

ShortTermMissions.com **Search Summary Report,** **Spring 2011**

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ShortTermMissions.com Search Summary Report, Spring 2011

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ShortTermMissions.com Search Summary Report, Spring 2011

Introduction

Since launching ShortTermMissions.com in 2000, Mission Data International (M-DAT) has tracked searches made on the website for the purpose of understanding which search criteria people use to look for a short-term mission opportunity. This is a follow-up report to our 2007, 2009 and 2010 reports.

The graphs in this report are based on 85,206¹ “basic” searches² made on ShortTermMissions.com from January through April of 2011.

In order to understand the data contained in this report, it is important to first know who uses the website. Start by reading the section titled, “Demographics of ShortTermMissions.com” on the next page. It may also be helpful to take a moment to visit www.ShortTermMissions.com and try a few searches to familiarize yourself with the method through which the data was collected.

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New reports as well as corrections or updates to information contained in this report will be posted at: <http://www.mdat.org/reports/>



Mission Data International is an innovative non-profit mission mobilization ministry. M-DAT creates websites that help believers move forward in their mission involvement. Our vision is that every believer desiring growth in mission involvement would obtain the practical assistance necessary to realize significant, life-long involvement in the Great Commission.



ShortTermMissions.com is a service of Mission Data International. The website was developed in 2000 to help youth and adults take the step of serving on a short-term mission opportunity. It features current details of mission opportunities from over one hundred sending organizations and sees 17,000 unique visitors each month.

A special thanks to all of our friends involved in the Fellowship of Short-Term Mission Leaders (www.fstml.org) and the Standards of Excellence in Short-Term Missions (www.stmstandards.org) for their encouragement over the years and for consistently striving toward excellence in what they do. We genuinely appreciate you!

Demographics of ShortTermMissions.com

ShortTermMissions.com's primary target audience is US believers who tend toward the Evangelical side of the Christian spectrum. The opportunities posted are primarily from US-based, inter-denominational sending organizations and have an evangelistic component to them.

A demographic survey of website visitors who viewed at least one short-term mission opportunity from April 1 – 25 in 2008 revealed the following characteristics about those searching on ShortTermMissions.com:

- 3/4 female and 1/4 male
- 14% high school aged (14-17), 31% college aged (18-21), 53% adults (22-65)
- 65% describe themselves as having a "high interest in missions"
- 78% want to go on a mission trip within the year
- 36% are considering long-term missions (i.e. serving on a short-term trip to explore whether or not becoming a career missionary is for them)

While this was not a fully scientific survey, the results give a consistent picture of the website's users. On most points, the results of the survey in 2008 were quite similar to the surveys performed in 2005 and 2007 with most of the same questions. The main differences are that in this latest survey the percentage of college students has risen 7%, the percentage of adults has dropped 8%, and the percentage considering long-term missions increased 10% over 2007.

Search Activity

ShortTermMissions.com has three kinds of search forms: “Basic”, “Advanced” and “Directory.” The data in this report is for “Basic” searches, which is used the majority of the time. There were 85,206 “Basic” searches made on ShortTermMissions.com from January through April of 2011. The graph below of traffic over a 12 month period shows that this is the time frame when search activity is at its highest:

