

ShortTermMissions.com
Search Summary Report,
Spring 2009

Compiled by
David Armstrong

Edited by
Peter Armstrong



ShortTermMissions.com Search Summary Report, Spring 2009

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ShortTermMissions.com Search Summary Report, Spring 2009

Introduction

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

The graphs in this report are based on 83,137¹ “basic” searches² made on ShortTermMissions.com from January through April of 2009.

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.

If you have questions or would like more information, please contact David Armstrong.
Email: research@mdat.org, Phone: 479-524-9110

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 one hundred sending organizations and sees 12,000 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 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 83,137 “basic” searches made on ShortTermMissions.com from January through April of 2009. The graph below of traffic over a 12 month period shows that this is the time frame when search activity is at its highest:

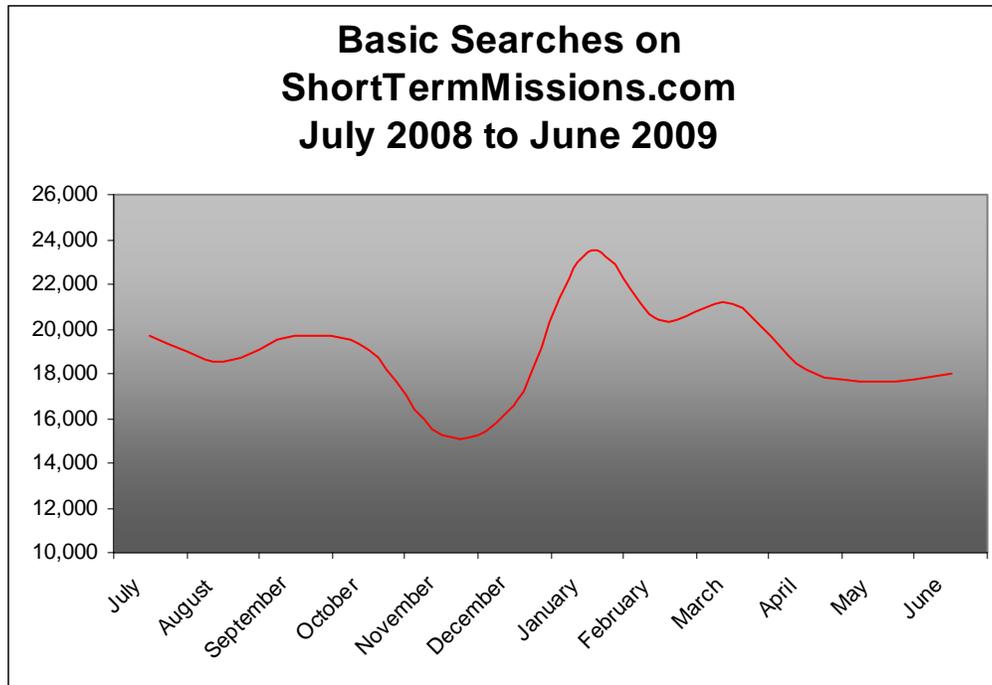


Figure 1

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The Fall-Spring traffic pattern seen above is very similar to the one we have seen each of the last seven years.

While January through March are peak months for searching, there is significant search activity ALL year long. Organizations wanting to get the most visibility for their trips should start making details about their short-term mission opportunities for the following year available in July or August of this year. We recommend to our listing organizations to post a skeleton description of their next year’s trips late in the summer with the exact date and cost “to be announced” and then fill out the rest of the information as it becomes available later in the year.

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 83,137 basic searches:

