

# Culture – A Tourist Attraction: Importance – Expectations – Potential

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Culture is a tourist resource with a long tradition, a vivid present and a promising future. Already, for the Grand Tour of the English aristocracy in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, culture and education were the main priorities. Since then, millions of people have followed in the footsteps of their tourist ancestors by visiting historic buildings, cities and sites.

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, cultural tourism is extremely popular and, at the same time, omnipresent: cathedrals, art exhibitions and concerts are recording high numbers of visitors and the offers for events and festivals are vast. However, more and more providers of cultural activities are pushing into the lucrative travel market which will lead to increasing competition in the area of cultural tourism in the coming years.

In this situation, providers of cultural activities and educational travel need up-to-date market information to develop successful business strategies and target group orientated marketing operations. However, the current situation regarding data and research concerning cultural tourism proves to be ambivalent:

- On the one hand, tourism research has been concentrating on this issue in numerous case studies and at scholarly conventions since the 1990s. The results are documented in collected volumes, textbooks and bibliographies (Becker/Steinecke 1993; Robinson/Evans/Callaghan 1996; DSF 1996; Weissenborn 1997; Heinze 1999; Korsay et al. 1999; Aiest 2000; Dreyer 2000; Richards 1996, 2001; Steinecke 2007).
- On the other hand, specific data for this market segment are missing, because official statistics do not record cultural tourism (e.g. visitor numbers for museums are, at best, estimated). In tourist surveys cultural tourism is merely recorded as one out of many kinds of vacation travel.

Therefore, a specific representative survey concerning cultural tourism was carried out throughout Germany for the first time in 2009.<sup>1</sup> The survey focused on the following questions:

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<sup>1</sup> The survey was conceived by Jens Hulverson (Gebeco, Kiel), Dr. Wolfgang Isenberg (Thomas-Morus-Academy, Bensberg) and Prof. Dr. Albrecht Steinecke (University of

- How important is culture when considering a person's reasons for holiday travel?
- Regarding tourist activities, how important are visits to cultural attractions?
- What does it mean to tourists to visit cultural attractions?
- What do tourists remember most about a visit to a cultural attraction?
- What is the potential demand for (self-)organized cultural and educational travel?
- What do tourists expect from organized cultural travel?

The following article gives a short review of the survey's main results.

## **1 How Important Is Culture When Considering a Person's Reasons for Travel?**

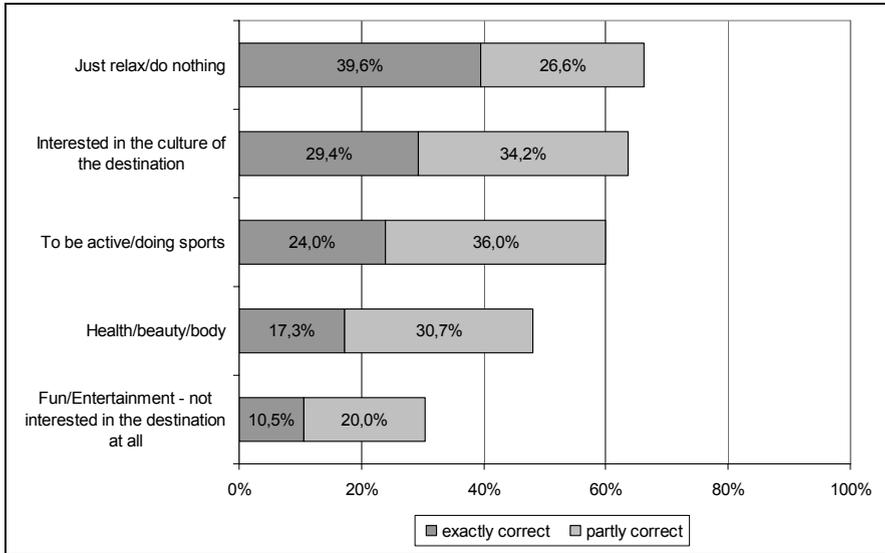
In recent decades, tourism research has compiled numerous surveys about the reasons for travel. On the one hand, there are theoretical surveys categorising one's wish for travel according to already established social science theories, e.g. travel as an anthropologic constant, as an ostentatious consumption, as a pilgrimage, as a game, as an exhilarating experience etc. Although explications of this sort seem to be logical at first sight, they can prove to be problematic, because of their one-dimensional character. They can, indeed, sufficiently explain the reasons for some kinds of tourism. Given the variety of reasons for travel, however, they prove to be insufficient (Hennig 1997: 72-101).

