

City break as a form of urban tourism

Agata Balińska

Warsaw University of Life
Sciences—SGGW, Poland

E-mail: agata_balinska@sggw.edu.pl
ORCID: 0000-0002-8777-9955

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to investigate the attractiveness of city break trips as a form of urban (cognitive) tourism. The study focuses on the following research questions: What factors influence the popularity of city break trips? Which cities are most often chosen as destinations for short-term holidays? What factors determine the choice of these cities? Which city attractions appeal to city break visitors? How are city breaks organized? These research questions were investigated through desk-based analysis of literature on urban tourist destination attractiveness and the determinants of city break trend development as well as an online diagnostic survey which involved 184 respondents actively participating in tourism. The study shows that the main reasons for taking a city break trip is the desire to “escape from everyday life routine”, “sightseeing” and “relaxation”. Cities in Poland were more popular destinations than cities abroad and they were usually reached by train or car. City break visitors most often visited historical sites and looked for off-the-beaten-track places. The main reason for choosing a particular destination was the desire to see something new. Research topic and issues testify to the originality of the selected research area.

Keywords: city break, tourism, cities, destination, destination attractiveness

1. Introduction

Already in ancient times cities were places of tourist reception. They were home to temples and amphitheatres and often enjoyed vibrant cultural life. However, despite the long history of the phenomenon, it is difficult to provide a concrete, unequivocal definition of the term *urban tourism*. G. Ashworth and S. J. Page, M. Mika, M. Kachniewska (Ashworth and Page, 2011, pp. 1–15; Kachniewska, 2012, pp. 49–52; Mika, 2007, pp. 319–328) also address the problem of defining this term. Kowalczyk distinguishes between urban tourism and tourism in urban areas and defines the former as “tourism

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Correspondence to:
Agata Balińska
Szkoła Główna Gospodarstwa
Wiejskiego w Warszawie
Wydział Ekonomiczny
ul. Nowoursynowska 166
02-787 Warszawa, Poland
Tel.: +48 22 593 41 54

whose purpose is to visit and get to know the city treated as a cultural heritage and recognized as an indivisible element of a tourism space” (Kowalczyk, 2005, p. 157). Due to their specific features, cities are destinations attracting various forms of tourism: cultural tourism, business travels, entertainment tourism, hobby tourism (including passive sport tourism or festival tourism), post-industrial tourism, religious tourism and sightseeing. Unlike peripheral areas, cities are destinations of short trips, which has been noted by Z. Kruczek and P. Zmysłony (2010, pp. 12–31). Obviously, the city’s attractiveness plays an important role in stimulating tourist demand. In a case of a tourist who is keen on exploring the city, attractiveness will consider different elements than in a case of a business tourist. Researchers have identified the main components of cities’ attractiveness as tourist destinations (Mika, 2007, p. 320; Esteban, 2017, pp. 22–58; Romão et al., 2018, pp. 67–75; Boivin and Tanguay, 2019, pp. 67–79; Nicoletti et al., 2019): architecture and urban layout of the city, including both historical and modern districts, cultural facilities (theatres, cinemas, museums, galleries), sacred architecture, ethnic districts, conference and shopping centres, entertainment and sports facilities, food places, transport hub (e.g. port, airport), scientific and academic potential (colleges, universities), festivals, city atmosphere.

Trips to cities are usually short-term (max 3 nights) and are extra leisure activity (they do not replace regular holidays) usually taken outside the tourist season. Due to their length and character, they are increasingly called city breaks. The term is defined differently. M. Awedyk, M. Makarewicz and J. Weltrowska define it as “relatively short, usually weekend trips outside the home country to fashionable metropolises, with particular emphasis on capital cities, combining relaxation with sightseeing and cultural tourism, usually organized independently by a tourist, with relatively low budget” (Awedyk, Makarewicz and Weltrowska, 2013, p. 12). The definition of a city break most widely used in the literature is the one proposed by J. Trew and N. Cockerell, who use this term to describe a short leisure trip to one city or town, with no overnight stay at any other destination during the trip (Trew and Cockerell, 2002, p. 86). City break is often considered part of weekend tourism. We also note this in the approach of the Ministry of Sport and Tourism (from 18 November 2019, the Ministry of Development), which was the organizer of the seminar entitled “How to sell a weekend? City break trends” (MSiT, 2015; see also: MSiT, 2016–2019; MSiT, 2019).