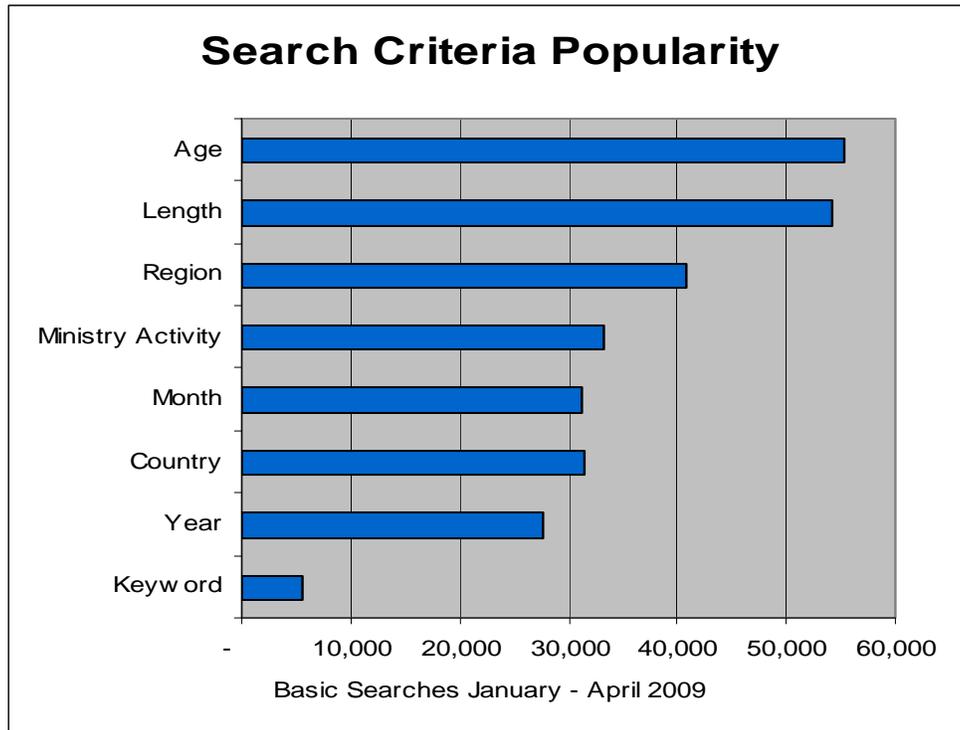


Figure 2

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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.

Over the last two years, every criteria has increased slightly in usage over the previous year, and “Country”, “Region” and “Length of Trip” have increased more than the others. The relative rankings of the criteria have remained the same over the years, varying little year to year, except for “Country” and “Month”, which are almost the same and have actually switched back and forth in their ranking a little.

The average person searching on www.ShortTermMissions.com specifies 3.4 criteria in addition to the participant type, which all searches include by default. This is up slightly from 3.2 in 2007.

The Most Searched for Countries

Searches specified a country 38% of the time. Below is a graph of the twenty most searched for countries:

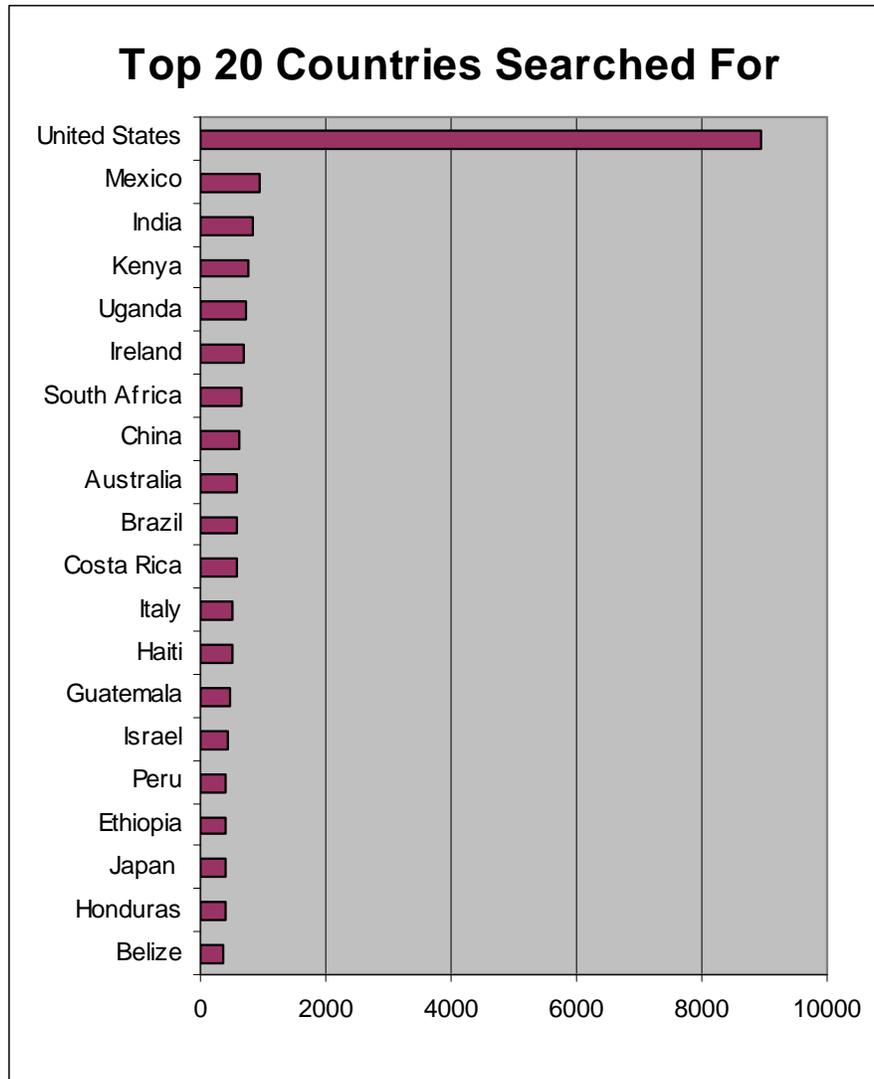


Figure 3

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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, changing over the years. Natural disasters often result in an increase in interest for certain countries.

The United States and Mexico continue to be the top two countries for which people search. This Spring a larger percentage of people selected the US as their country of interest. About 28% of the time a country was specified, it was the US, versus 23% of the time in 2007.

Over the last several years, the distance between Mexico and the next closest country has continually decreased. In 2007 Mexico was named in 5% of the searches specifying a country, but in 2009 it was named only 3% of the time. Stated in another way, in Spring 2009, Mexico ranked only 13% higher than the next closest country in contrast to 66% higher in 2007.

Uganda continues to rank as the fifth most searched for country. Two years ago it rose to the top five from not even registering in the top twenty-five countries in 2004. As mentioned in our 2007 report, the increase in popularity for Uganda likely correlates with strong interest generated by the Invisible Children documentary (<http://www.invisiblechildren.com/home.php>) over the last five years.

Russia has continued moving downward in interest and this Spring it did not make the top twenty-five countries searched for. China has also moved downward, dropping from fourth place to eighth place over the last two years.

There are 249 countries in the UN list of countries. We had trips posted for 128 of these countries this Spring. Interest in the other 121 countries is not represented in our data. Only countries for which a trip is offered appear in the country search list on ShortTermMissions.com.

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:

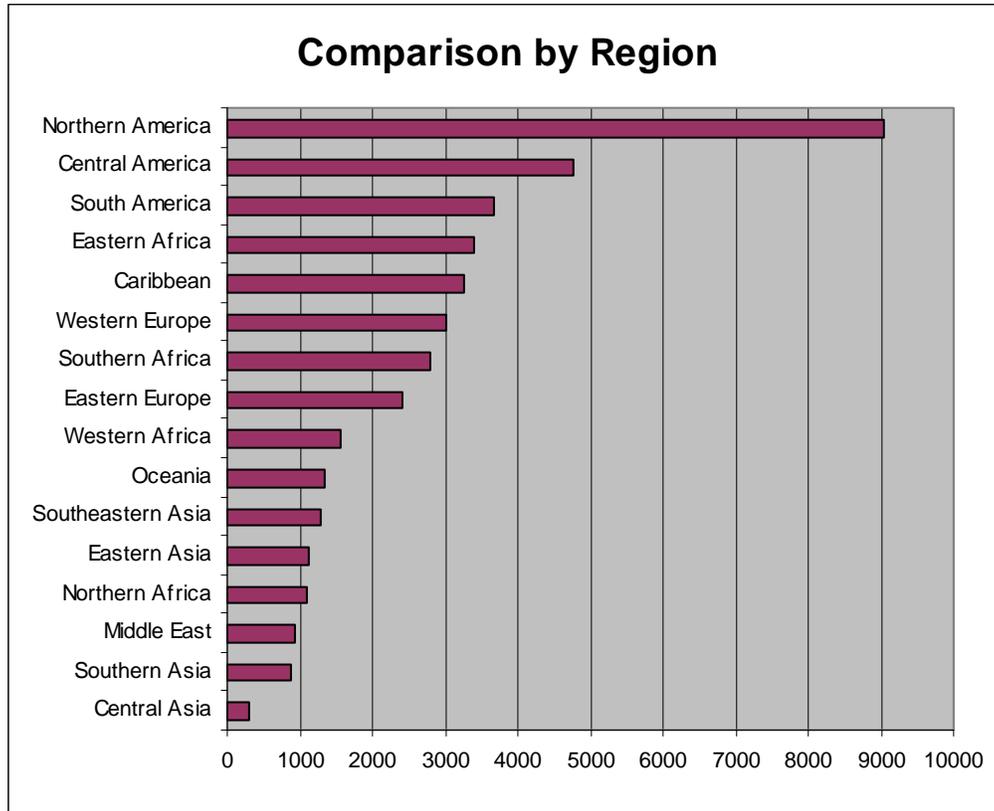


Figure 4

© 2009 Mission Data International

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



Figure 5

© 2009 Mission Data International

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.

