

# Motorcycle tourism in Mexico

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## **Abstract**

*Motorcycle tourism is a growing niche market in many countries that offers a great chance for small destinations. Motorcycle tourists spend more than average tourists and are willing to try destinations and activities off the beaten path. Although this segment has a large number of users and involves great income for tourism destinations, few studies have been published and almost none in Mexico. The present paper is the first academic paper concentrated on motorcycle tourism in Mexico. Since there are few sources, the author used a survey to identify the user's profile and preferences. This paper discusses the findings of our research into the motorcycling leisure and tourism sector in Mexico, examining the characteristics of this group and its potential economic impact.*

**Keywords:** *Motorcycling, Niche markets, Mexico tourism.*

## **Introduction**

Specialized niche market tourism has grown worldwide before de pandemic. The tourism market in Mexico is a particularly important part of the economy and tourism services providers work hard to offer better options for the experience seeking clients of our times.

This paper analyzes the growing segment of motorcycle tourism, also known as Biker Tourism. This is the first academic approach to this niche market in Mexico and aims to identify the user's profile, the market dimensions and give tools to future research and growth of this important tourism product. Even when the number of bikers is growing every year, few services have adapted their offer to attract specifically the motorcycle tourist.

Another contribution of this study is the obtaining of data given the practically inexistent research about the biker segment, comparison with other countries is also useful to better understand the phenomenon in Mexico.

## **Motorcycle tourism in the world**

The lack of research for the motorcycle tourism is a global situation since few studies have been published in some key countries, none in Latin America or specifically in Mexico.

According to some international publications, Biker tourism is a large and growing market in several countries. In 2008 the United States market registered 7.7 million motorcycles, this is a 50% growth compared to 1997 numbers and that country presented a 9% annual growth rate before the pandemic. Weddell, 2014 expected 11 million motorcycles registered in the U.S. for 2015 and 9% of the US bikers taking at least one trip per year and spending \$85 billion USD per year. The same study

points out that Harley Davidson is the main manufacturer with 47% of the U.S. market. The average biker income in that country is \$59,290 USD per year, higher than the average income of the US citizens calculated in the same year at \$50,233 USD a year. Biker tourism is an especially important tourism segment across the US. The average owners' age in the U.S. went from 27.1 years in 1985 to 41 years in 2003. Concerning the average age and gender, mature riders (50 years and older) account for nearly 25% of the U.S. market and women are also a growing force and now make up to 12% of motorcycle ownership and 23% of motorcycle riders in 2008 (Skyles & Kelly, 2012).

The UK Motorcycle Industry Association estimated that motorcycle-related tourism expenditure in the UK is around £569 million, supporting approximately 13,250 tourism jobs (Cater, C. 2017). Biker tourists require some specific services when travelling like access to gas stations, covered parking lots, laundry, amongst others. The limited access to luggage in the motorcycle also determines some characteristics of their behaviour, higher consumption of food and beverages, and less shopping, also most bikers travel in group influencing decision making for hotel and restaurant services. (Cappelloni, et al. 2019)

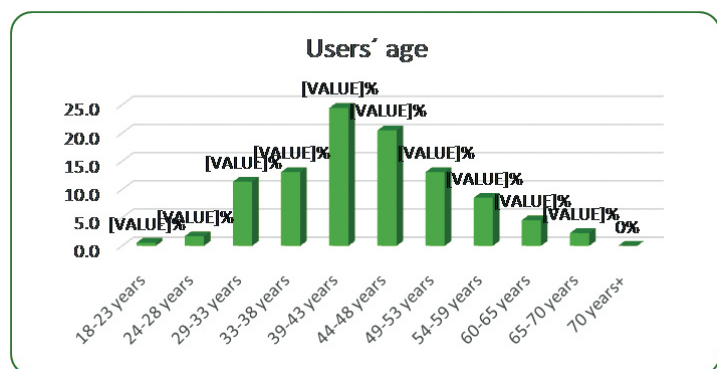
In the Italian study, 91% of the biker tourists were male, and the average age was 42 years, the oldest participant was 88 years old and the youngest 18, legal age to drive in that country. A large group of bikers interviewed had an employment (86.3%) and only 6.2% were retired. According to Cappelloni, et al. 2019, biker tourists travel to enjoy the road (82%), opposed to most tourists for whom the road is only a mean to reach a destination. Bikers seek small roads with attractive landscapes, small charming communities where gas stations and scenery restaurants are key elements when choosing a destination. Visiting the destination was the motivation for 63% of the motorcycle tourists and visiting cultural sites was mentioned by 37%. Finally, the hotel choice is also an important aspect to choose a destination, given that clients are extremely tired after a long ride, sometimes wet and muddy, finding a hotel that understands and cares about their specific needs is very important.