On the other hand, tourism motivation has been the subject of empirical research as well, e.g. in form of direct interviews as well as telephone interviews and mail questionnaires. But these methods are not perfect either, because the respondents' answers are based on voluntarily disclosed personal information. The respondents need to have a great ability to reflect and articulate. Furthermore, these methods involve the risk of receiving answers that are socially desired by the respondents, while those reasons for travel that need to be thought of ambivalently are not mentioned at all (Steinecke 2006: 49-51).

These methodological constraints have to be taken into account as well when looking at the following results. In each case, the data refers to the subjective view of the respondents. Therefore, no defined term for "culture" was given beforehand, because there is no absolute and interdisciplinary accepted definition of "culture" (Moebius 2009). Additionally, the number of statements was intentionally reduced

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Paderborn). The telephone interviews (1,509 people over the age of 16) were conducted by the European Tourism Institute in Trier. The project was funded with the financial support of Gebeco (Kiel), a provider of educational and cultural travel.



**Fig. 1.** Reasons why the Germans travel

Source: survey on cultural tourism by Gebeco/TMA/UPB 2009

to five central reasons for travel: relaxation, culture, health and body, sports, entertainment (see fig. 1).

For 66.2% of the respondents, recreational reasons such as relaxing/doing nothing are the most important vacation expectations. These reasons reflect the high physical and mental strain, as well as the restrictions, that the German population has to face in their everyday work (this is why recreation is particularly important to middle-aged, working respondents).

Interest in the culture of the travel destination comes a close second at 63.6%. This figure shows that culture is of great importance to Germans among their reasons for travel, regardless of whether the respondents understand culture as tourist attractions of a high culture or as cultural elements of everyday life. Older people especially show a keen interest in new cultural experiences (81.1% of the 65-74-year-olds vs. 37.5% of the 16-24-year-olds).

Usually, German tourists are more curious and open-minded about new impressions than is generally assumed. This fact also becomes clear in the relatively limited approval of the statement “During my last vacation, fun and entertainment were especially important to me – the travel destination did not matter”. Although shown as pleasure-seeking, boozy and noisy in the media, especially on commercial TV stations, only every third respondent could be characterised as a hedonistic and solely fun-oriented tourist (predominantly younger tourists with a low level of education).

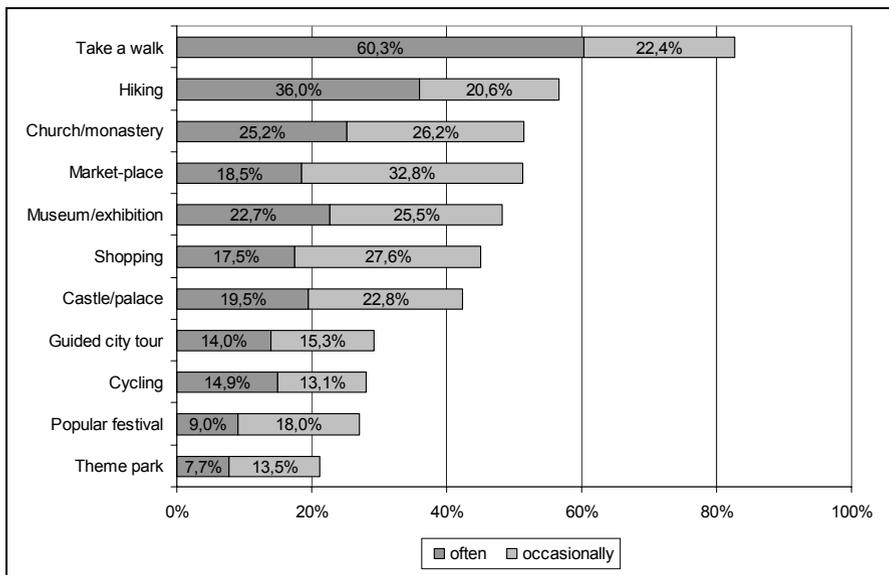
## 2 Regarding Tourist Activities, How Important Are Visits of Cultural Attractions?

