451	479	468	482	499	545	566	559	570	3%
Nights in backpacker accommodation (million)	13	11	11	12	13	12	15	15	14	15	2%
Average stay in backpacker accommodation (nights)	28	25	23	25	26	24	27	26	25	26	
Nights in Australia (million)	34	33	32	30	33	32	39	40	41	44	3%
Average stay in Australia (nights)	75	73	67	64	68	64	72	71	73	77	
<b>Domestic</b>											
Visitors ('000)	462	283	386	475	439	413	524	500	426	451	0%
Nights in backpacker accommodation (million)	2.3	1.3	1.5	1.6	1.5	1.3	1.7	1.7	1.4	1.2	-7%
Average stay in backpacker accommodation (nights)	5	5	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	
Nights in Australia (million)	3.1	2.1	2.5	2.4	2.2	2.1	2.5	2.9	1.8	1.8	-6%
Average stay in Australia (nights)	7	7	7	5	5	5	5	6	4	4	

## How much did they spend?

International backpackers spent an average of \$8,193 per person on their trip, significantly more than the spend of other international visitors (\$4,687). This is expected due to the higher average length of stay of backpackers (77 nights) compared to other visitors (29 nights). International backpackers spent proportionally more than other visitors on items such as *accommodation, food and beverage* and *organised tours*, but spent proportionally less than other visitors on items such as *education*.

Domestic backpackers had similar spend patterns to other visitors. However, they spent proportionally less on *accommodation, food and beverage* than other visitors.

**Table 3 Average visitor expenditure, 2009**

	International		Domestic	
	Backpacker	Other	Backpacker	Other
Accommodation, food and beverage	2,994	1,345	336	395
Shopping	526	511	140	226
Domestic airfares	436	345	289	475
Other transport	2,467	1,527	147	138
Organised tours	807	396	250	357
Education	6,624	9,855	446	462
Entertainment	257	188	109	131
Other	757	1,363	590	261
<b>Total spend per visitor</b>	<b>8,193</b>	<b>4,687</b>	<b>695</b>	<b>641</b>
<b>Total spend per night</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>165</b>

## What did they do?

International backpackers took part in an average of 15 activities, almost double that of other international visitors (8 activities). This is due to the longer length of stay of backpackers allowing more time to participate in a greater number of activities. The most common activities for backpackers were *social* (98%), *outdoor and nature based* (94%) and *local attractions/tourist activities* (90%). Backpackers (69%) were more likely to participate in *active outdoor/sports activities* than other visitors (26%).

Domestic backpackers participated in similar activities to international backpackers. The most common were *social* (89%) and *outdoor and nature based activities* (40%). They were also more likely to participate in *local attractions/tourist activities* (32%) and *sports or active*

*outdoor activities* (31%) than other visitors (18% and 23% respectively).

## Where did they go?

Three quarters (75%) of international backpackers spent time in regional Australia, and 40% of their nights spent in backpacker accommodation were in regional areas. The most popular regional areas for nights in backpacker accommodation were Tropical North Queensland, Northern Rivers (New South Wales) and the Whitsundays (Queensland).

Domestic backpackers spent 42% of their nights in backpacker accommodation in regional areas.

**Table 4 Most popular tourism regions for international backpackers, 2009**

Tourism region and state	Visitors '000	Nights in	
		Australia (million)	backpacker accommodation (million)
Sydney, NSW	430	10.7	3.5
Melbourne, Vic	253	5.6	1.8
Brisbane, Qld	245	5.0	1.2
Tropical North Qld, Qld	224	3.2	1.7
Northern Rivers, NSW	157	1.0	0.6
Whitsundays, Qld	146	0.0	0.5
Hervey Bay/ Maryborough, Qld	146	0.7	0.4
Gold Coast, Qld	139	1.5	0.4
Experience Perth, WA	99	3.2	1.0
Sunshine Coast, Qld	95	0.8	0.2
Adelaide, SA	93	1.2	0.4
<b>Total in regional Australia</b>	<b>427</b>	<b>14.8</b>	<b>6.0</b>
<b>Total in capital cities</b>	<b>559</b>	<b>29.0</b>	<b>9.0</b>
<b>Total in Australia</b>	<b>570</b>	<b>43.8</b>	<b>15.1</b>

