General Travel Behavior in Eastern Macedonia and Thrace

G. Yfantidou, A. Dalakis, G. Costa and G. Tzetzis

Abstract Holidays that include outdoor recreational activities are preferred by tourists. The opportunity given to tourists for active employment during holidays is one of the key reason for choosing regions that offer such activities. Our research took place in the region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace in a year base in order to monitor the tourist behavior of tourists. Participants in the survey were 3070 from seven different countries. Travel behavior in the survey was tested with 5 questions. The behavior of the tourists was different between Greek, English and Polish, who behaved differently from German, Bulgarian, Cypriot and Romanian. The favourable and preferred sports activities are the canoe-kayak, rafting, diving, mountain bike (m.t.b.), climbing-rappeliling, flying-fox and water sports.

Keywords Outdoor recreational activities · Tourism · Travel behavior
Region tourism · Opportunities of tourism

1 Introduction

The growth and competition in tourism have stimulated significant interest in highly effective marketing and management strategies for tourism destinations, and made competitiveness a critical emphasis in today's changing market. Therefore, destination competitiveness is now becoming a crucial issue in the tourism industry and an established topic for researchers. Furthermore, evaluation of the competitiveness of a tourism destination is increasingly being recognized as an important tool in the strategic positioning and marketing analysis of destinations (Hudson, Ritchie & Timur, 2004). Ritchie and Crouch (2000) also indicated that destination

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competitiveness has "tremendous ramifications for the tourism industry and is therefore of considerable interest to practitioners and policy makers".

The concept of tourism can be viewed from two perspectives: a theoretical, covering all aspects of the phenomenon such as economic, social, psychological and a practice one, regulating exchange relations. From the theoretical point of view it can be determined the temporary movement of people from their permanent residence in another place, for reasons mainly psychological, without profit motive and organized effort to attract, welcome and serve the people, and from the perspective of practice, the concept of tourism aims to find an appropriate understanding of all those who are involved in international scale with tourist activities. The specific tourism formula has two sides: the first refers to the movement of people, which represents the consumers of tourism and coincides with the tourist demand and the second refers to the reception and service of mobile, thus accounting for the productive part of tourism coincides with the tourist offer (Gartner, 2001). International studies suggest that tourists travel not only just to see places and monuments or simply overnight in a hotel as nice and comfortable it is. The modern tourist is looking forward to obtain various experiences in the tourist destination, often participating actively in his/her daily activities, taking part in local activities, and experiencing feelings and stories about the cultural and natural heritage of the destination (Yfantidou, Costa, & Polemitis, 2012). For example, it is neither architectural nor historical value nor the stylish of the balcony of the Verona building that attracts thousands of tourists every day to the city. The motivation to visit this city is mainly the love story of Romeo and Juliet (which has never been, but is Shakespeare's creation) that has been linked to this balcony and creates the need for people to visit it and experience similar feelings (Sigala, 2013). Consequently, the main factors that attract tourists to a destination are no longer only their ``material' and ``tangible' resources, but above all the intangible values, stories, myths and feelings to be used to describe and to promote these resources and create the need for the tourists to experience something unique (Yfantidou, Costa, & Michalopoulos, 2010).

Travel demand management is a collection of different measures (e.g. policies and strategies) implemented with the aim of modifying people's travel behavior and changing the demand for a specific travel mode (Meyer, 1999). To encourage people to change their travel behavior, incentives are frequently used (Gneezy, Meier, & Rey-Biel, 2011). These can be used either alone or in combination with, for instance, marketing campaigns. One advantage of incentives is that the individual may be motivated, due to these having either monetary or non-monetary value, to try an alternative behavior.

Strong and positive destination images can attract more tourists and establish a successful and competitive positioning (Stylos, Vassiliadis, Bellou, & Andronikidis, 2016; Zhang, Fu, Cai, & Lu, 2014). Destination image influences tourists' intention to travel, destination choice, experience, and satisfaction levels, which could be used as a strategic management tool for a destination. On the other hand, travel constraints prohibit people's traveling to a destination or lead to negative effects on the quality of travel. (Lai, Li, & Harrill, 2013). The constraints affect not only travel intentions, but also tourists' participation, preferences, and experiences while taking a trip (Nyaupane & Andereck, 2008). When promoting a

destination, understanding and reducing constraints is necessary to increase travel intentions (Park, Hsieh, & Lee, 2017).