Also, bikers are friendly people, who enjoy travelling in group and spend more money than average tourists, they also care about the environment, actually, travelling in a motorcycle means fewer fuel consumption and normally they choose environmentally friendly services. Motorcycle tour operators went from 600 in 72 countries in 2012 to more than 700 in 77 countries in 2015. (Scol, 2016)

### Motorcycle Tourism in Mexico

There are no formal studies analysing the motorcycle tourism phenomenon in Mexico, few publications like journals, magazines and websites indicate that biker tourism is growing constantly. According to the specialized magazine "Revista 400", and the International Motorcycle Event (SIMM), 98% of motorcycle tourists in Mexico are Mexicans and the average tours go from 2 to 6 days. Colonial cities, small towns and beach resort are the most popular destinations for bikers.

The SIMM organizers estimate that every year the market generates \$110 million pesos, equivalent to 0.07% of the national tourism GDP. The SIMM considers that bikers spend between \$1,000 and \$1,500 pesos, per day in trips that go from 250 to 400 km distance from their hometown.

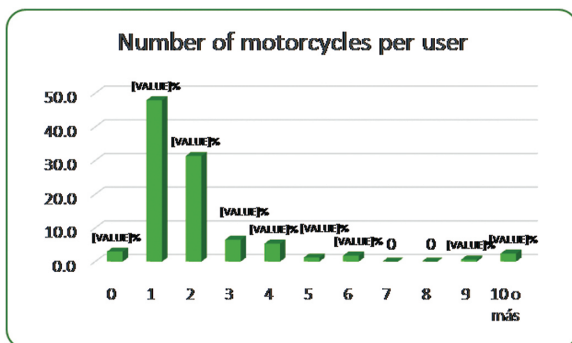
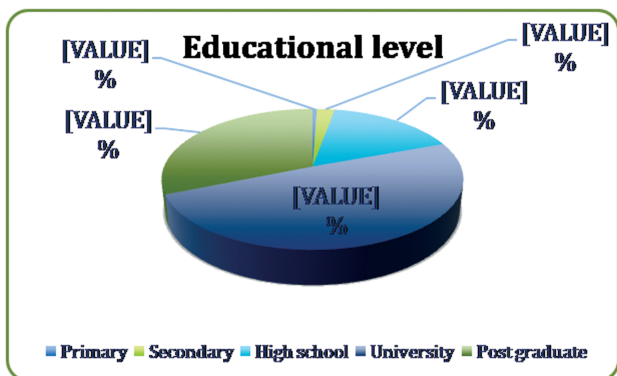


According to the national statistics bureau (INEGI), Mexico had 3.5 million motorcycles in 2017, which meant a 17% increase compared to 2016. The state of Mexico is the national leader with almost half a million motorcycles followed by Jalisco and Mexico City. In 2019, Mexico hosted more than 100 motorcycle events.

In order to identify the motorcycle tourist profile in Mexico, a survey was conducted using a questionnaire distributed to biker tourists online, through the surveyhero.com platform, the survey was shared amongst bikers through social networks such as WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter. The survey was online from October 15, 2019 until November 30, 2019; 560 people were reached.

We observe that 45% of respondents were between 39 and 48 years old. This means that the market is composed mainly by people in their most productive period of life with resources to travel.

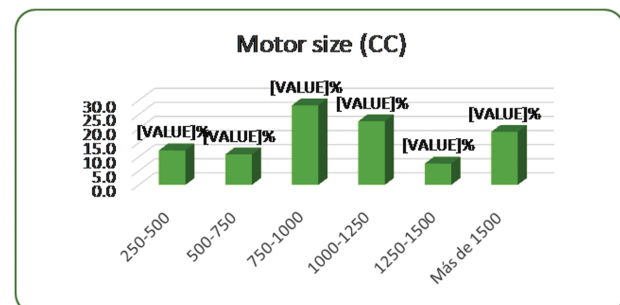
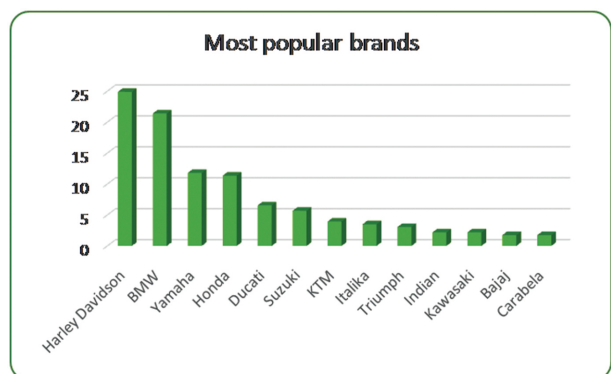
The large majority is composed by men (95%), similar to other studies in various countries, generally the motorcycle owner is a male and travellers ride in couple. 80.68% of the participants has a university degree or higher. 49.43% has a university degree and 31.25% postgraduate studies. Biker tourists have higher studies level than the national average. In Mexico the average is only Secondary school. 37% of the participants live in Mexico City,



followed by people from Estado de México with 10%, Baja California Sur 7.4% and Michoacán 6.3%.