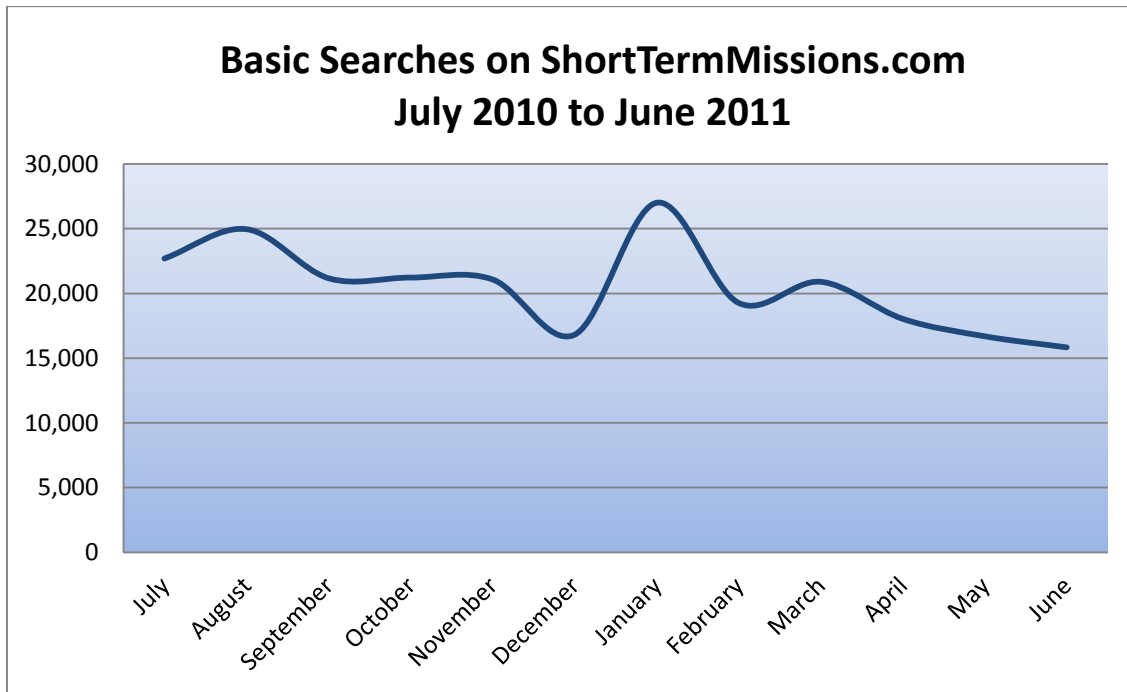


Figure 1

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The Fall-Spring traffic pattern seen above is a bit different from the ones we have seen the last several years. There was unusually heavy searching in July and August 2010. As a result the rise in searches during Jan – Mar was not as marked. The lower peak in January is similar to what we saw in January of 2009 when the economic situation was so bad. The Spring surge in searches also did not last as long as in previous years.

Search Criteria Popularity

The basic search includes nine possible search criteria: participant type, age, ministry activity, region, country, length, start month, start year, and keyword. By default, all of these criteria are set to “any” or left blank except participant type which is set to “individuals.” Below is a graph showing how often the different search criteria were used in the 85,206 basic searches:

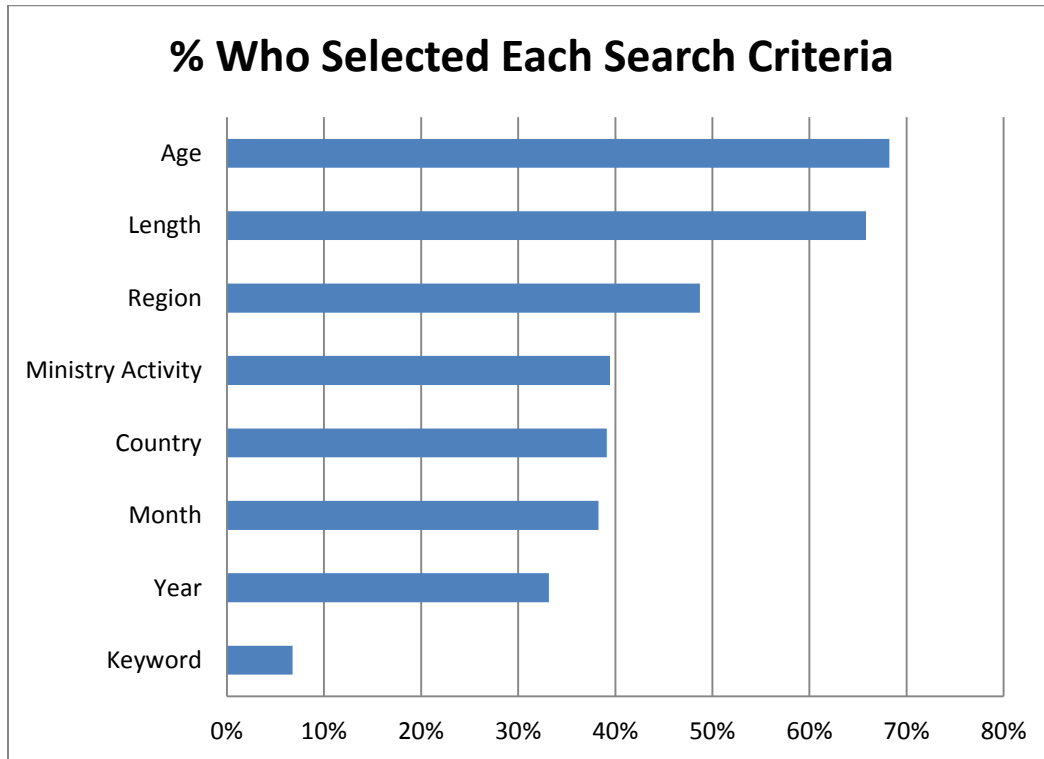


Figure 2

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A closer look at each of these search criteria is provided in the pages that follow with the exception of start month and start year.