The conditions for the development of city break trips are very diverse, and the most important include (Prylińska and Ratkowska 2009, pp. 4–5; Szymkowiak, 2014, pp. 136–152; Charterina and Aparicio, 2015, pp. 71–82; Gralak, 2016, pp. 23–34):

- fashion for short tourist trips;
- development of means of transportation (especially by air—more flight connections, low-cost airlines);
- development of Internet services enabling tourists to quickly obtain information and make reservations;
- changes in the organization of work (remote working);
- socio-cultural changes (non-working days in the form of religious and secular holidays);
- flexibility in taking leave (leave on demand);
- increased wealth status of the society;

- increased cooperation between people sharing access to goods (sharing economy), e.g. couchsurfing, Airbnb, BlaBlaCar;
- growing popularity of social media, which are a source of inspiration and information;
- development of group shopping portals;
- increased availability of hotel accommodation;
- increased number of households with double income (both partners are professionally active);
- tourists seeking new and unique experiences without compromising high standard of services;
- new tourist attractions, e.g. interactive museums, cultural and scientific centres (e.g. Copernicus Science Centre in Warsaw).

The factors driving city break trend are both economic and non-economic (mainly social) in character. Local government authorities, associations and governmental agencies are also involved in the development of this form of recreation. The examples include: Half-Price Weekend—organized by the Ministry of Sport and Tourism (from 18 November 2019, the Ministry of Development), Half-Price Poznań—an offer by a tourist organization, or Fall in Love with Warsaw—a campaign run by the capital's authorities.

City break is not only an interesting socio-economic phenomenon, but also a phenomenon worth academic investigation. Unfortunately, the research in this field seems insufficient, which prompted the author to undertake a study in this area.

2. Assumptions for the research and results

2.1. Aim and methods

The aim of this paper is to investigate the attractiveness of city break trips as a form of urban (cognitive) tourism. The study focuses on the following research questions: What factors influence the popularity of city break trips? Which cities are most often chosen as destinations for short-term holidays? What factors determine the choice of these cities? Which city attractions appeal to city break visitors? How are city breaks organized? The questions, although indirectly stated, took into account the most important elements of tourism attractiveness (touristic assets, transportation accessibility, touristic infrastructure and the abstract perception of appeal).

The study used a desk research method and a diagnostic survey method. The survey involved an online questionnaire which was made available through social media in the first quarter of 2018 and 184 respondents, actively practicing tourism, participated in the survey. The questionnaire was conducted on Survio platform. The survey included 12 questions and respondents' particulars. Closed questions, semi-closed questions, opened questions, questions with Likert scale and descriptive scale were used. Both at the stage of preparing the survey and discussion of results the method of netography was applied to analyze available information (also the results of scientific research). The collected material also was used in the construction of the research tool.

The collected material was subjected to quantitative and qualitative analysis. In order to verify the statistical relationships between the sex, age and place of residence of the respondents and the determinants of using city break, the Mann–Whitney U Test was used. The test was also used to look for relationships between socio-demographic variables and the most-watched attractions.

2.2. Results

The empirical research was conducted on a sample of 184 respondents. The sample was dominated by women, people aged 19–24, with secondary education, from large cities, who mostly viewed their wealth status as good (Table 1). This respondents' profile is unfortunately typical for online surveys, specifically those which take into account social media.