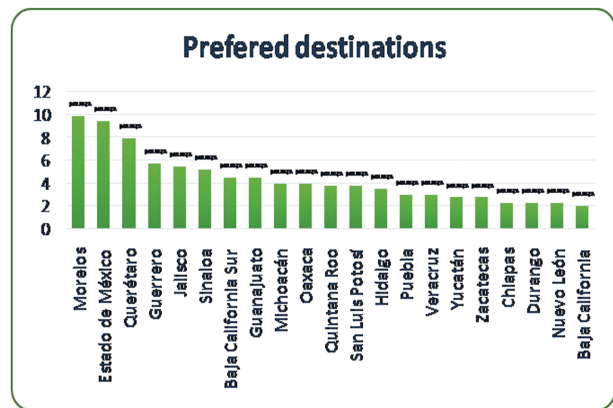
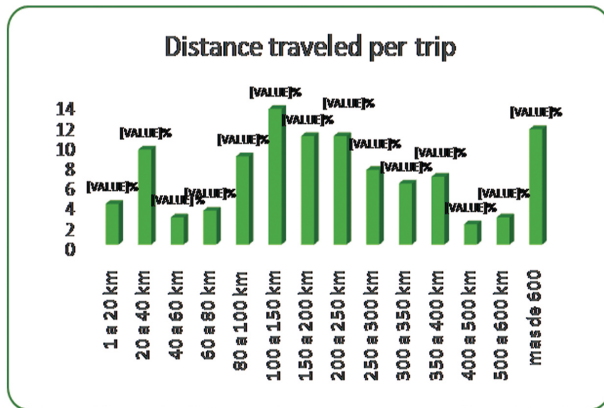
48% bikers own one motorcycle, while 31% has two and 18% owns more than three motorcycles. 3% of the motorcycle tourists do not have a motorcycle but practice biker tourism, this group usually rent or travel with specialized biker tourism companies.

Harley Davidson and BMW are the top brands for motorcycle tourism in the country followed by Yamaha, Honda, Ducati and Suzuki. The most popular engine size for travelling is between 750 and 1000 cc, but surprisingly many users (18.8%) have larger bikes, 1500 cc or more. 67% of the motorcycle tourists belong to a motor club or biker association, usually these

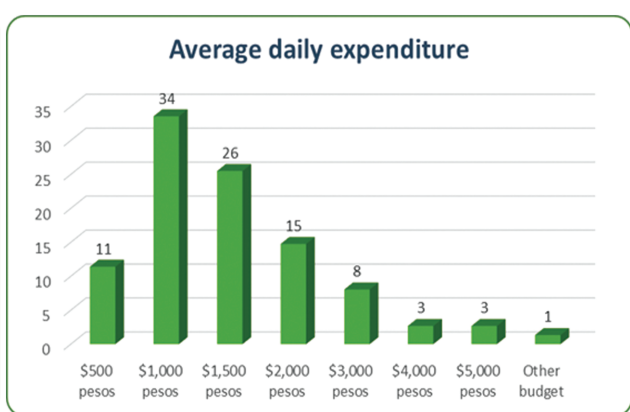
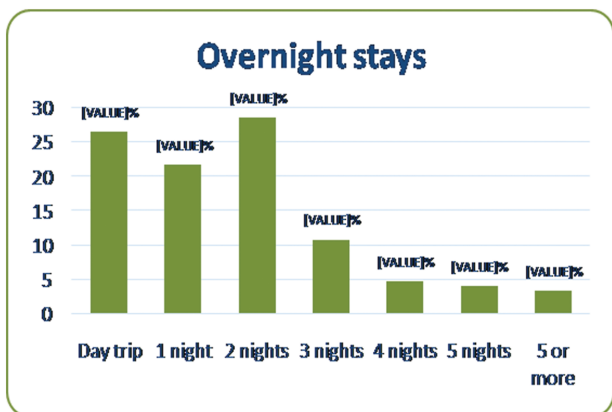


organizations are constantly promoting tours and events for their members, many are even created or organized by motorcycle vendors, mainly HD and BMW. Most bikers travel for more than 100km from their city of residence. 36% travel as far as 250km while 11% go beyond 600 km from

their city of residence. Of course, the longer the trip the higher the need to have hotel and restaurant services.



According to the answers received, the state of Morelos is the most popular destination for Bikers in México, followed by Estado de México, Querétaro, Guerrero and Jalisco. The large number of bikers living in Mexico City and Estado de Mexico influences the number of visitors in surrounding destinations like, Morelos, Querétaro or Guerrero.



73% of the users stay in hotels and only 27% make daytrips. 29% stay for at least two nights and only 12% spend more than 4 nights per trip. Also 96% would like to stay in a hotel specially conceived for bikers.

Usually, expenditure questions are biased, since survey participants tend to declare less expenditure or not answer at all for security reasons, in our case, 34% indicated that they spend in average \$1,000 pesos a day. 41% spends between \$1,500 and \$3,000 pesos daily. And only 15% spend more than \$3,000 pesos a day (around 140 USD).

## Conclusions

This first approach allows us better understanding of the motorcycle tourists in Mexico and aims to help decision makers and further researchers to comprehend and, thus better serve this growing niche market within the Mexican Tourism offer.

The segment potential is big, but if destinations and investors want to take advantage of the motorcycle tourism growth, it is important to know the profile of such users and propose services accordingly. Tourism accounts for more than 8% of Mexican GDP and specialization will certainly be a key ingredient in the future development of the tourism industry.

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