The average person searching on www.ShortTermMissions.com specifies 3.4 criteria in addition to the participant type, which all searches include by default. From 2007 through 2011, the number of criteria specified in searches has varied very little (2007 – 3.2, 2009 – 3.4, 2010 – 3.5, 2011 – 3.4)

The Most Searched for Countries

Searches specified a country 39% of the time. Below is a graph of the twenty five most searched for countries:

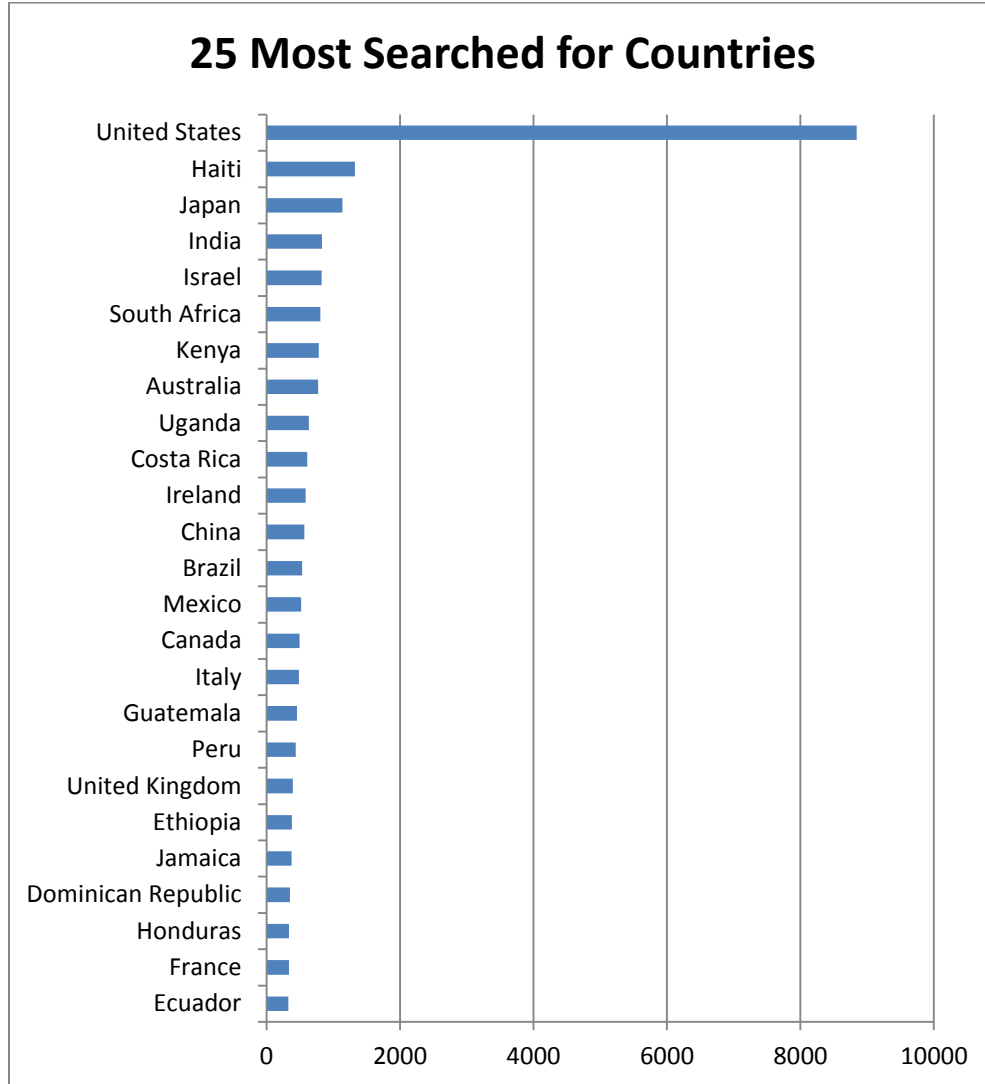


Figure 3

© 2011 Mission Data International

Comparing this year's patterns with the last 5 years, Kenya and Uganda dropped out of the high popularity position which they enjoyed over the last couple of years. Mexico, which has solidly been in second place for years is no longer in the top ten. Haiti, which rose to prominence last Spring following the devastating earthquake, remained in second place again this Spring. Japan moved up to the #3 position following the March 11th Tsunami. Israel, which was in 15th place two years ago, has moved up to the top five.

The most searched for “Country” is the only search criteria that changes over the years. The “Length of Trip”, “Age of Participant”, and “Preferred Ministry Activities” all remain about the same. The specific countries most searched for each year are more dynamic, moving up or down in the list as “this year’s favorites” change. Natural disasters often result in an increase in interest for certain countries.

From the fact that people coming to our web site search so much for the US, and from Barna’s Oct 2008 survey³ which states that “33% of the mission trips were to locations in the US”, one would conclude that the Christian public sees the phrases “mission trips” and “short-term missions” to mean any service trip, whether in the US or outside the US. Originally it was a term referring to trips overseas. As people discuss and study short-term missions, it would be helpful for them to state whether their study and conclusions refer to all mission trips or just those outside the US.