Two thirds of all Germans want to learn more about the everyday culture of their travel destination during their vacation. The fact, that cultural attractions rate among the most popular activities during a vacation, reflects this great interest. In this ranking, taking a walk and hiking come first. However, a large section of the respondents visit historic buildings, an exhibition or take a guided city tour (see fig. 2).

Among the cultural attractions, churches and convents prove to be the most popular sights at 51.4%. From a touristic perspective, they have a diverse potential (Steinecke 2007: 103-104):

- As an architectural/ historical site, they represent different stylistic periods.
- Cathedrals are seen as especially spectacular buildings (landmarks), which impress with their great architecture and valuable inventory.
- Many churches and convents are religious sites which are still in use. Therefore, they offer visitors a special atmosphere of peace and tranquillity.

One proof of their great attraction is the high number of visitors some churches can record: Cologne Cathedral, for example, is the most popular of all German sites with 6 million visitors a year. About 1 million people visit the Aachen Dome



**Fig. 2.** Holiday activities of the Germans

Source: survey on cultural tourism by Gebeco/TMA/UPB 2009

every year and 600,000 visit the Ulm Cathedral (see German tourism association DTV 2003).

48.2% of the respondents stated, that they visited museums and exhibitions during their vacation. This type of demand is closely associated with the expansion of museums in Germany as well as in other European countries. The number of museums in Germany, for example, rose from 2,076 in 1981 to 6,197 in 2007 (Institute for Museum Research IfM 2008: 7). Besides the permanently exhibited art collections, special temporary events can attract visitors like a magnet, e.g. the exhibition of the Museum of Modern Art (New York) in Berlin, which recorded more than 1.2 million visitors in 2004.

Among the popular cultural attractions are castles and palaces (42.3%). Although they are now standard sites, they have been used as tourist attractions only since the 19th century (since the Romantic period – especially castle ruins, which are considered to be relicts of a mysterious past). In Germany, Heidelberg Castle (1.2 m visitors/year), Neuschwanstein Castle (1.2 m) and Wartburg Castle (430,000) record the highest number of visitors (see DTV 2003).

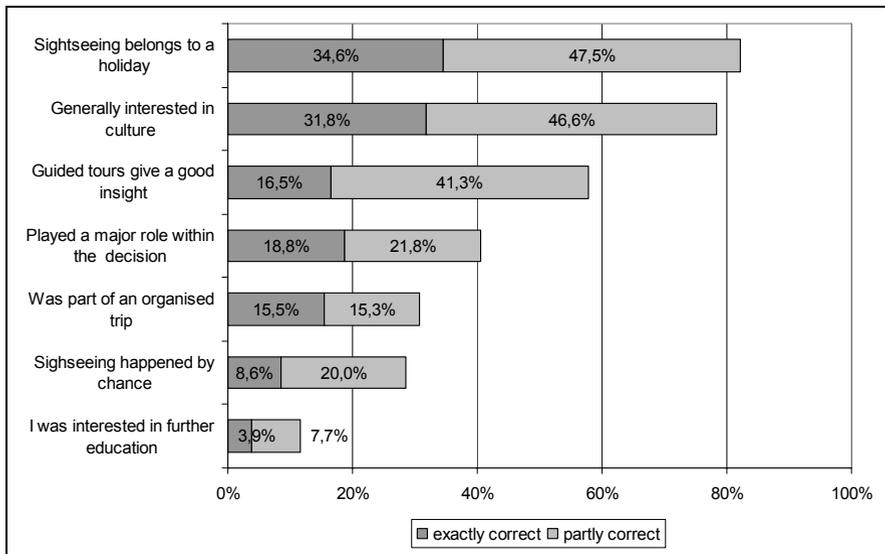
### **3 What Does It Mean to Tourists to Visit Cultural Attractions?**

In the survey, 85.6% of the respondents stated that they visited cultural attractions at some point. For the majority (82.1%), such sightseeing is a matter of course and is simply part of a perfect vacation (see fig. 3). Based on this evaluation, excursions and sightseeing can be described as habitual tourist activities, which have no particular importance for the holidaymaker.

This stance is the result of a historical learning process, which has been taking place since the beginning of tourism in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century. During the Grand Tour of the English aristocracy, it was not the visiting of churches, castles and museums, but the training in dance, fencing and horseback riding, meeting important people and learning how to behave according to one's social standard that were on the agenda (Brilli 1997).