Table 1. Profile of the respondents

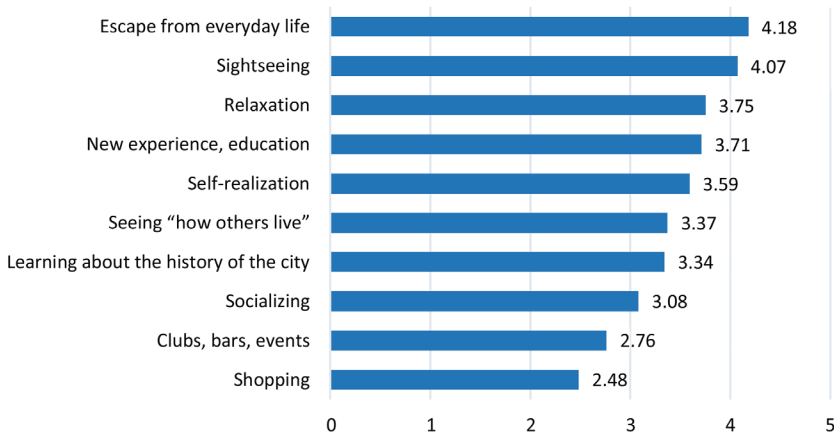
Characteristics of respondents	Number of respondents (in %)
Gender:	
Women	84.2
Men	15.8
Age:	
17–18	5.4
19–24	77.2
25–30	14.1
31≤	3.3
Education:	
Secondary	51.6
Tertiary	42.9
Other	5.5
Place of residence:	
City of over 200,000 residents	68.5
City of 50,000–200,000 residents	7.6
City up to 50,000 residents	12.5
Village	11.4
Assessment of own wealth status:	
Very good	14.1
Good	47.3
Average	37.0
Rather bad	1.6
Participation in tourism:	
Every few years	4.4
1–2 times a year	17.4
3–4 times a year	46.7
5 times a year minimum	31.5

Source: Author's own elaboration.

The frequency of respondents' participation in tourism was quite high, as much as 78.2% declared a trip at least three times a year (it is due to the way of reaching the respondents). Interestingly, there was no statistically significant relationship between the frequency of travels and other socio-demographic variables, including the declared (perceived) wealth status.

The research focused on participation in city break travels. Most respondents took such trips three or more times a year (51.6%) or twice a year (23.9%). People taking a city break holiday once a year accounted for 16.3%, and once every two years or less often only 8.2%. These answers were confirmed by responses to the question about the duration of the trips. Almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of the respondents (65.2%) travelled regardless of the season, 26.1% mainly in summer, 5.4% in spring and some individuals in winter and autumn.

Various factors motivated respondents to take city break trips. Their rank varied, as illustrated by Figure 1.



Note: Scale 1–5, where 5 means “the most important”.

Figure 1. Ranking of factors motivating tourists to take city break holiday

Source: Author's own elaboration based on the research.

“Escape from everyday life”, “sightseeing” and “relaxation” were the key motives to take a city break trip. Shopping, enjoying clubs and parties were the least important motives (Figure 1). These results are partly in line with the study carried out by G. Dunne et al. (2007, p. 103). In their research, the “escape” motive also came first, but the second one was “socializing”, which in our study featured in a lower position. There was no statistically significant difference, as measured by the Mann–Whitney U Test (Z), between the importance of city break travel determinants (shown in Figure 1) and the gender or age of respondents. However, a statistically significant difference was noted between the place of residence and the

“escape” motive—people living in the largest cities are more likely to “escape” from their place of residence than residents of small towns ($Z = 0.511, p = 0.03$).

The respondents most often visited large Polish cities, i.e. Trójmiasto (52.7%), Krakow and Wrocław (47.8% each), Zakopane (20.1%), Poznań (19.6%), Toruń (17.9%), Łódź (11.4%) and Warsaw (9.8%), as well as a small but very popular town—Kazimierz Dolny (8.7%). As for cities abroad, respondents most often chose Prague (32.6%), Berlin (26.1%), Paris (23.6%), London (16.8%), Barcelona (16.3%), Vienna (13.6%), Rome (13.0%) and Budapest (11.4%). These are the capitals of European cities, well-connected with major Polish cities. They are also cities heavily burdened by tourist traffic which has negative effects (Bouchon and Rauscher, 2019, pp. 598–619). The question about travel destinations leads to another question about what factors determined their choice. The motives, as declared by the respondents, are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Influence of individual motives on the selection of city break destination

Motives	Influence (in %)		
	decisive	medium	no influence
Interest in new destinations abroad	34.2	37.0	28.8
Interest in new destinations in Poland	32.1	52.2	15.7
Return to well-known places in favourite destinations	27.7	58.2	14.1
Friends' recommendation	14.1	46.6	39.3
Travel agent's offer	5.4	12.0	82.6

Source: Author's own elaboration based on the research.

The need to see new places home or abroad was viewed as decisive (Table 2). Almost one in three respondents decided to return to already known places. Travel agents' offers had the lowest influence on the decision, which may come as a surprise as more and more tour operators are offering this type of holiday.

