

Highlights of Directory Search Report Spring 2016

Compiled and
Edited by
David Armstrong



Highlights of the Spring 2016 Directory Search Report

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. Each spring from 2007 through 2012 reports were created and posted at www.mdat.org/reports. These reports have been valuable to many agencies as they plan opportunities.

Due to major changes made to our search engine format in 2012, this report and the data being analyzed in it are quite different from the data in the previous reports and are not directly comparable, though there are many similarities.

Directory Search Activity

There are several ways to conduct a search on the ShortTermMissions.com website. The most prominent means is by using the search box that dominates the front page of the website, and this is the primary way searches are conducted by those who hear about ShortTermMissions.com and begin their search from the site's home page. This report, however, describes searches using the browse or directory mode, accessible from <http://www.shorttermmissions.com/directory/>, through a link in the lower left section of the home page, or more commonly by typing one's search criteria directly into a search engine and clicking on the results. By analyzing these searches we can discover the key phrases or criteria entered by those using the major search engines. Knowing the key phrases people search by can be very helpful as an organization writes up the marketing for their trips.

If you have questions or would like more information, please contact David Armstrong.
Email: research@mdat.org, phone: 479-530-5987

The Most Searched for Countries

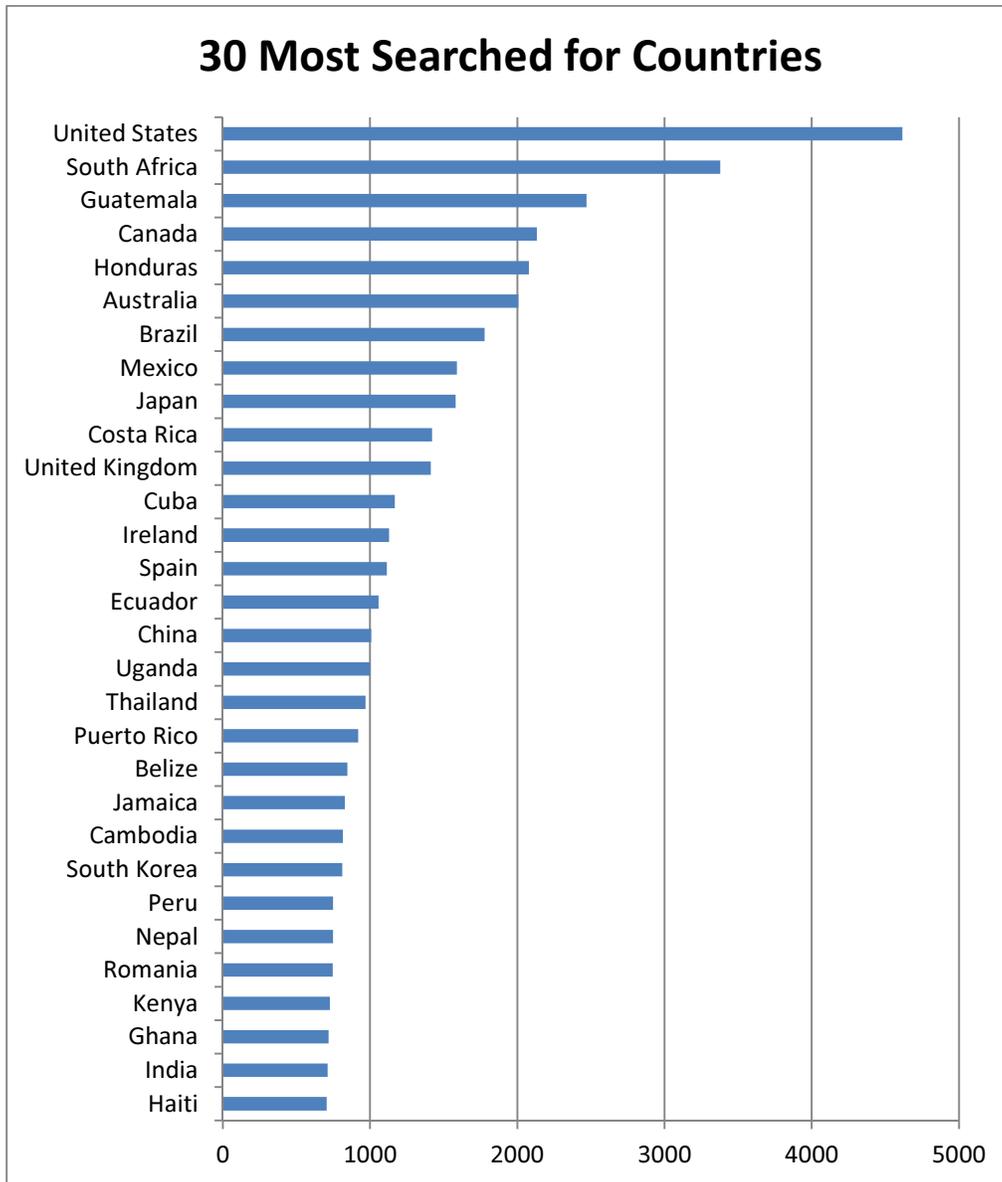