It was not until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the bourgeoisie was able to travel as well, that sites of interest came more and more to the fore. Given the short time and sparse funds available, tours had to be planned and calculated efficiently. Tourists wanted to be able to orientate themselves quickly and see those things which were especially worth seeing. The traveller's companions ("Red Books") of British John Murray and the guidebooks of Karl Baedeker provided a classification of sights (a valuation system with stars) and a catalogued order of sightseeing, influencing tourists' travel behaviour up to the present day (Steinecke 2007: 321).

Besides the habitual sightseeing behaviour, there are many, and sometimes very specific reasons, for visiting a cultural attraction: The desire to further one's professional qualifications plays a minor role (11.6%) similar to coincidental



**Fig. 3.** The reasons for visiting a cultural attraction

Source: survey on cultural tourism Gebeco/TMA/UPB 2009

sightseeing (28.6%). On the other hand, 40.6% of the respondents said that the visit to a cultural attraction was already a central issue when deciding on a vacation. These holidaymakers can generally be described as cultural tourists:

- 18.8% are cultural tourists in a narrow sense (they regarded the statement as “exactly correct”).
- A further 21.8% are cultural tourists in a wider sense (they regarded this statement as “partly correct”).

These results agree with other studies of the cultural tourism sector (although the data cannot be compared directly due to different collection methods):

- In the 1980s, a survey carried out across Europe concluded that 23.5% of tourist arrivals could be attributed to the cultural tourism sector. 10% of which were “Specific Cultural Tourists” for whom cultural attractions were the main reason for choosing their vacation and 90% were “General Cultural Tourists”, i.e. vacationers with an interest in culture but who also shared a broader range of reasons for going on vacation and shared a broader range of interests (Irish Tourist Board et al. 1988: 23).
- 16% of respondents of the travel survey “Reiseanalyse 2008”, carried out by the research team for vacation and travel (Forschungsgemeinschaft Urlaub und Reisen, established in Kiel), stated that it was “very important” to

them to do something cultural and educational whilst on vacation. This reason for a vacation can be found in the lower segment made up of a broad range which includes 29 statements (F. U. R. 2008: 86).

78.4% of the respondents claimed to be interested in culture at home as well as on holiday. This information may be important to the marketing departments of the providers of cultural activities and operators offering cultural travel. Through cooperation with adult education centres, theatres, museums and associations, communication strategies can be developed to reach prospective customers at their homes.

#### 4 What Do Tourists Remember Most About a Visit to a Cultural Attraction?

The tourists are eager and curious visitors but at the same time they are no experts on the history of art and culture. They want to see something impressive, gain new impressions and be informed in an entertaining manner. This fact stands out clearly due to the respondents' answers to the question, what they remembered in particular about their last visit to a cultural institution (see fig. 4).

Even though classical learning experiences are significant, they are less so than general memories like a change from the daily routine (94.1%) and a good and in spiring atmosphere (90.1%). It is far more important to spend a pleasant day

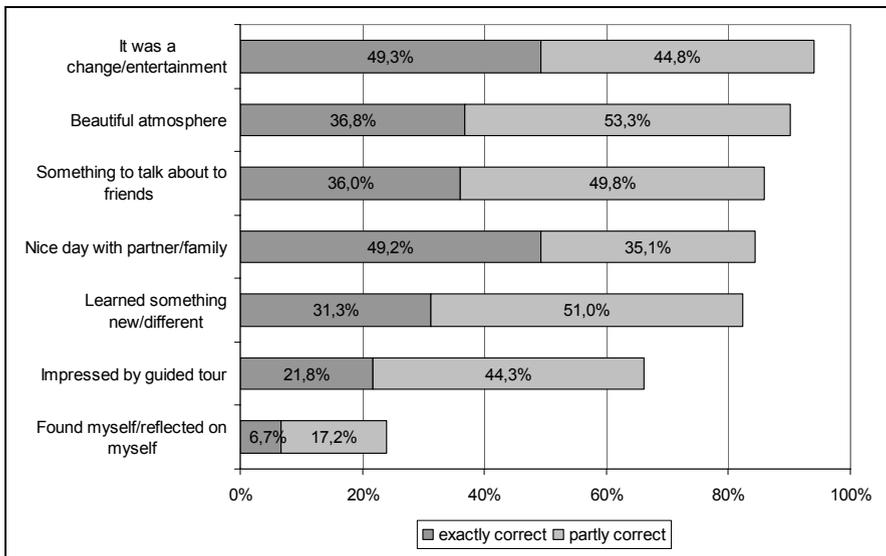


Fig. 4. Memories from visiting a cultural attraction

Source: survey on cultural tourism Gebeco/TMA/UPB 2009

with one's partner or family and to be able to have something to tell one's friends at home.

