

# THE CHANGING GEOGRAPHIES OF BACKPACKER TOURISM IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA.

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## **ABSTRACT.**

South-East Asia has the oldest backpacker trails. This paper examines the geographies of such flows, drawing upon the largest survey to date of backpackers in Asia using qualitative research in a longitudinal study from the 1970s to the 2000s. Backpacker trails have changed significantly and new routes have emerged including the ‘northern trail’ (Bangkok - Cambodia - Vietnam - Laos). Changing routes are to be expected (backpackers constantly seek new places, pioneering for later mass tourism), however, this paper suggests that fundamentally, these changing trails are due to external variables combining travel innovations (low cost airlines, and other new transport networks); exogenous shock (political instability and terrorism); and growing regional competition, specifically emerging ‘exotic’ destinations such as Vietnam and Cambodia.

**Keywords:** backpackers; small-scale tourism; travel choice; motivation

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

This working paper examines one particular form of international tourism – backpackers – who have their own idiosyncratic styles of consumption, travel patterns and peculiarities as a niche but growing segment. In many parts of the world backpacker routes, or ‘trails’ are emerging, including trails in South Africa, Latin