Figure 1

© 2016 Mission Data International

“Country” is the one search criteria that has constantly changed in ranking over the years. In the past the other criteria all tend to remain about the same or change slowly. The specific countries most searched for each year can be quite dynamic, moving up or down in the list as “this year’s favorites” change. Natural disasters often result in a sharp increase in interest for certain countries.

As we look at the top 30 countries in this data, several things stand out in comparison to other sets of data we have seen on ShortTermMissions.com. As in the past, the US has is in first place, reflecting the fact that about one third of all (Americans) who go on a mission trips do so within the borders of the US. Secondly, we see a predominance of Latin American countries, especially Central American. Third, European countries showed up more and African countries showed up less than in previous studies.

About half of the first 13 countries are English speaking. We may be seeing a move toward safer, friendlier areas taking place.

China, India and Russia were very popular five years ago, but today they are well down the list. Mexico has also moved way down the list over the last few years.

Regions

Below is a graph showing how the searchers looked at geographical regions:

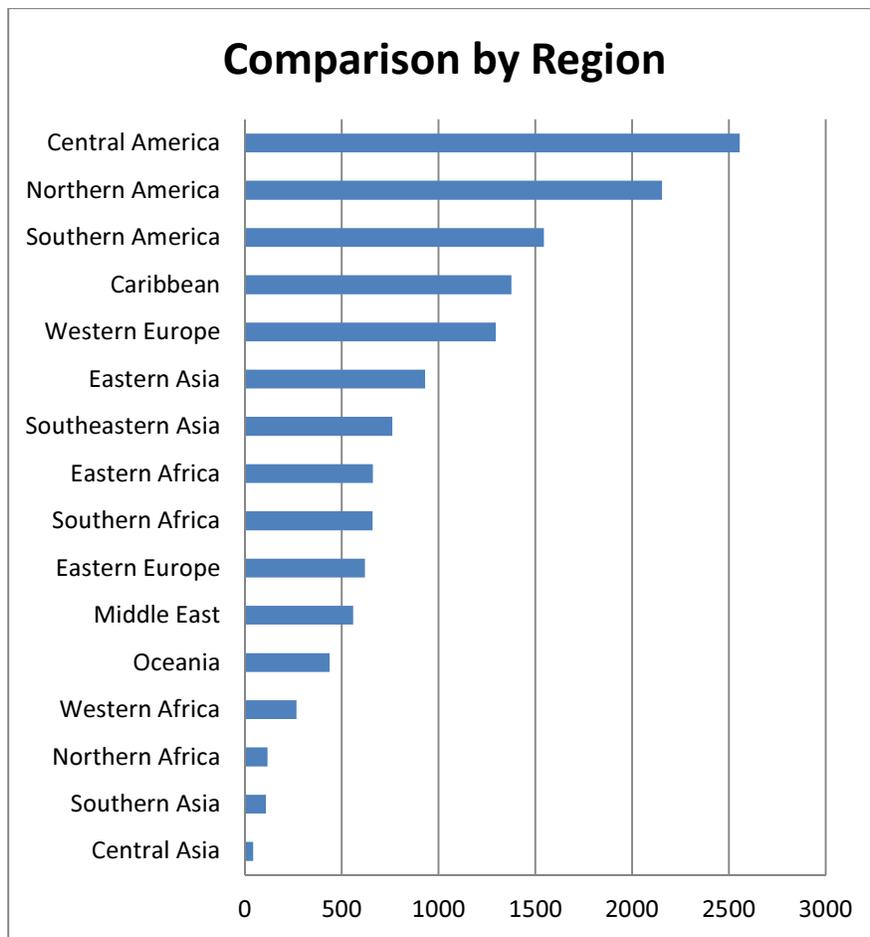


Figure 2

© 2016 Mission Data International

The patterns in this data are quite similar to search data in the past. There has been very little variation in the most popular regions, and most of the variation we have seen has been due to natural disasters.

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.