Tourism is one of the strongest economic sectors in European countries. Tourist activities in the EU 15, pay up to 12% of GDP (directly or indirectly) and 6% of employment (directly). All these numbers are expected to increase in the future, but not the same for all destinations. Today, in the EU, all this activity involves over two million tourism enterprises, with 7.7 million employees. This figure, according to European Commission is expected to increase by about 15% over the next decade. Particularly important also for the development of tourism in Europe is that more than 60% of holiday maker's citizens. The Mediterranean is considered as a leading tourist destination in the world. Spain, France, Italy and Greece remain by far the main destination for international tourism. Tourism nowadays is a dominant economic activity in Greece. The role of the economic growth is expected to grow further in the future, because the free time, vacation and recreation gain a central place in modern societies. During the last two decades, tourism has demonstrated clearly that it has the capacity to create wealth and economic prosperity for entire regions and destinations, jobs and prosperity for their inhabitants. Locations and sites based or look to him for their future (Agorastakis, 2006).

Tourism and recreation have become one of the most important economic and social activities in Europe. Tourism brings income and jobs, understanding other cultures, preservation of natural and cultural heritage, infrastructure development, which in turn have social and economic benefits. Tourism depends more than any other human activity on the quality of the natural and cultural environment. Such as agriculture, forestry, fishing and so tourism is affected by the environment. The term "tourism" includes all people travelling outside the place where they live, for any reason (fun, professional, educational, health reasons) and excludes people travelling for less time than 24 h. The majority of Northern European countries are net spenders. In Mediterranean countries like Greece, Portugal, Spain, Turkey, tourism has great participation in the national economy (Stanners & Bourdeau, 1995). Tourism nowadays is a dominant economic activity for Greece but also for many countries. The role of the economic growth is expected to grow further in the future, because the free time, vacation, recreation gains a central place in modern societies. During the last two decades, tourism has demonstrated clearly that it has the capacity to create wealth and economic prosperity for entire regions and des-tinations, jobs and prosperity for their inhabitants. 80% of all foreign tourists arriving in Greece by air. Participation of arrivals by air increased steadily due to the liberalization of air transport and the reduction of tariffs, while correspondingly reducing the involvement of other modes of transport. The tourism industry has uneven distribution to the country. Found a strong concentration of tourist activity in a few regions of the country. Five of the 13 regions account for 75% of hotel beds, while the concentration is significant differences within regions. The largest concentrations beds observed in the South Aegean Region (24% of total), Crete (19%), the Ionian Islands (11%), Attica (11%) (due in Athens) and Central Macedonia (10%) (because of Thessaloniki). Income from tourism services in Greece, have made spectacular rise in recent years. Although the majority of tourist

spending (mean 40%), intended for accommodation and food, Greece is still considered the country hosting the low-income level tourists. Although the numbers of Greek tourism are high and it is one of the economic sectors with the best prospects, it is observed an inability to its performances (Agorastakis, 2006). The purpose of this paper was to examine the travel behavior of tourists with different nationalities.

2 Methodology

2.1 Sample

The survey sample was 3070 tourists. There were three age groups divided the survey sample. The first was from 17 to 39 years (original maturity), the second from 40 to 59 years (middle adulthood) and the third 60 years and over (final maturity) (Gibson, 1994). The number of the sample was similar to the previous survey whereas the Virginia's sample was 3000 tourists.

2.2 Questionnaire

The scale of Meng (2006) was used in this research which was about the Destination Competitiveness from the Tourists' Perspective. The theoretical concepts of the research were four:

(1) Quality of vacation Experience (with 4 phases)

    (a) Pre-trip planning
    (b) En-Route Experience
    (c) Destination On-site
    (d) After-trip

(2) Perceived Destination Competitiveness
(3) Tourist Involvement
(4) Motivation.