Regions

Searches specified a particular region of the world 49% of the time. Below is a graph of how this breaks out by region and by continent:

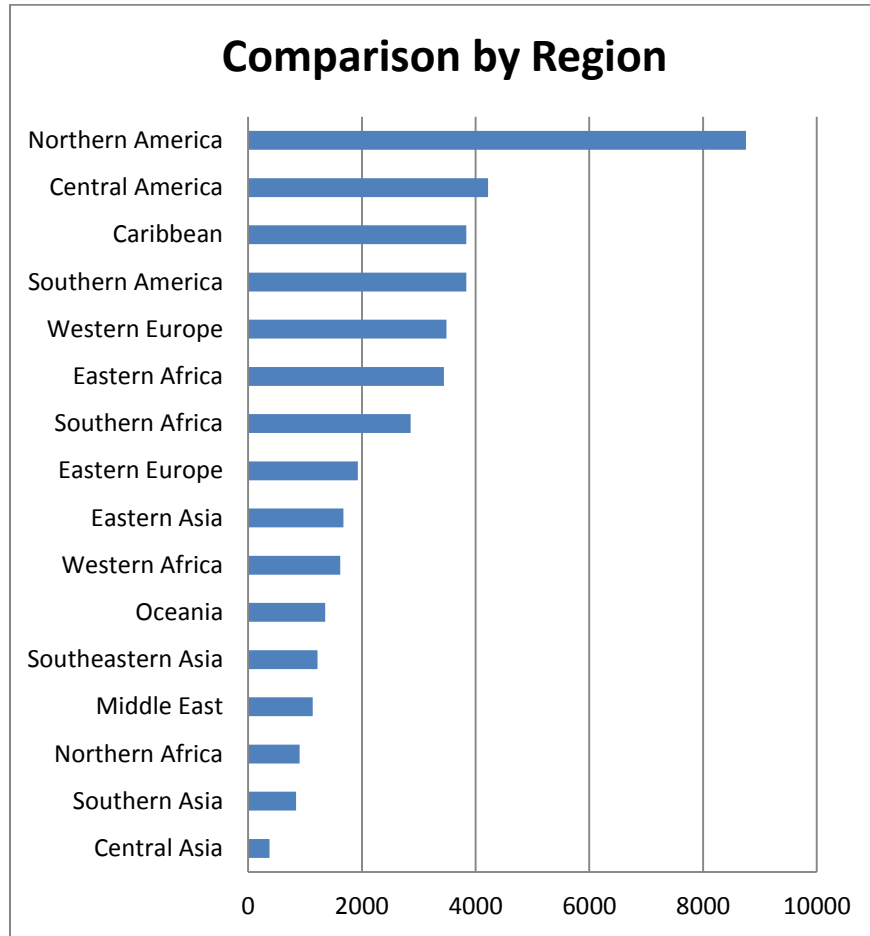


Figure 4

© 2011 Mission Data International

There has been very little variation in the most popular regions, and the variation we have seen has been due to the response to natural disasters.

On ShortTermMissions.com, the regions are defined as follows:



Figure 5

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The regions used on our map and in our data correlate with the regions and sub-regions used by the UN, except for the Middle East.

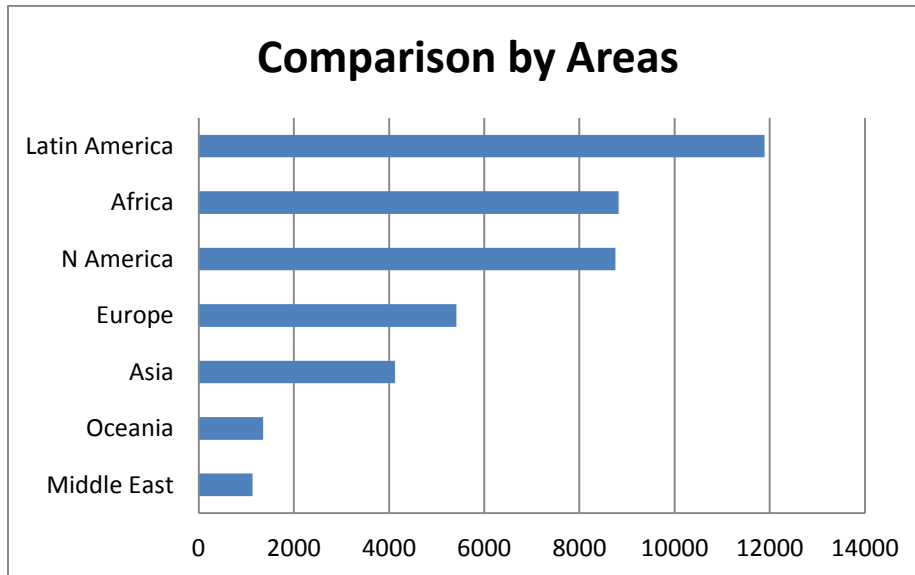


Figure 6

© 2011 Mission Data International

Latin America continues to be the most popular area of the world for mission trips, with North America (the US) and Africa vying for second place. Latin America is a broader designation than a continent, but to make a more helpful comparison between the regions, for the above chart we have grouped together “South America”, “Central America” and “The Caribbean” as “Latin America.” “N. America” refers to the United States and Canada.