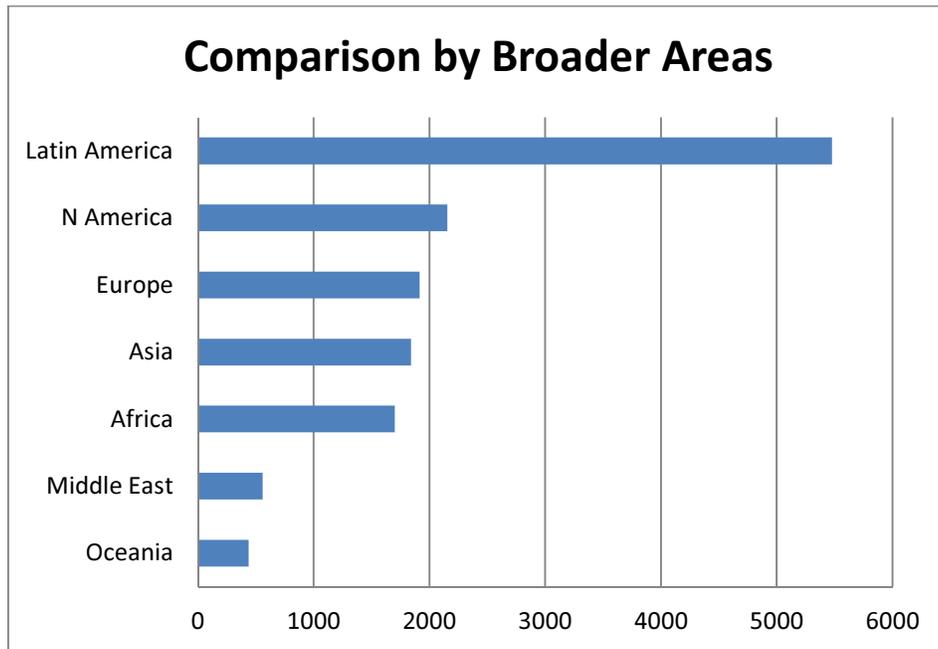


Figure 3

© 2016 Mission Data International

Latin America continues to be the most popular area of the world for mission trips, but it is noticeably higher in this data. Also in this data Africa appeared lower and Europe appeared higher than in our previous reports based on our regular search data.

Latin America is a broader designation than a continent, but to make a more helpful comparison between the regions, the above chart groups together “South America,” “Central America,” and “The Caribbean” as “Latin America.” “N. America” refers to the United States and Canada even though Mexico is technically considered to be part of North America.

The Most Searched-for Ministry Activities

Below is a graph showing the relative popularity of the 39 ministry activity options in the directory searches on ShortTermMissions.com this spring:

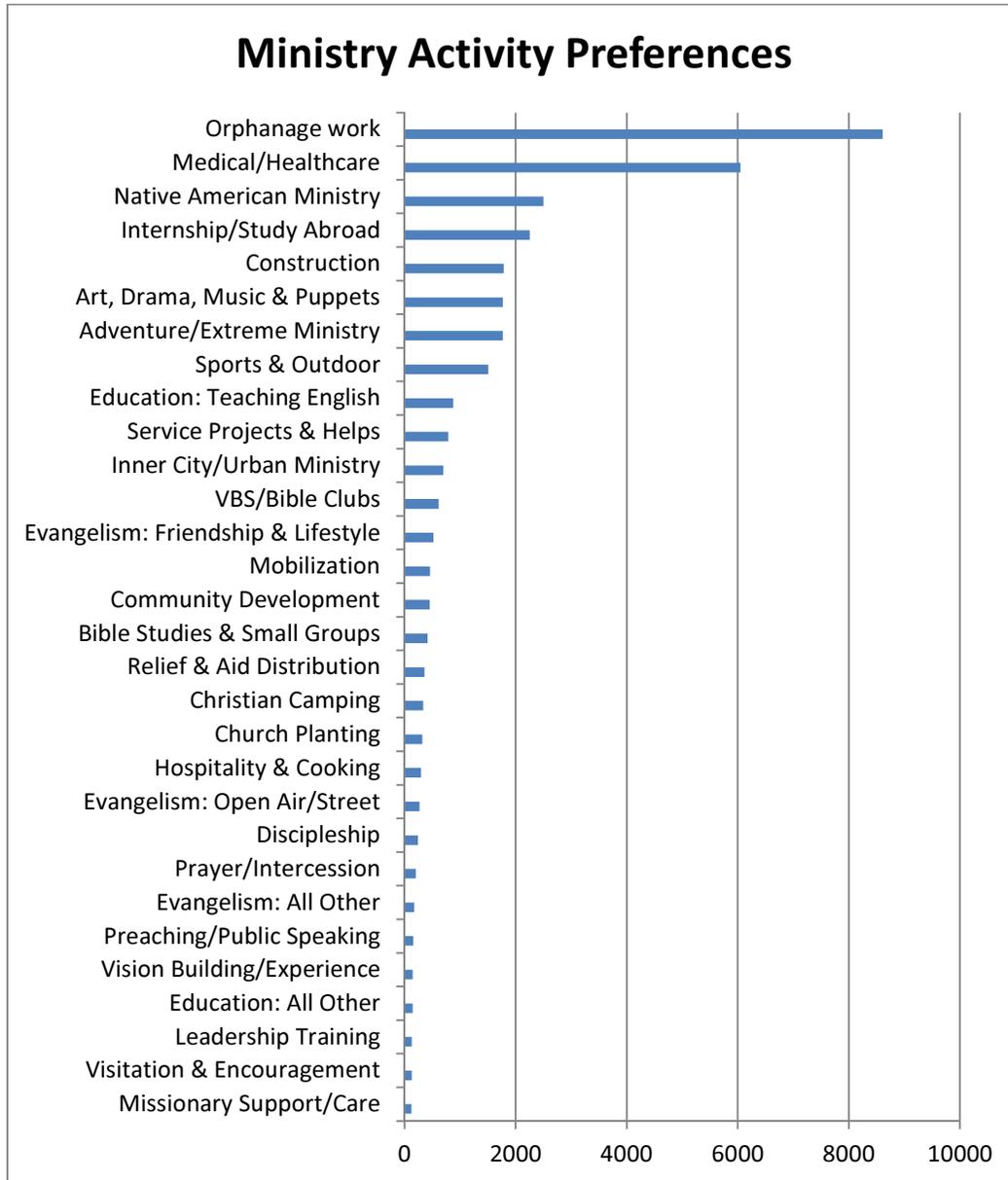


Figure 4

© 2016 Mission Data International

In previous reports of spring search data there were three ministry activities that consistently appeared way above all others: orphanage work, medical/healthcare, and construction, always in that order. The next six activities remained the same over the years, but had moved around some relative to one another. But those six ranked about twice as high as all the remaining options. The above results appear very similar to the past results.

In this study, the top ten activities account for almost 75% of the searches which specified an activity.

To get a more accurate picture of the popularity of evangelism, discipleship and church planting activities we have grouped some of the various ministry activities related to those activities. In the listing of 39 types of ministry activities this area is so segmented that its full strength is not readily apparent.

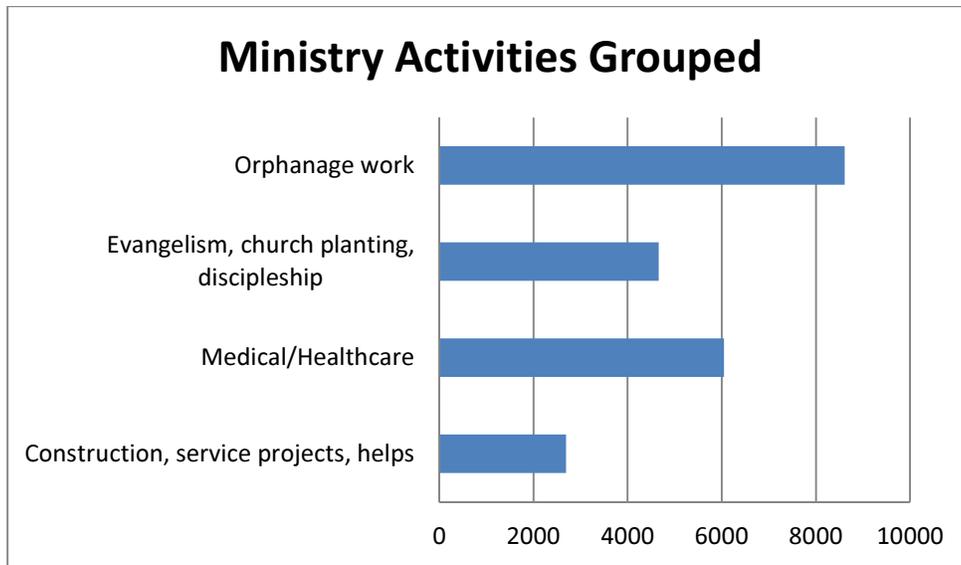


Figure 5

© 2016 Mission Data International

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.

Conclusions:

These are the highlights of a study of the category words that brought searchers for mission trips to the ShortTermMissions.com “directory” search. Because the large majority of them come directly to these directory pages from the words they entered in the major search engines, the results reveal key categories agencies can include in their descriptions in order to better draw attention to their mission trips, both on the internet and in print. It can also show them where added effort might enable them to serve more people.



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 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 28,000 unique visitors each month.



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