The first theoretical concept of the research was the Quality of vacation Experience which had 4 phases. Pre-trip Planning Phase with 4 questions, the En-route Experience Phase with 6 questions, the Destination On-site Phase with 10 questions and the After-trip Phase with 5 questions. The second theoretical concept of the research was the Perceived Destination Competitiveness with 21 questions. The third theoretical concept of the research was the Tourist Involvement with 11 questions based on two scales for the involvement: Personal Involvement Inventory (PII) and Consumer Involvement Profile (CIP). The fourth theoretical concept of the research was the Motivation of tourists with 12 questions. Finally, the questionnaire had five questions regarding general travel behavior of tourists and at the last page there were 7 questions for the description of their holidays, 1 question

about the area of the 13 regions of the country where they usually go on vacation and 1 question about the sport activities they choose to perform in the vacation area. The last part contained 10 questions about demographic characteristics such as residence place, gender, age of participants, marital status, number of people included in the family, the number of children and their ages, educational level, annual income and occupation.

The questionnaires were in English and translated in Greek, German, Polish and Bulgarian language adapted to different nations in order to approach foreign tourists coming to the destinations in Greece. The procedure of double translation for each of the languages was followed and afterwards the questionnaire was translated from English (original) in Greek and adapted to the needs of the research. The Romanian participants in the research completed questionnaires which were translated in English.

Sport outdoor recreation activities that were included in the questionnaire were the most known: canoeing on lakes, rivers and sea, rafting, archery, diving, sport shooting, M.T.B. (Mountain bike), hiking, orientation, climbing—rappel, Flying-fox (rope games), mountain hiking, water sports, paragliding, motor sports and other.

All the questionnaire responses were given in 5 point scale of Likert from 1 "not at all important" to 5 "very important". In the case of the tourist involvement on vacation, the 5 point scale of Likert was from 1 "absolutely disagree" to 5 "totally agree".

2.3 Process

Participants participated voluntarily in the survey. Informed of the content of the questionnaire and the purpose of the survey and then completed the questionnaire. The survey was conducted in the region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace (5 counties including the islands of Thasos and Samothrace) in north eastern Greece. The places that the questionnaire was distributed were the hotel Thraki Palace in Alexandroupolis, the hotel Agriani in Xanthi, on ships (ferry boat schedules Keramoti—Limenas Thasos Alexandroupolis—Samothrace line), at beaches (the island of Thasos and Samothrace, in Xanthi and Alexandroupolis) and at destinations where outdoor recreational activities took place (in different points of the river Nestos delta Evros river, the canyon of the river Aggitis, in Vistonida lake in Livaditi waterfall in Xanthi, the narrow river Nestos, the ski center of Falakro Drama), and at the city centers of Drama, Kavala, Xanthi, Komotini and Alexandroupoli or outdoor in the suburban forest of Xanthi, the monasteries of Xanthi, in Nymfaia area in Komotini, in St. Barbara park in Drama, at the Kavala castle in Dadia forest.

3 Results

The participants in the survey were from 7 different countries. 1666 were from Greece (873 men and 793 women), 251 were from Great Britain (138 men and 113 women), 233 were from Germany (152 men and 81 women), 156 were from Poland

(67 men and 89 women), 461 were from Bulgaria (292 men and 169 women), 67 were from Cyprus (36 men and 31 women) and 64 were from Romania (37 men and 27 women) (missing values 172). The Greek participants resided in 47 of the 51 prefectures. The counties took numbering according to Wikipedia under "prefectures of Greece". The participants were from the prefecture Argolida (4) Grevena (9), Lakonia (32) and Fokidas (51). The age group was 3 to 17–39 years 69.8%, 40–59 years 24.7% 60 years and over 1,7% (Gibson, 1994). Table 1 shows the profile of tourists who participated in the Greek research.

Tourists came from seven different countries (Table 2). The total number of the respondents was 3070 (172 tourists did not answer the question of their gender).

The general travel behavior of tourists was examined through five questions. The first question "In the past 18 months, how many vacations have you taken (for more than two nights away from home)?" was recorded in three groups (a) 0–2 times), (b) 3–6 times and (c) 7 or more times. 887 answered 0–2 times, 1864 answered 3–6 times and 250 selected 7 or more times. At Fig. 1 the question is presented according to these groups and nationalities.