These results contain important information for providers of cultural activities and operators of cultural travel which helps them to design their products, because the demanding and travel-experienced customers do not simply expect dry data, numbers and facts – they expect an illustrated, lively and emotionally touching presentation. From the visitors' perspective, the sightseeing of churches, castles and museums is a collective experience which should include all senses, and not just the intellect. It should therefore be the central aim of culture and tourism marketing departments to produce such memories for holiday travellers. Therefore it is necessary to pay attention to a crucial factor that is typical for all cultural tourists: Selectivity. In the face of little time and money, holidaymakers are forced to select places and sights. They are not interested in getting a complete and systematic overview. Instead, they are looking for the extraordinary, the typical or the superlative. This selectivity forms a strong contrast to the aim of traditional providers of cultural activities (especially museums) who offer systematic, broad and thorough transfer of knowledge about collections, research and education.

## **5 What Is the Potential Demand for (Self-)Organized Cultural and Educational Travel?**

The analyses of the reasons for travel showed that older people are far more curious about and interested in culture than younger age groups, who prefer to relax and have fun. Hence the aging of the German population provides an opportunity for cultural institutions and operators of cultural travel alike, as seniors constitute an increasingly important group in the tourist sector.

In order to record the potential demand for cultural and educational travel more precisely, the following question was asked in the course of the survey: "There are many ways to spend one's vacation. Which types of vacation are of interest to you during the next three years?"

Long-distance travel to exotic destinations (54.1%) and beach holidays by the Mediterranean Sea (52.2%) rank high among the most popular types of vacations (see fig. 5). Self-organized cultural and educational travel comes in third place (51.2%) and this is especially popular among the middle- and higher-age groups (above 45 years).

The potential demand for organized cultural travel, as offered by tour operators, accounts for 9.9% ("great interest") or 21.7% ("interest"). In comparison to other empirical data collections, this survey found a marked greater potential for this type of vacation: In the German travel analyses of 2008 quoted above, a mere 3% of respondents said that they were "fairly sure" they were planning a cultural holiday. A further 6% thought this offer to be worth "general consideration" (F. U. R. 2008: 102).