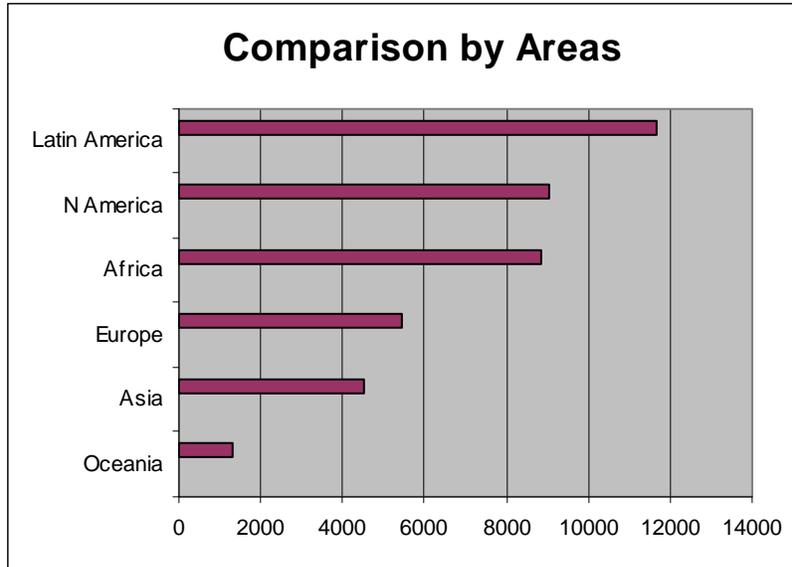


Figure 6

© 2009 Mission Data International

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” while “N. America” refers to the United States and Canada.

The Most Searched for Ministry Activities

Searches specified a ministry activity 40% of the time. Below is a graph showing the relative popularity of the thirty-nine ministry activity options on ShortTermMissions.com:

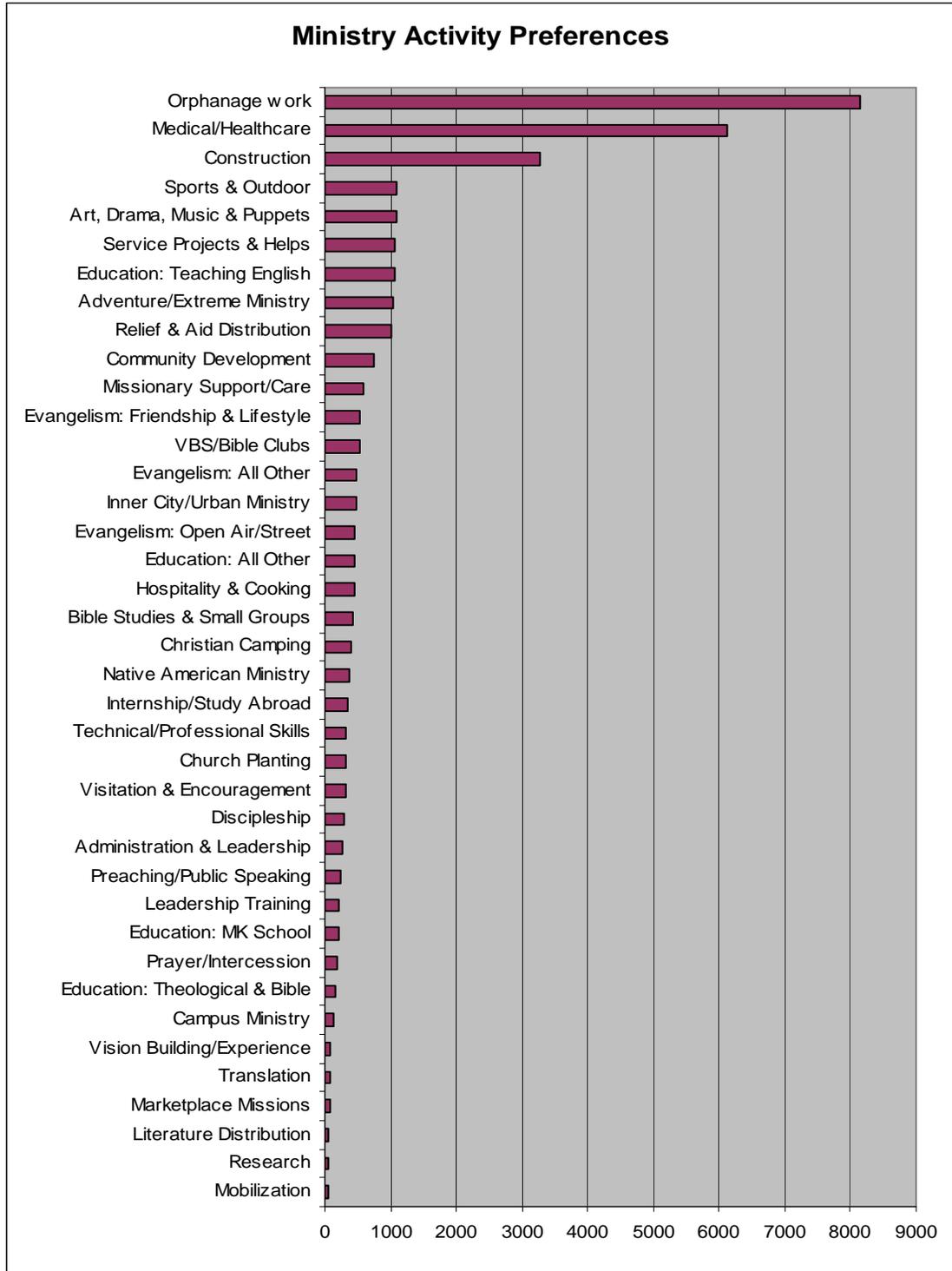


Figure 7

© 2009 Mission Data International

Surprisingly, 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 three years.

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

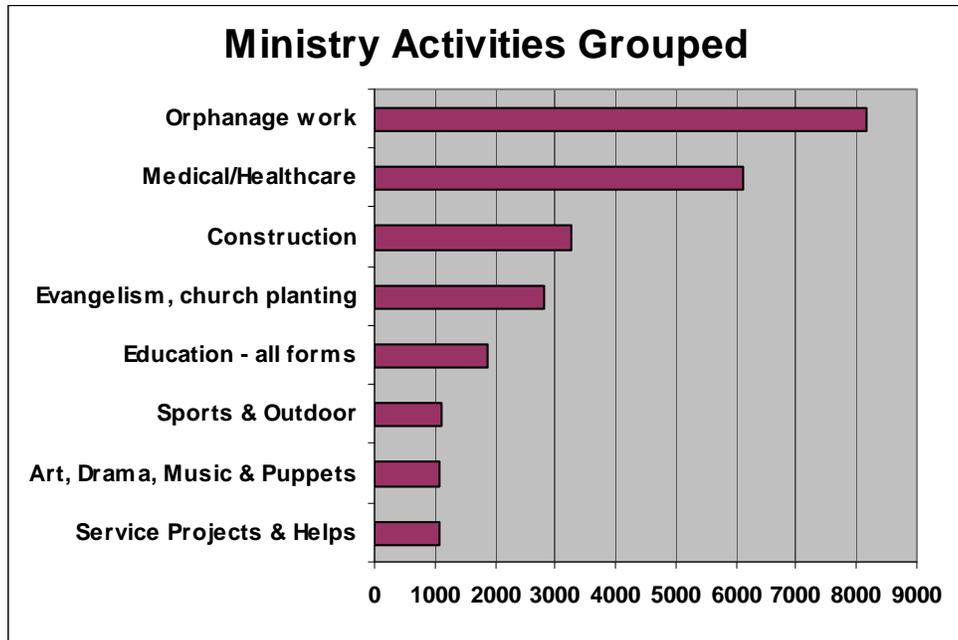


Figure 8

© 2009 Mission Data International

If all the forms of evangelism and church planting, and all the forms of education were totaled under those two categories, activities four and five would change. 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 would push “Evangelism, church planting” higher than “Construction”.