The second question "How far in advance do you usually book the trip?" was categorized also into three categories (a) 0 days/I do not arrange my holidays, (b) 1–89 days/under 3 months and (c) 90 days/3 months or more. The first category was selected by 1300 tourists, the second by 1539 tourists and the third by 231 (Fig. 2).

The frequency responses of the third question "How many nights do you usually stay in the vacation destination?" were divided into three categories (a) 1 night up to 2 nights, (b) from 3 nights to 6 nights and (c) 7 nights and more. The first category was selected by 103 tourists, the second by 2240 and the third by 676 (Fig. 3).

The fourth question "Generally speaking, how many vacations do you take per year?" was divided into three groups (a) 0–2 vacation every year, (b) 3–6 vacation every year and (c) 7 and more vacation every year. 2208 answered the first one, 706 the second and only 72 the third (Fig. 4).

Finally, the fifth question "Who do you usually travel with on your vacation?" was divided into six categories: Alone 5,5%, Spouse/Partner 28,3%, Family members/Relatives 19,9%, Friends 37,6%, Organized group 4,9% and other 3,8% (Fig. 5).

Crosstab analyses were run between the categories of recreational activities. The positive answers are shown in Table 3.

4 Discussion and Conclusions

Due to the different nature of destinations or the types of tourism activities, it is difficult to measure, evaluate, and compare the destinations, as in many cases they are unique in their features and cannot be considered as identical to each other. However, it is important to develop a universal or widely accepted measurement for the various tourism elements when evaluating the competitiveness of a given destination. Existing tourism literature has attempted to answer this question

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of Greek research sample

Demographic characteristics	Sample (%)
Gender	
Male	51.99
Female	42.41
Missing value	5.6
Age	
17–39	69.8
40–59	24.7
60 or older	1.8
Missing value	3.7
Marital status	
Single	49.3
Married	29.7
Widowed	3.1
Divorced	2.4
Separated	2.5
Cohabit	0.7
Something else	0
Missing value	2.7
Education	
Primary school	0.7
High school	1.7
Lyceum	21
Four-year college	16.4
University degree/Technological Institute degree	49.9
Master	7.1
Ph.D.	1.1
Missing value	2.1
Total annual income	
Under 20,000€	43
20,001€–40,000€	32.9
40,001€–60,000€	11.9
60,001€–80,000€	3.3
80,001€–100,000€	0.7
100,001€–120,000€	0.4
120.001€–140.000€	0.2
Over 140,001€	1.4
Missing value	6.2
Occupation	
Freelance	16.8
Private employee	25.9

Table 1 (continued)

Demographic characteristics	Sample (%)
Retired	2.5
Household	1.3
Unemployed	5
Student	33.3
State employee	11.4
Something else	1.7
Missing value	2.1

Table 2 Participants in the survey listed by country

| Countries	Men	Women	Total
Greece	873	793	1666
Great Britain	138	113	251
Germany	152	81	233
Poland	67	89	156
Bulgary	292	169	461
Cyprus	36	31	67
Romania	37	27	64
Total	1595	1303	2898

In the past 18 months, how many vacation(s) have you taken (for more than two nights away from home)? _____times.

■ none to two times   ■ three to six times   ■ seven and more times

GREEK: 34,8% / 55,8% / 9,7%
BRITISH: 26,1% / 66,4% / 7,6%
GERMAN: 12,3% / 82,6% / 5,1%
POLISH: 24,4% / 65,9% / 9,8%
BULGARIAN: 22,5% / 72,6% / 4,9%
CYPRIOT: 36,9% / 50,8% / 12,3%
ROMANIAN: 26,2% / 67,7% / 6,2%
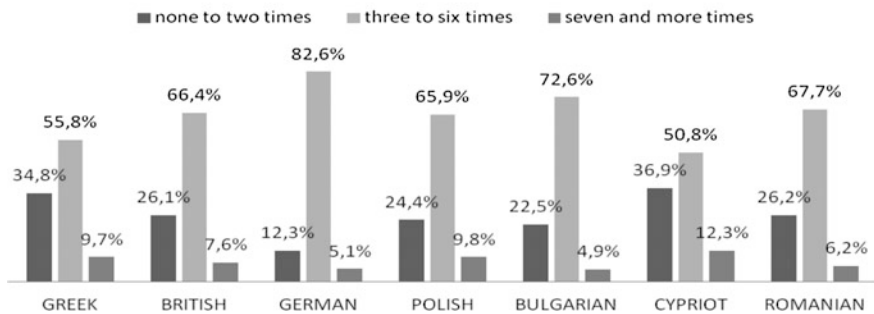
Fig. 1 The general travel behavior of tourists with different nationalities