The trips were primarily of a sightseeing nature, which was confirmed by the indications of attractions most frequently visited during city break holiday (Table 3).

Table 3. City attractions visited on city break trips

Attraction	Frequency (in %)			
	always	often	occasionally	never
Historical sites	47.3	39.1	11.9	1.7
Off-the-beaten-track places	33.4	42.1	22.3	2.2
Festivals, events related to local culture and history, e.g. Oktoberfest	25.5	41.9	26.6	6.0
Museums, art galleries, exhibitions	21.8	40.2	32.6	5.4
Educational places, e.g. offering interactive workshops/ classes	21.2	48.9	26.6	3.3
Music festivals	12.5	23.4	40.2	23.9
Shopping centres	7.6	23.9	42.4	26.1
Theatre, cinema	3.8	19.0	48.4	28.8
Clubs	6.0	22.0	35.6	36.4

Source: Author's own elaboration based on the research.

Respondents indicated that the most visited attractions are historical sites and off-the-beaten-track places. Attractions like clubs, cinemas, theatres and shopping centres were rarely or never chosen.

There was no statistically significant difference between the most-visited places and the socio-demographic variables of the respondents.

The study also investigated the means of transportation and accommodation used by the respondents (Figure 2).

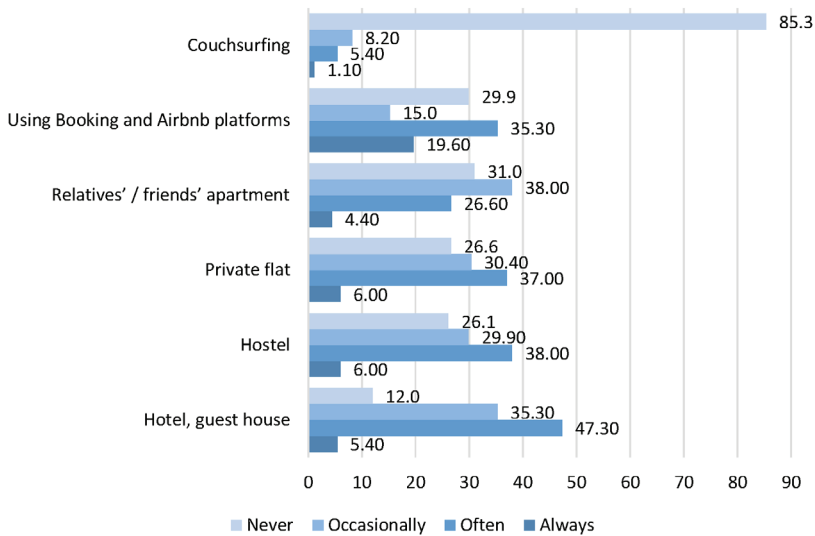


Figure 2. Types of accommodation used on city break trips (in %)

Source: Author's own elaboration based on the research.

The respondents most often used accommodation offered on Booking and Airbnb platforms. The least popular was the use of non-commercial accommodation, i.e. couchsurfing (Figure 2). Even though Poles in general are often hosted by relatives and friends when on holidays, this type of accommodation was rarely used by city break visitors.

The factors that determined the choice of accommodation were primarily the price (43.2%), followed by the distance from the centre (32.1%), which seems appropriate for this type of trips. Also convenience (27%) and distance from attractions (25%) were viewed important. The less important factors included: available equipment and opinions (17.9%), originality of the place (7.1%), recommendation by family and friends (5.8%) and promotional offer (5.8%).

The fact that respondents chose cities in Poland more often than abroad translates into their preferred means of transportation. Respondents most often chose the train (31.5%) and the car (29.9%) to travel. Air travel came third (27.7%), followed by the coach. The main factor determining the choice of transportation was the price (37.9%). Journey time was important for one in three respondents (29.4%), while convenience for one in four (25.0%).

3. Conclusions

City break is an attractive form of spending free time, enabling the implementation of two functions: relaxing and sightseeing. The situation on the market (before COVID-19 epidemic) had shown that tourism sector had been developing in dynamic pace. That was indicated by the scale of touristic demand, as well as the involvement of local entrepreneurs,

local governments and plenty of other organizations which aim was to promote cities as places for a short tourist stay.