Participant Types

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

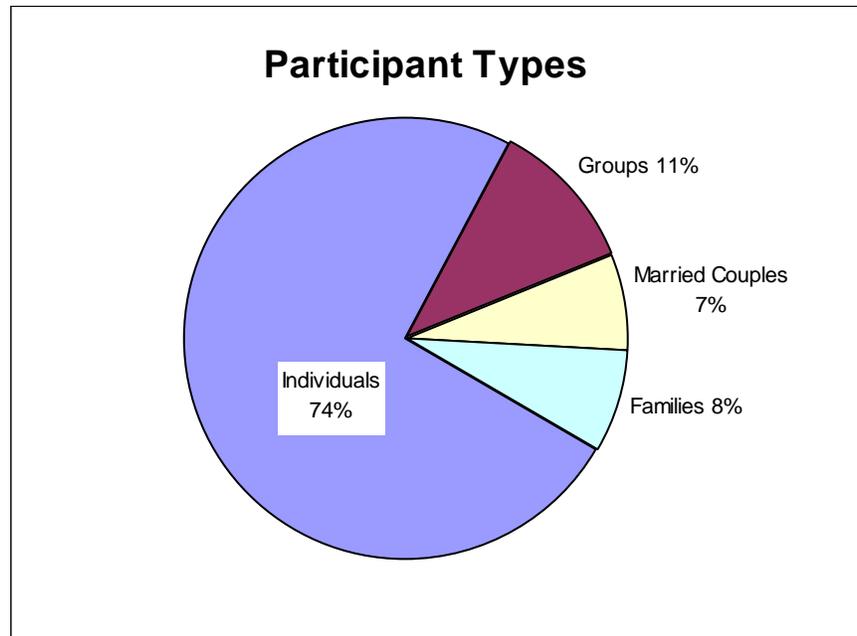


Figure 9

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Over the last three years, this graph has remained almost identical, though in 2008 and 2009 there was a slight increase in searches for “families” (from 6% to 8%) and a corresponding decrease in searches for “individuals”.

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 person does the searching to find the opportunity. So, while just 10% 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 67% of the time. Below is a graph of how this breaks out:

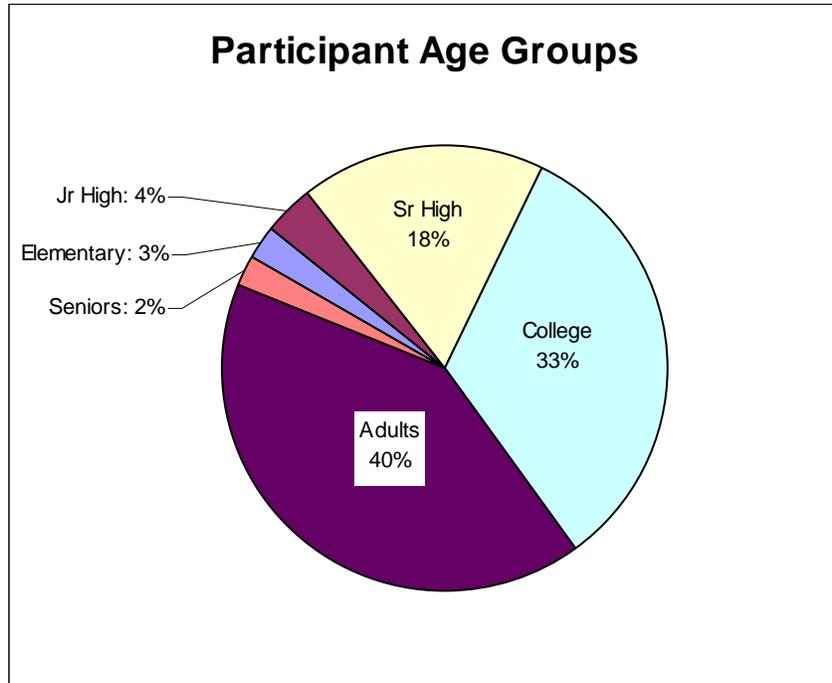


Figure 10

© 2009 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 students 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 two years the split out between the various ages has not changed significantly.