through different approaches, either supply- or demand-oriented in nature. Most recent studies examined destination competitiveness with suppliers as the target group, such as managers of tourism firms and other industry practitioners, and examined the topic related to tourism enterprise development, marketing, and
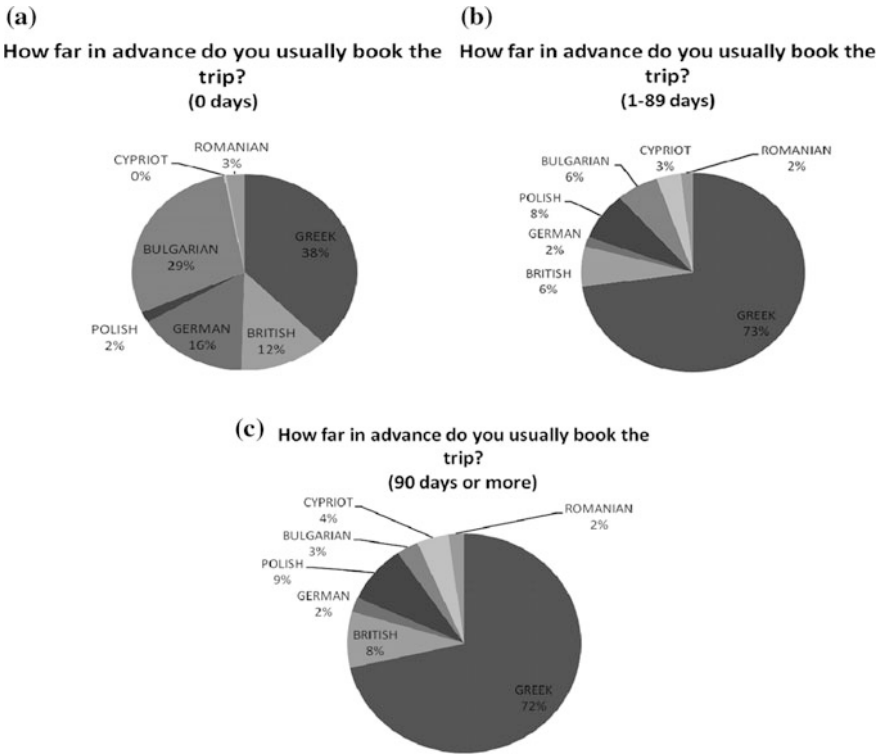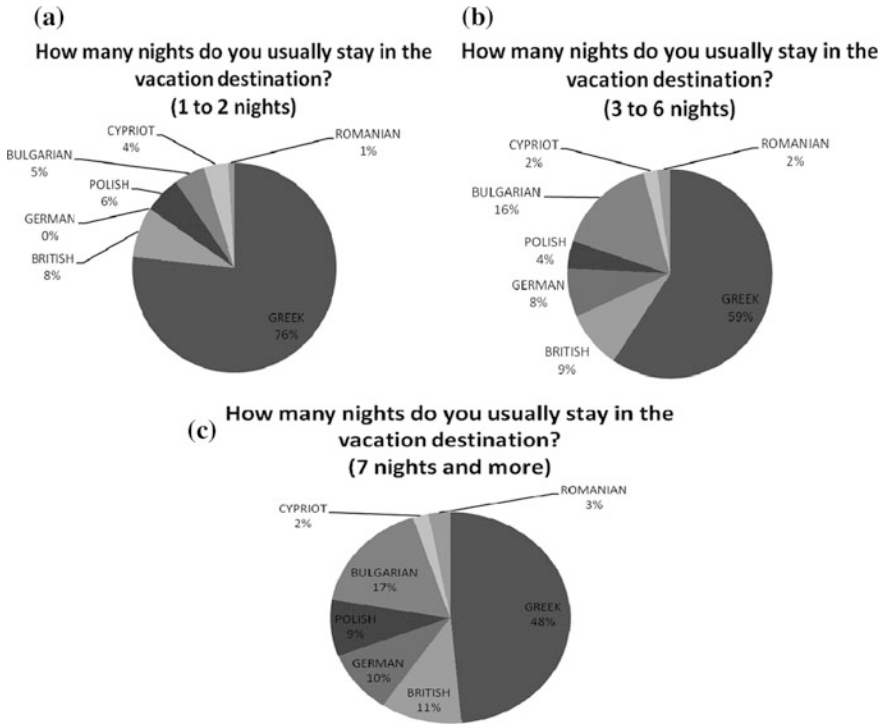
Fig. 2 The number of days needed to book the trip before arrival according to different nationalities. **a** The percentage of 1300 tourists that selected this answer. **b** The percentage of 1539 tourists that selected this answer. **c** The percentage of 231 tourists that selected this answer