The Most Searched for Ministry Activities

Searches specified a ministry activity 39% of the time. Below is a graph showing the relative popularity of the thirty-nine ministry activity options on ShortTermMissions.com:

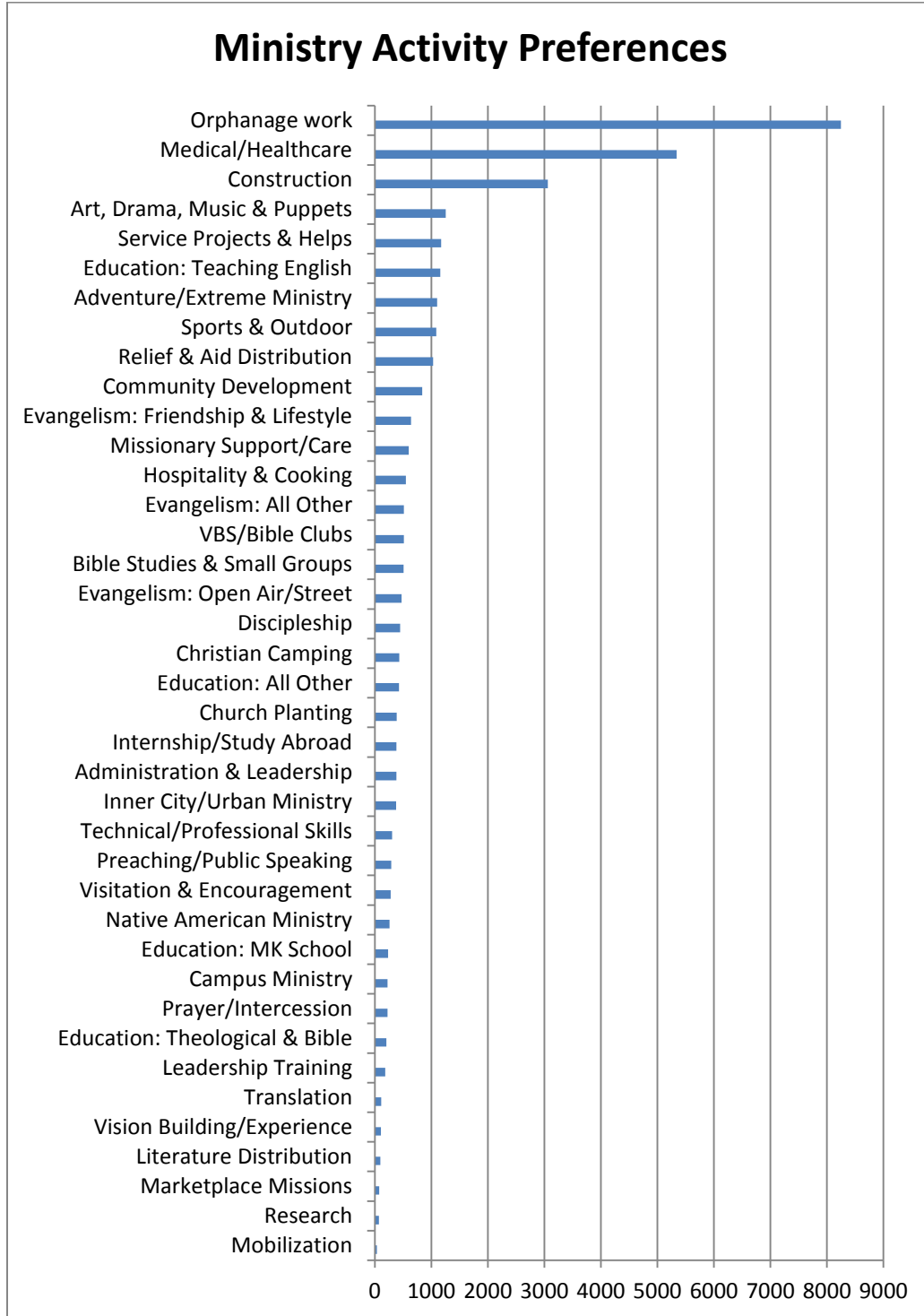


Figure 7

© 2011 Mission Data International

There are three ministry activities that consistently appear way above all others: orphanage work, medical\healthcare, and construction, always in that order. The next six activities have remained the same over the last three years, but have moved around some relative to one another. They rank about twice as high as all the remaining options. “Community Development” has remained tenth in the rankings over the last four years.