Length of Short-Term Mission Trip

Searches specified a trip length 65% of the time. Below is a graph of the how this breaks out:

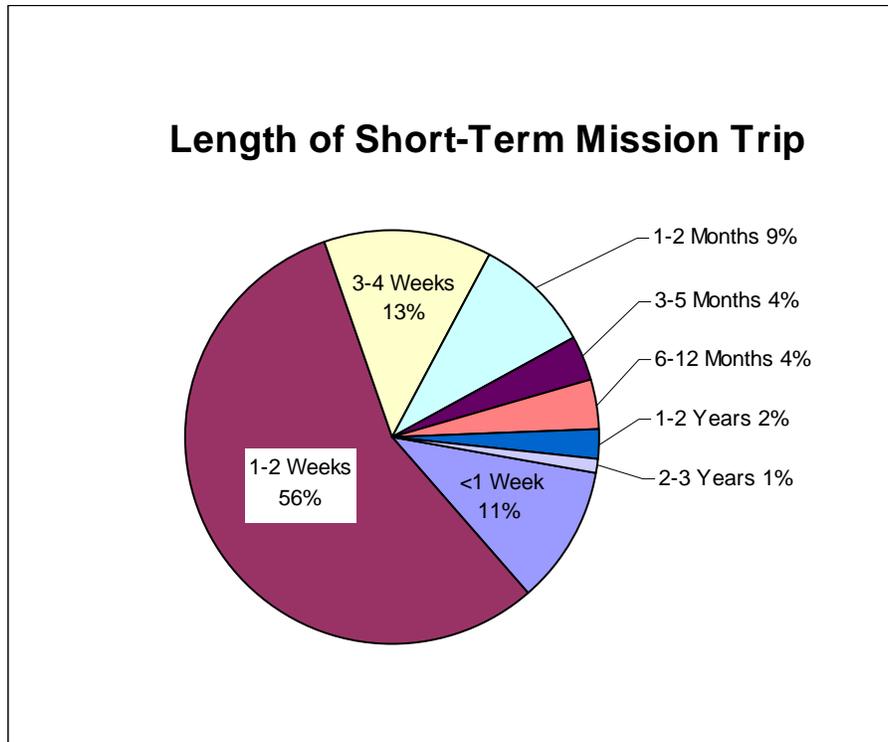


Figure 11

© 2009 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 11% searched for three months or longer (11% translates to about 1,470 searches per month).

Over the last two years, the percentage looking for two weeks and under trips increased from 63% to 67%. During the same time the percentage looking for 1 to 2 month opportunities decreased from 11% to 9%. This could imply a continuation of movement over the years to shorter mission opportunities.

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 presentation 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 to 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 2009:

Rank	Summary	Searches
1	Alaska	394
2	Children	110
3	Africa	106
4	Medical	100
5	Build	92
6	Nurse	86
7	orphanage	84
8	native american	60
9	Orphan	54
10	new york	52
11	Haiti	50
12	Chicago	37
13	Catholic	36
14	california	34
15	Nursing	33
16	Music	32
17	Kenya	32
18	new orleans	32
19	haiti - build	30
20	Jesus	29
21	evangelism	28
22	Dental	27
23	christian	27
24	appalachia	27
25	French	26
Rank	Summary	Searches

Figure 12 © 2009 Mission Data International

In comparison to the order of keywords during Spring 2007, “Africa” is up, as would be expected from the most searched for countries and “New Orleans” and “Katrina” are down.

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

Questions Raised

In addition to providing insight, we hope this report will prompt questions that contribute to the dialogue about short-term missions. Below is a list of some of the questions the report continues to bring to our minds:

1. In light of the fact that 36% of those searching on ShortTermMissions.com are “considering long-term missions”, what kinds of mission trips are more likely to result in people pursuing longer term missions involvement?
2. Do the figures in this report apply more broadly to the short-term mission movement than just providing a snapshot of the users searching on ShortTermMissions.com? In other words, how accurately does the traffic on ShortTermMissions.com reflect the whole of short-term mission activity? How accurately does the data on those searching for mission trips represent those going on mission trips?
3. How much should popularity of a location, ministry activity, or length of opportunity determine what opportunities are offered by mission agencies and US outreach organizations?
4. Should services like ShortTermMissions.com make efforts to encourage people to go to certain areas of the world over others or to be involved in certain activities? If so which activities and locations should be encouraged?

If you have a question to add to this list please send it to research@mdat.org. We plan on wrestling with these questions over the next few years as time permits.

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