sustainable tourism (Dwyer, Mellor, Livaic, Edwards, & Kim, 2004; Enright & Newton, 2005; Hudson, Ritchie, & Timur, 2004). Findings from numerous studies have supported the view that effective branding lead to greater competitiveness which, in turn, leads to stronger brand loyalty. However, there are very few studies which support that an increase in competitiveness can lead to stronger brand equity (Wong & Teoh, 2015).

Monitoring the tourists and his or her experience is crucial for the competitiveness of a destination. This relates to common knowledge that the competitiveness of a destination ultimately depends on the satisfaction of its customers throughout the customer experience. Knowing the customer and retaining feedback from the customers will thus continue to be a key strategic asset on both the individual level of the entrepreneur and on the collaborative level of the destination. Easy monitoring techniques for destinations could be informal talks with guests;

(a)

How many nights do you usually stay in the vacation destination?
(1 to 2 nights)

CYPRIOT 4%
BULGARIAN 5%
POLISH 6%
GERMAN 0%
BRITISH 8%
ROMANIAN 1%
GREEK 76%

(b)

How many nights do you usually stay in the vacation destination?
(3 to 6 nights)

CYPRIOT 2%
BULGARIAN 16%
POLISH 4%
GERMAN 8%
BRITISH 9%
ROMANIAN 2%
GREEK 59%

(c) **How many nights do you usually stay in the vacation destination?**
(7 nights and more)

CYPRIOT 2%
BULGARIAN 17%
POLISH 9%
GERMAN 10%
BRITISH 11%
ROMANIAN 3%
GREEK 48%

Fig. 3 The number of nights at the vacation destination between different nationalities. **a** The percentage of 103 tourists that selected this answer. **b** The percentage of 2240 tourists that selected this answer. **c** The percentage of 676 tourists that selected this answer

another option could be to implement guest surveys (Zehrer & Hallmann, 2015). In accordance to the above this research proposed a theoretical model to investigate the concepts of the quality of tourism experience and tourists' perception of destination competitiveness with a questionnaire adapted to different nations.

As Ritchie and Crouch (2000) claimed, "The fundamental product in tourism is the destination experience". Compared to a business traveler's trip, the choice of destination is central to a pleasure traveler because his/her travel experience is tied to the destination itself. The tourism product incorporates the entire destination experience, which includes many individual segments, such as accommodation, transportation, attractions, entertainment, recreation, and food service. To develop modern tourism products and turn them into creative lures that will attract visitors and make them loyal to a business or a tourist destination, businesses and Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) will need to develop strategies and policies, which will be based on their tourist resources and will enrich them with

(a)

Generally speaking, how many vacation(s) do you take per year?
(0 holiday every year to two holidays per year)

CYPRIOT 2%
ROMANIAN 2%
BULGARIAN 19%
POLISH 4%
GERMAN 10%
BRITISH 10%
GREEK 53%

(b)

Generally speaking, how many vacation(s) do you take per year?
(3 holidays every year to 6 vacation every year)

CYPRIOT 3%
ROMANIAN 2%
BULGARIAN 9%
POLISH 8%
GERMAN 3%
BRITISH 7%
GREEK 68%

(c)

Generally speaking, how many vacation(s) do you take per year?
(7 holiday every year and over)