The top ten activities account for almost 75% of the searches which specified an activity.

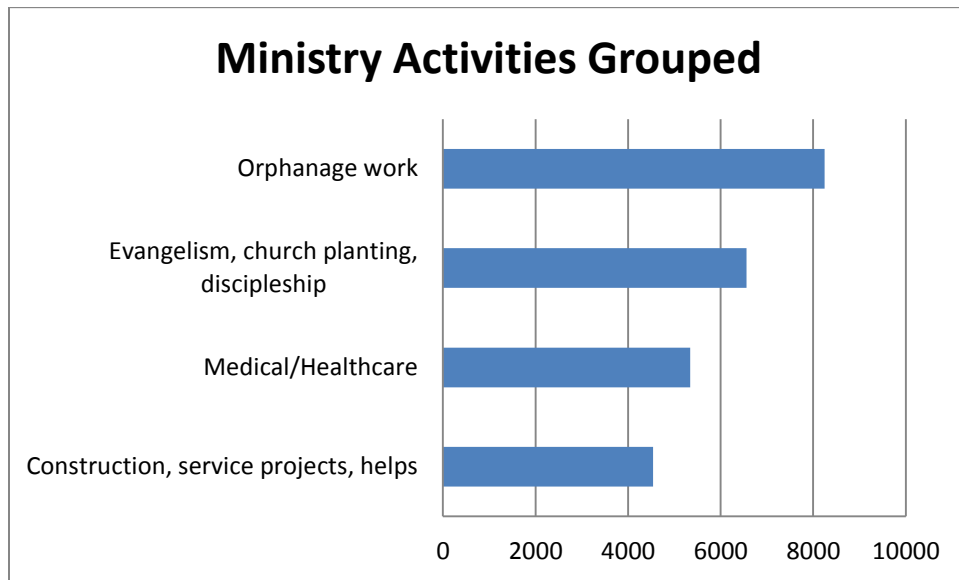


Figure 8

© 2011 Mission Data International

This year we have grouped the various ministry activities in a new way which we feel is a more accurate representation of the “evangelism, church planting discipleship” type of mission trips. In the listing of 39 types of ministry activities this area is so segmented that it makes it appear that this is not a dominant grouping.

Due to the overlapping nature of some of the listed activities, it is hard to draw concrete conclusions. For example, if the “Sports and Outdoors” category is actually “Sports Evangelism”, that changes how it would be grouped.

Participant Types

By default ALL searches specify a participant type in the search criteria. Below is a graph of how this breaks out:

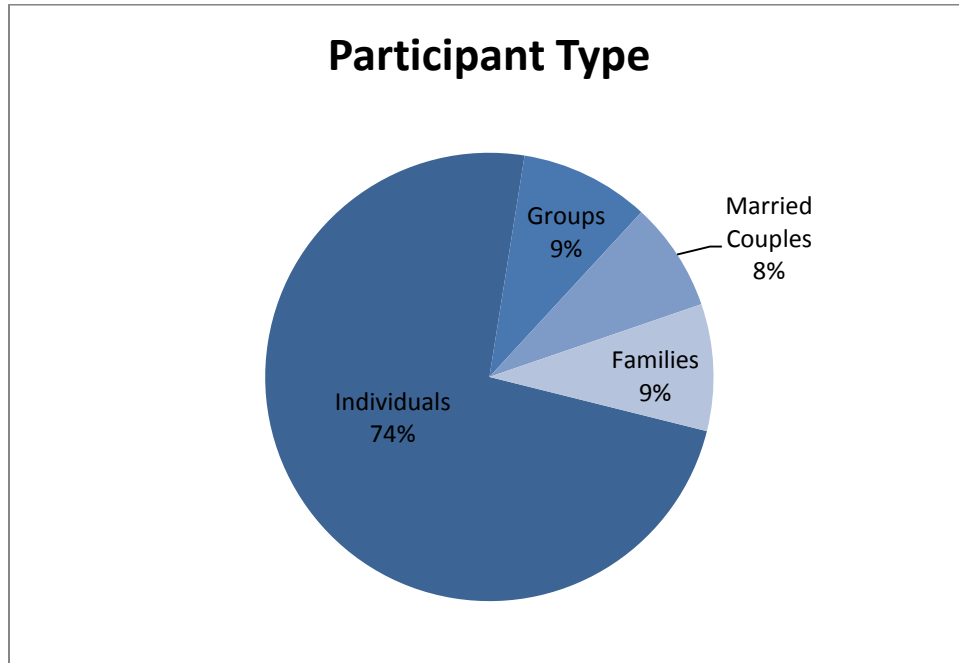


Figure 9

© 2011 Mission Data International

Over the last five years, this graph has remained almost identical, though there has been a slight increase in searches for “families” (from 6% to 9%) and “married couples” (from 6% to 8%).

