



## ENGAGING NEW TRAVEL AUDIENCES: UNDERSTANDING THE UK BAME TRAVELLERS' DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

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## Executive Summary

This report aims to provide an insight to the UK Black, Asian and other Minority Ethnic (BAME) travellers, their experiences, preferences, behaviour, opportunities, and constraints in making destination choices. It is a collaborative endeavour between SHTM Surrey and Women in Travel (WiT) CIC. BAME groups in the UK are a powerful emerging travel market with very similar travel characteristics to the wider population of White travellers. Despite the segment's potential and presence in both domestic and international travel markets, there is a serious dearth of research on how these travellers make decisions, perceive challenges to travel choices and find mitigating strategies to overcome barriers to travel.

The proposed project was challenge-led and multidisciplinary and aimed to achieve the following four interlinked objectives:

- **Evaluate the size and value of the UK BAME Travel Market**
- **Determine the travel propensity and patterns of BAME travel consumers**
- **Understand the travel decision-making behaviour of this market segment**
- **Develop evidence-based recommendations for research, practice and industry,**

In meeting these objectives, the project hopes to lay the foundations that will provide WiT CIC with the research insights needed to gain a good evidence-based understanding of the BAME travel segment. This information will enable WiT to develop tools and guidance for its members to understand and engage with this segment from both demand and supply side perspectives.

A mixed methods approach was undertaken involving qualitative (focus groups and semi-structured interviews) and quantitative methods (survey), to develop a framework to better understand the needs of the BAME travel market. Online surveys were conducted to examine the travel patterns, influences, circumstances and other factors influencing the decision-making of UK BAME and non-BAME (i.e. White) travellers. A series of focus group discussions (FGDs) and interviews were conducted with BAME participants to further explore their decision making patterns, motivations, circumstances, constraints and negotiating strategies. The FGDs and interviews also examined destination choices and concerns amongst BAME travel audiences on the state of products and services currently on offer, and how these could be developed to become more diverse and inclusive.

550 BAME travellers and 589 White travellers met the survey's attention check and consent form criteria. Six focus groups were conducted through June 2021 with an average of 4-6 participants in each, and ten interviews, each lasting between 45 minutes to 60 minutes, were conducted throughout July and August 2021 focussing on specific themes including travel motivations, experiences, barriers, mitigating strategies, opportunities for organisations and destinations. While there are many demographic similarities between BAME and White travellers, in this sample, BAME survey respondents were more youthful female travellers with higher educational qualifications who work full time and a sizable portion of them earn a high income. In contrast, White respondents were primarily older travellers and a sizable proportion in their fifties or above, retired, having a moderate level of household income. White respondents were more averse to domestic travel than their BAME counterparts who also engaged in more frequent international travel. BAME respondents were more likely to seek adventure when travelling within the UK, while White travellers prioritised sightseeing over

adventure. Within the UK, White travellers, spent more nights per trip on average, while BAME travellers had longer international holidays. White travellers spent more money on holidays overall, but the figures were comparable for both groups.

Participants for the qualitative study came from a variety of backgrounds, including academics, travel bloggers/content creators, travel journalists, experienced backpackers, frequent travellers, experienced travel industry professionals, and students. The majority of participants were female with widespread travel experience who had travelled extensively around the world and within the UK. Time, budget (specifically value for money) and destination's unique attributes were key factors influencing their choice of travelling to a destination. Most of the travellers were more likely to follow their instincts when visiting any destination, and for the majority of them, the aim was to experience new destinations that fit their budget, time constraints, and other external factors. While putting the pandemic into context, respondents shared that before the pandemic, it was about exploring places, but after the pandemic, they feel the need to reconnect with friends and families.

The majority of the participants stated that they relied heavily on word-of-mouth recommendations, travel blogs, and internet sources, trusting people from their networks with shared identities. British BAME travellers perceived similar travel constraints that are markedly different from those encountered by White travellers and their ethnic and racial influences make BAME travellers more adaptive, rational and pragmatic and less impulsive when choosing destinations. Participants discussing their encounters with insecurity, stereotyping, microaggressions, racism, and underrepresentation while travelling at home and abroad identified concerns for physical safety and racial discrimination as the most overwhelming concern and constraint to travel choice. Most participants reported instances of racial harassment, microaggressions and/ or discrimination while travelling, which had a significant impact on their perception of travel to specific destinations and the embedded apartheid culture. These negative experiences were considered by participants to be deeply embedded within society, and not a matter of surprise for those within the BAME communities, with uncomfortable truths only coming out as a result of recent conversations around diversity and inclusion. There were some significant experiences of how racial prejudices could also come from within the community, very much influenced by wider societal norms.

The report found substantial evidence of a lack of equality, diversity, and inclusion in the travel industry with regard to BAME travellers, as reflected in the narratives of the participants. All respondents acknowledged that BAME travellers are significantly underrepresented in the tourism sector, and there were very few senior jobs or positions in the sector that were occupied by members of the BAME community. Although there is an acknowledgement of some affirmative action, it is felt that there is a tendency to view all BAME travellers as a homogeneous travel segment, with little understanding of diversity within individual communities. There are very few statistics available from the government or literature on the size, travelling patterns, and volume of expenditure in the tourism sector by British BAME travellers, and thus this segment continues to be an “unheard and undervalued” travel segment.

The travel industry, policymakers, travel media, and tourism-related government bodies must have effective strategies in place to positively respond to such growing concerns of racism, inequality, diversity, and inclusion in tourism. Thus, the following recommendations are made



to assist these organisations in recognising and incorporating the preferences of this new diverse travel audience when developing effective strategies to alleviate their concerns:

- Building an independent platform for BAME travellers
- Creating a research network focusing on UK BAME travellers
- Building networks with BAME communities and co-creating travel experiences
- Embracing a culture of diversity and inclusion
- Supporting and encouraging the BAME travel businesses
- Commencement of an Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) accreditation for travel businesses
- Training staff on issues of diversity, equality and inclusion
- Engagement of online content creators
- Organising training for destination management organisations and local service providers

**This report is one of the first in the UK to provide a snapshot of the travel characteristics, motivations, and decision-making processes of the Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic travellers segment.** These findings have significant implications for travel businesses, tourism marketers, and tourism-related government entities. It is noted that the time is ripe to collaborate with all of these active voices to co-create travel experiences through a balanced approach that will ensure equality, diversity, and inclusion in the tourism sector. as well as integrate the perspectives of BAME actors into the mainstream discourses.