## Where did they stay?

International backpackers chose to stay in a variety of accommodation. While backpackers spent 34% of their nights in *backpacker accommodation*, they also spent 32% of their nights in a *rented house or apartment* and 11% of nights in the *home of a friend or relative*.

Domestic backpackers were more likely to spend most of their nights in *backpacker accommodation* (69% of nights) or in the *home of a friend or relative* (12% of nights).

## Why did they travel?

International backpacker visitors were more likely to travel for the purpose of *holiday* (73%) than other

visitors (43%). However, they were less likely to travel to *visit friends and relatives* (8%) and *business* (2%) than other visitors (27% and 16% respectively). Education was the main purpose of visit for 11% of backpackers.

Two thirds (66%) of domestic backpackers travelled for the purpose of *holiday*.

## How many businesses offer backpacker accommodation?

The number of backpacker establishments in Australia continued to decrease during 2009. In spite of this decline, bed spaces increased by 2%. Takings from backpacker accommodation also increased during this period.

New South Wales and South Australia were the only states to experience growth in backpacker guest nights in 2009.

**Table 5 Backpacker/hostels<sup>a</sup>, capacity and accommodation**

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
No. of establishments <sup>b</sup>	456	429	424	407	400
Persons employed <sup>b</sup>	3,337	3,271	3,449	3,385	3,360
Bed spaces <sup>b</sup> ('000)	48	47	47	46	47
Guest nights <sup>c</sup> (million)	8.31	8.54	8.73	9.11	8.82
Bed occupancy rate <sup>d</sup> (%)	47.8	49.7	51.2	54.0	52.7
Takings from accommodation (\$ million)	192.3	203.4	218.4	239.7	240.3

### Data sources

Tourism Research Australia National Visitor Survey (NVS) and International Visitor Survey (IVS) (unpublished data)  
Australia Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Cat. No 8635.0 Survey of tourist Accommodation

### Key

- <sup>a</sup> Only includes visitor hostel establishments with 25 or more bed spaces
- <sup>b</sup> Measured at the December quarter of each year
- <sup>c</sup> The total number of paying guests counted on each night they stayed at the accommodation establishment during the year ending December 2009
- <sup>d</sup> The average over four quarters

### Notes

The number of nights spent in backpacker accommodation differs to the number of guest nights reported by Tourism Research Australia, as the ABS only publishes guest nights for visitor hostel establishments with 25 or more bed spaces. The ABS also uses visitor hostel data as a proxy for backpacker accommodation. Data collected in the IVS and NVS include both backpacker and visitor hostel accommodation, and do not exclude small establishments. Expenditure: total trip expenditure by international and domestic backpackers, excluding major purchases such as motor vehicles by domestic visitors. Total capital cities: includes all capital cities plus the Gold Coast; 'Regional Australia' excludes all capital cities and the Gold Coast.

## Key findings

- Both international and domestic backpacker visitor numbers increased during 2009.
- Domestic backpackers aged 40 to 49 years have seen the strongest growth since 2000, increasing at an average annual rate of 7% and representing 15% of the total domestic backpacker market.
- International backpackers spent an average of \$8,193 per person on their trip, significantly more than other international visitors' spend (\$4,687).
- International backpackers took part in an average of 15 activities in 2009. This is almost double that of other international visitors (8 activities).
- Three quarters (75%) of international backpackers spent time in regional Australia, and 40% of their nights spent in backpacker accommodation were in regional areas.
- The number of backpacker/hostel establishments continued to decline in 2009.

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