Why the lower representation of groups? One reason for this is that by default, participant type is set to “individuals.” Another key reason is that for a group of ten, twenty or even one hundred youth, only one or two people do the searching to find the opportunity. So, while just 9% of the searches were looking for group opportunities, it likely represents more total people than those searching for opportunities for individuals (It may be helpful to note here that in the end almost all mission trips are “group mission trips,” the only difference is that some groups are formed by the church or school sending them, while others are formed by the mission organization out of individuals who do not previously know each other.)

Participant Age Groups

Searches specified a participant age group 68% of the time. Below is a graph of how this breaks out:

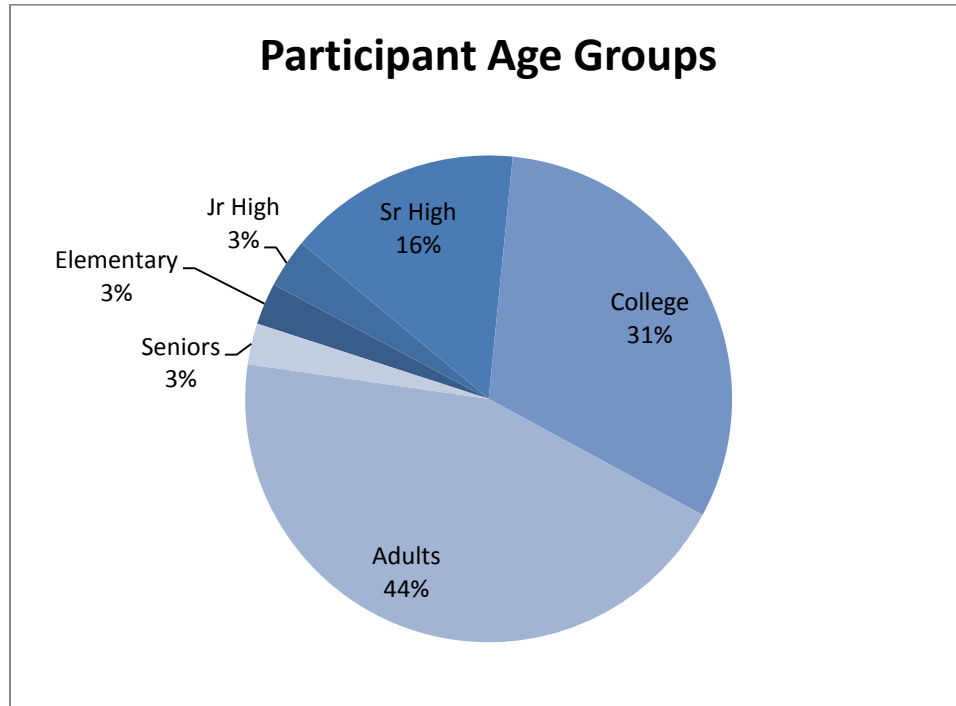


Figure 10

© 2011 Mission Data International

Note: This graph shows the age requirement of the opportunity, not the age of the searcher. In other words, high school youth leaders would be looking for "Senior High" even though they themselves would fall in the "Adult" category. Individuals searching for an opportunity for themselves, would search for their own age.

Concerning the percentages of people searching for junior and senior high student's mission trips, most go with their church youth group. In many cases these are *church coordinated mission trips directly arranged with supported missionaries*, which are not represented on ShortTermMissions.com. In addition, for those going on *mission agency coordinated mission trips*, only the youth pastor does the leg work of finding a short-term opportunity--one person searching, but ten to twenty Junior or Senior High students going.

Over the last three years the split out between the various ages has not changed significantly, though the adult segment has gone up over the last 5 years and the college segment appears to be down some this year..