BULGARIAN 2%
CYPRIOT 0%
ROMANIAN 1%
GERMAN 2%
POLISH 8%
BRITISH 11%
GREEK 76%

Fig. 4 The number of vacations per year for the different nationalities. **a** The percentage of 2208 tourists that selected this answer. **b** The percentage of 706 tourists that selected this answer. **c** The percentage of 72 tourists that selected this answer

intangible stories, myths, emotional experiences, events and activities. Emphasis can and should be given to specific forms of tourism and tourism resources, where Greece has competitive and comparative advantages. The right planning and detailed analysis of the data can lead future tourists to a very pleasant holiday without any unexpected problems. Teamwork needs to be done by all stakeholders (public bodies and tourism professionals) in order to boost tourism results to the region.
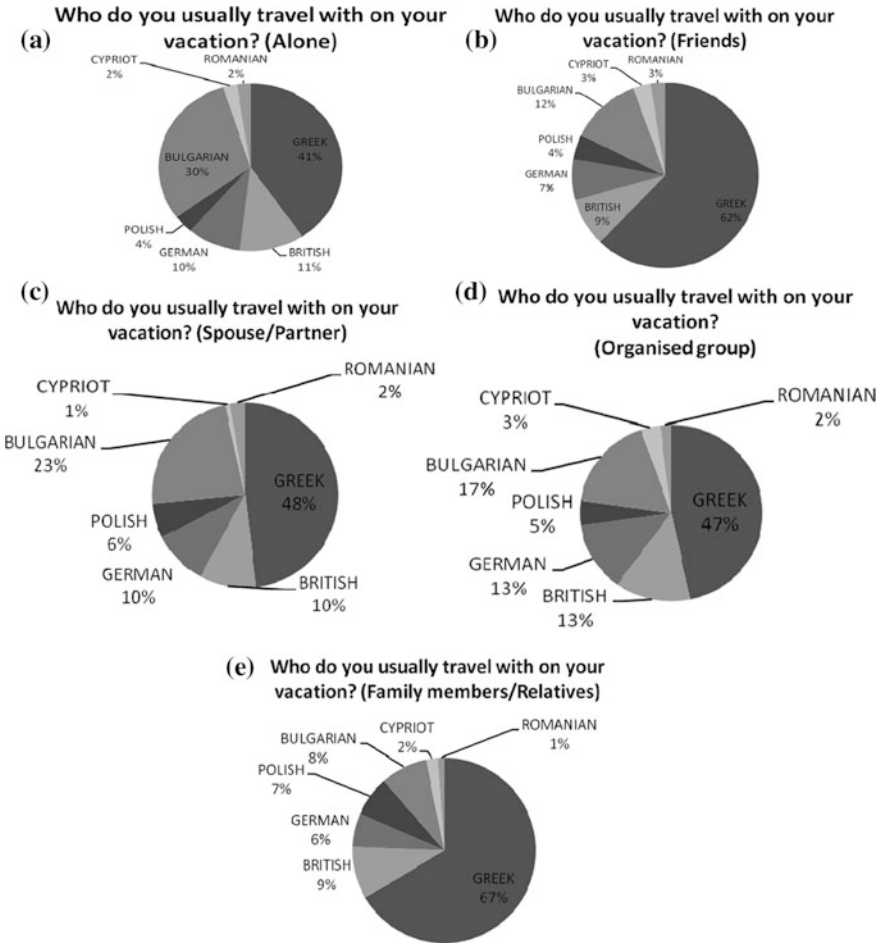
Fig. 5 The selected company on vacations between different nationalities. **a** The percentages of 5.5%. **b** The percentages of 37.6%. **c** The percentages of 28.3%. **d** The percentages of 4.9%. **e** The percentages of 19.9%

Table 3 Positive responses for each activity

	Positive responses	Percentages (%)
Canoe-Kayak	1668	54.3
Rafting	1335	43.5
Archery	1045	34.0
Diving	1349	43.9
Sport shooting	1175	38.3
Mountain bike (M.T.B.)	1386	45.1
Mountain hiking	1201	39.1
Orienteering	716	23.3
Climbing-Rappeliling	1318	42.9
Flying-fox	1237	40.3
Mountaineering	711	23.2
Water sports	1608	52.4
Paragliding	850	27.7
Motor sports	466	15.2

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