The growing popularity of this type of tourist trips was influenced by the desire to rest combined with sightseeing and well developed transportation and accommodation infrastructure which enables quick access and effective use of free time. Hence, big cities which often are capital cities are so popular. This thesis was confirmed by the conducted survey. From the surveys the following conclusions were drawn:

1. The main factor deciding about tourist trips was recreation outside the everyday environment.
2. The respondents were slightly more likely to choose well-connected cities in Poland than the capitals of the European countries. The list of most preferred destinations also includes smaller towns which are extremely popular with tourists, i.e. Zakopane and Kazimierz Dolny. Interestingly, the reason for choosing a given city was not only the desire to see something new, as reported by one in three respondents, but also to return to already known and previously enjoyed places (a decisive motive for over one in four respondents). It shows that emotions play the key role when choosing the place for leisure. It is also a guide for touristic entrepreneurs, which proves that a satisfied customer is willing to come back to the same place again.
3. The most frequently chosen attractions in the visited cities included historical sites, off-the-beaten-track places rarely visited by tourists travelling in organized groups and cultural events.
4. The respondents were most likely to reserve accommodation posted on popular booking platforms and their choice was mainly determined by the price and distance from the centre. The weight of the latter factor also resulted from the fact that the most popular means of transportation was the train, followed by the car in second position.
5. The survey has also shown that the term *city break* is spreading more slowly than the idea of this type of trips. It is an important guide for touristic entrepreneurs and local governments. Extended attraction offer may expand the number of touristic trips.

The attractiveness of city break trips was influenced by many factors, either practical (quick commute, praise, popular monuments) or emotional (searching for the new, originality, return to previous places, the possibility of escaping everyday hustle). The presented survey has shown the complexity of city break trips as the area of the research. It has also proved that online surveys, although have many advantages, have also some limitations. The main thing is that young people using the Internet and social media participate in them. This age group is the most active and visible in tourism. However, it is difficult to maintain an equal number of women and men surveyed. While conducting next research it is crucial to lay an emphasis on respondents' participation from each demographic and social group. In period of research and editing of the obtained data the health situation worldwide has been rather stable. In the era of global COVID-19 pandemic, we can only predict in which direction the touristic market will develop after the end of the epidemic. In author's opinion, if the epidemic ends, city break trips to well communicated cities will be gaining in popularity among tourists worldwide. Promotions and discounted offers on accommodation and cultural events, which cannot take place today, though will be present in the future with high frequency, will be a favour to city

break trips. The obstacles with crossing state borders will cause probably local tourists rather than foreign tourists to be the first to take part in such a touristic activity.

Knowing the conditions for the development of this form of spending free time, one can put forward the thesis that we will observe intensive development in this area of tourism, which broadens the space for future scientific research.

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City break jako forma turystyki miejskiej

Abstrakt: Celem badań była ocena atrakcyjności „city break” jako formy turystyki miejskiej (poznawczej). W opracowaniu postawiono następujące pytania: Jakie czynniki wpływają na popularność wyjazdów typu „city break”? Które miasta są najczęściej wybierane jako miejsca krótkookresowego wypoczynku? Jakie czynniki decydują o wyborze tych miast? Jakie obiekty w miastach cieszą się największą popularnością wśród respondentów? W jaki sposób organizowane są wyjazdy „city break”? W pracy dokonano analizy literatury z zakresu atrakcyjności turystycznej miast oraz uwarunkowań rozwoju wyjazdów „city break”. W ra-

mach metody sondażu diagnostycznego zastosowano ankietę internetową. W badaniu wzięły udział 184 aktywne turystycznie osoby. Wyniki pokazały, że główne powody korzystania z „city break” to chęć oderwania się od codzienności, zwiedzanie i odpoczynek. Częściej niż zagraniczni respondenci wybierali miasta w Polsce, do których dojeżdżali pociągiem lub samochodem. Najczęściej zwiedzali zabytki oraz miejsca „nieodkryte” przez turystów zorganizowanych, a główny powód wyboru danego miasta to właśnie chęć zobaczenia czegoś nowego. Temat opracowania i poruszane problemy świadczą o oryginalności wybranego obszaru badań.

Słowa kluczowe: city break, turystyka, miasta, destynacja turystyczna, atrakcyjność turystyczna