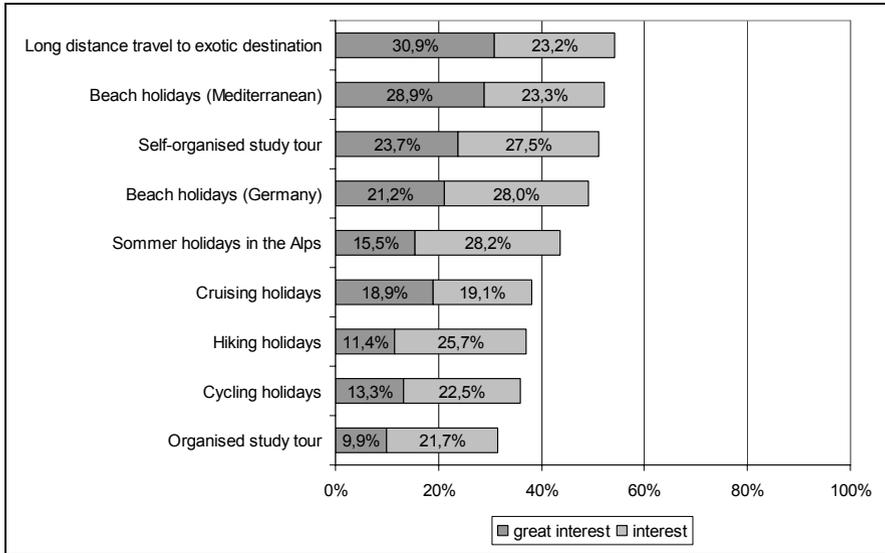


Fig. 5. Future interest in different kinds of vacation

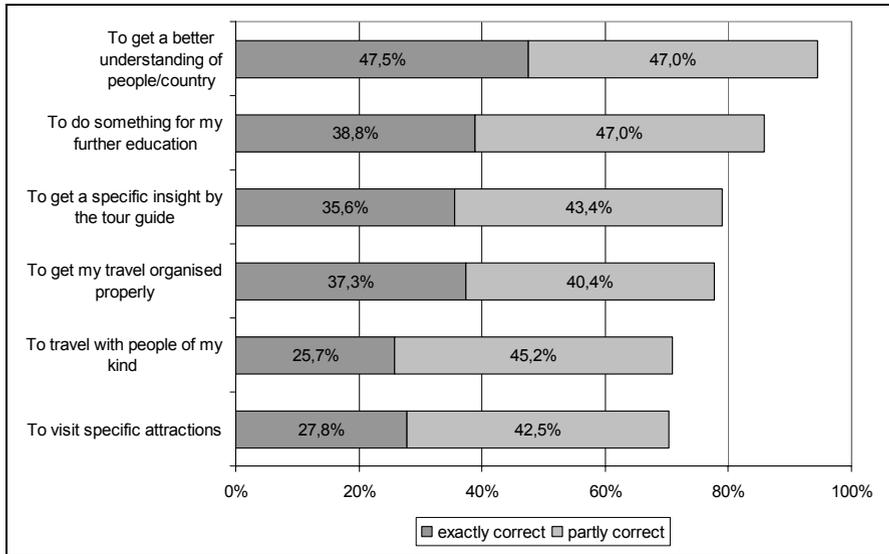
Source: survey on cultural tourism Gebeco/TMA/UPB 2009

## 6 What Do Tourists Expect from Organized Cultural Travel?

The character of organized cultural travel has changed fundamentally in the course of history. The scientific expeditions of the 19th century, which were undertaken by professors and their students to get to know foreign countries and different cultures, became a touristic product in its own right in the 20th century (Steinecke 2007: 280-281).

Against the background of a changed definition for “culture” and new demands of the participants, cultural travel is undergoing constant change – away from the classical form which focused exclusively on the relics of the high culture to a contemporary kind of vacation that also includes cultural elements of an everyday nature. Current trends of this market segment are: The thematic specialization, experience-orientated marketing, use of different modes of transport, designation of new target groups and product classification (luxury vs. low-budget cultural travel).

Notwithstanding these changes in organisation and content, this survey makes it clear that the (potential) participants are mainly interested in getting to know the holiday destination, its culture and people (94.5%). Additional typical expectations include furthering one’s own education as well as gaining special insights through the tour guide (see fig. 6). On the other hand, comfort, the desire for social contacts and the interest in particular cultural institutions are of slightly less importance for organized cultural travel.



**Fig. 6.** Expectations from organized cultural travel

Source: survey on cultural tourism Gebeco/TMA/UPB 2009

The results show clearly that (potential) customers have a variety of demands for contemporary cultural travel. Tour operators are thus facing the challenge of combining the elements of classical cultural travel (transfer of knowledge, sociability, and safety) with new elements. This includes the individualisation of offers because participants place more value on flexibility and the realisation of their own interests. On the other hand, cultural travel should not just transfer cognitive knowledge but also facilitate sensual and emotional experiences (Treidel 2006: 367-368).

In spite of these changes, the core elements of organized cultural travel prove to be quite stable: An expert guide and a set program, based on a sound concept and good preparatory work.

## 7 Conclusion

This survey has generated current data on the general importance of culture as a tourist attraction, on the expectations of tourists and the future potential demand for this sector. The central results are as follows:

- The culture of the holiday destination constitutes an important part of the range of reasons for going on vacation.
- After walking and hiking, visiting cultural attractions is among the most popular holiday activities.

- Sightseeing is just part of having a great holiday; for 41% of the respondents it is a central reason for going on a vacation.
- Tourists do not just remember the educational value of sights, but above all, they associate general and positive memories with them (change from their daily routine, sophisticated atmosphere, pleasant day spent with their partner/family, having something to tell other people about).
- Great potential exists for self-organized cultural travel; 10% of Germans are interested in cultural travel.

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