Length of Short-Term Mission Trip

Searches specified a trip length 66% of the time. Below is a graph of the how this breaks out:

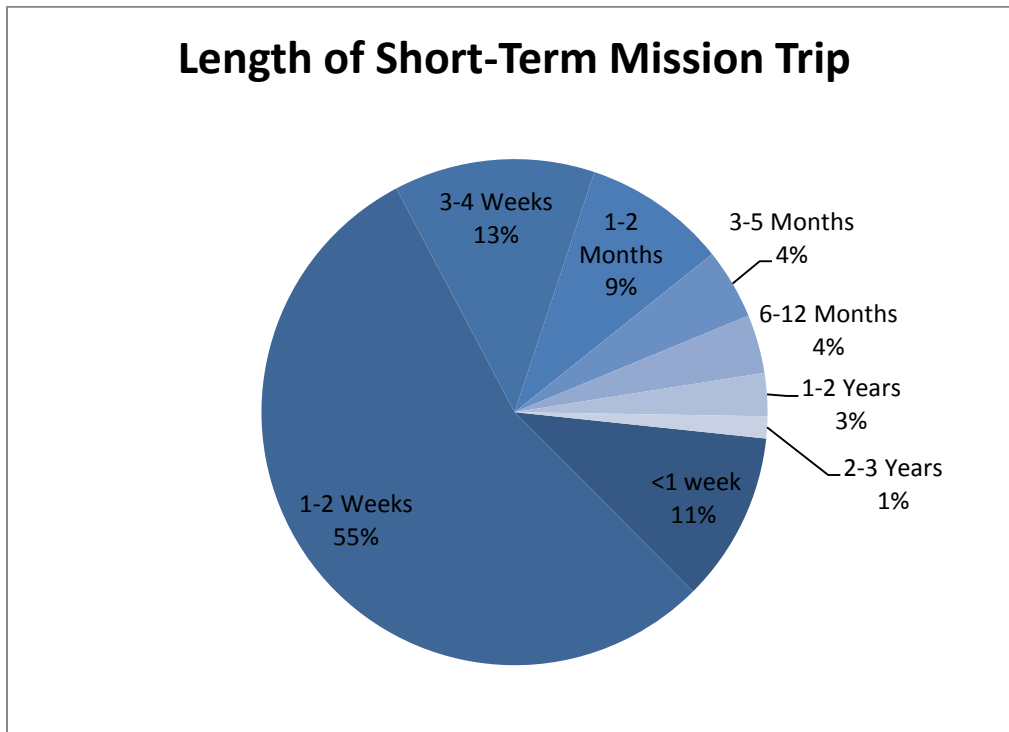


Figure 11

© 2011 Mission Data International

While two thirds of those specifying a length of opportunity selected two weeks or under, this graph shows significant levels of interest in longer opportunities as well: 13% searched for three to four weeks, 9% for one to two months, and another 12% searched for three months or longer (12% translates to about 1,740 searches per month).

The one-to-two week category is the length that most people think of when they hear the terms “short-term missions” or “mission trips,” and two thirds of the searches made on ShortTermMissions.com are for this length. Because of the considerable difference between two week service trips and two month internships, various people have tried to differentiate between them in their studies and presentations of data.

In the summary at the beginning of the 2007-2009 Mission Handbook⁴, Dr. Scott Moreau uses the term “short-term” to refer specifically to “two weeks to one year”. Those shorter than two weeks are referred to as “mission trips”. Michael Jaffarian, Senior Research Associate for Operation World, also made that distinction in his webinar presentation⁵ Feb 12, 2009 for The Mission Exchange.

Common Keywords

Searches specified a keyword 7% of the time. Below is a chart showing the top twenty-five keywords during the months of January through April 2011:

Rank	Summary	Searches
1	alaska	156
2	haiti	133
3	build	97
4	africa	83
5	children	78
6	medical	69
7	orphanage	56
8	christian	42
9	japan	40
10	orphans	38
11	nurse	37
12	catholic	37
13	dental	37
14	music	36
15	new orleans	36
16	new york	34
17	mexico	33
18	orphan	32
19	west virginia	31
20	love	30
21	texas	29
22	water	29
23	haiti-build	29
24	california	29
25	stem	27

Figure 12 © 2011 Mission Data International

Alaska has moved back up to the top as it was in 2009, but Haiti is still close behind.

The phrase “Haiti -build” is the example given under the Keyword search box on the Home page, so its presence in the top twenty-five words is probably not warranted.

End Notes

¹ ShortTermMissions.com employs a variety of methods to filter out non-human search activity from search data; however, due to the complex and ever-changing nature of robot and spider activity it is impossible to achieve 100% accuracy. Our current methods filter out at least 95% of all non-human activity on the website.

² The analysis of the data in this report does not attempt to filter multiple searches made by the same person for the same or similar search criteria.

³ Barna Group. “Despite Benefits, Few Americans Have Experienced Short-Term Mission Trips”. Oct 6, 2008. Barna Group. www.Barna.org.

⁴ Weber, Linda and Dorsey Welliver. Mission Handbook, 2007-2009, 20th ed. Wheaton: EMIS, 2007

⁵ Jaffarian, Michael. “The North American Missions Movement: Key Facts and Trends”. February 12, 2009. The Mission Exchange. www.TheMissionExchange.org