

# Managing a Tour Operating Business



# Managing a Tour Operating Business:

*A Perspective from Africa*

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This book is dedicated to my late parents whose insights in the importance of education were truly amazing given their own limitation to school education and the period of time they lived in the Zimbabwe.



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface .....	ix
Acknowledgements .....	x
Abbreviations and Acronyms .....	xi
Chapter 1 .....	1
Introduction to the tourism industry and tour operations	
Chapter 2 .....	14
The genesis of tour operations	
Chapter 3 .....	31
Airline policies and their impact on tour operations development	
Chapter 4 .....	49
Tour operators and the accommodation sector	
Chapter 5 .....	66
Tour operators' products	
Chapter 6 .....	80
Tour package planning, pricing and marketing	
Chapter 7 .....	100
Tour guiding planning and practice	
Chapter 8 .....	120
The travel agency	
Chapter 9 .....	134
Information communication technologies in tour operations	
Chapter 10 .....	158
Tour operations in Zimbabwe and South Africa	

Chapter 11 .....	189
The future of tour operations in Africa	
References .....	206



## PREFACE

The overall aim of the book is to contribute to knowledge on tour operations business. The specific objective of the book is to bridge the knowledge gap that currently exists in both Institutions of Higher Learning and the tourism industry with regard to conceptual and theoretical appreciation of tour operations as an area of study. The book offers up to date insights on the role that tour operators play in the development of tourism in both developed and developing countries. It further highlights the role played by source market tour operators in influencing tourism development in the receiving destinations.

The book brings together current issues that are affecting the survival of the tour operating business, for example, the impact of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs). It offers new insights into the challenges that the tour operators are facing as a result of constant changes and innovations in information communication technologies including social media.

Tourism studies are expanding and becoming more and more popular in both universities and colleges. This is one of the few standalone books on tour operations management. The subject has been treated as an add-on topic in general books on tourism management. The book is therefore a key resource for students in universities and colleges studying tourism.

A large number of people are finding employment in tour operating enterprises as tours consultants, tour guides, operations managers etc. without any formal training in the tourism industry. In both the developed and developing countries individuals have established tour operating companies without any formal training in the subsector. This book will give both the employees and the entrepreneurs structured knowledge and skills on the activities they undertake on a daily basis.

The book offers both the academic community in tourism and practitioners in the tourism industry a narrative of the issues affecting the tour operation subsector with a perspective from the South which is a major recipient of the tourist flows that are driven to these destinations by the promotional and marketing activities of tour operators from the North.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the students that I have taught the course on tour operations at the University of Zimbabwe during the past eleven years. They gave me the opportunity to explore with them the developments that have been occurring in this subsector of the tourism industry. Engagements with the students further highlighted the dearth of comprehensive clearly structured information on the subject. My gratitude also goes to my colleagues in the department of tourism and hospitality at the University of Zimbabwe, especially Dr. E. Marunda who encouraged me to embark on the book project. However the opinions and views expressed in the book are all mine.

## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ABTA-Association of British Travel Agency  
ASAs- Air Service Agreements  
ATA-Association of Travel to Africa  
AU-African Union  
BASAs-Bilateral Air Service Agreements  
BEE-Black Economic Empowerment  
CRS-Central Reservation System  
EFTGA- European Federation of Tour Guides Association  
EU-European Union  
GDS-Global Distribution System  
GVC-Global Value Chain  
IATA- International Air Transport Association  
ICAO-International Civil Aviation Organization  
ICTs- Information Communication Technologies  
ITB-International Tourism Borse  
ITOAZ-Inbound Tour Operators Association of Zimbabwe  
LCC- Low Cost Carriers  
OECD-Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development  
NFTGA- National Federation of Tour Guides Association of the United States of America  
NTA-National Tourism Organization  
OSAs-Open Skies Agreements  
OTAs-Online Travel Agencies  
POIs-Points of Interests  
SAOZ-Safari Operators Association of Zimbabwe  
SATSA-Southern African Tour Operators Association  
TBSA-Tourism Business Council of South Africa  
TBCZ-Tourism Business Council of Zimbabwe  
UNWTO-United Nations World Tourism Organization  
WFTGA-World Federation of Tour Guides Association  
WTTC-World Travel and Tourism Council  
WTM-World Travel Market  
YD-Yamoussoukro Decision  
ZTA-Zimbabwe Tourism Authority



# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION TO THE TOURISM INDUSTRY AND TOUR OPERATIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the reader to the tourism sector and highlight its growth and its role in the economic development of countries.

The objectives of the chapter are:

- To define the tourism industry
- To explain the factors that have driven the growth of the industry since the end of the Second World War
- To highlight the positive and negative impacts of tourism development
- To explain the composition of the tourism industry
- To introduce the concept of tour operations.

The tourism industry is premised on a number of other sectors and is linked to a wide variety of activities. There are, therefore, a wide variety of definitions that have been proffered to explain the phenomenon. One of the classic definitions is that of Burkhart and Medlik (1981: 42) who defined tourism as “the temporary short-term movement of people...and their activities during the stay at these destinations”. According to McIntosh and Goeldner (1990) tourism is “the sum of the phenomena and relationship arising from the interaction of tourists, business supplies, host governments and host communities in the process of attracting these tourists and other visitors”.

However, in order to have some measure of comparability in terms of tourism data, most countries use the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) definition.

## **The UNWTO definition of tourism**

Tourism is a social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes. These people are called visitors (which may be either tourists or excursionists; residents or non-residents) and tourism is related to their activities, some of which imply expenditure. The different components of the definitions can be explained as follows:

### ***Visitor***

A visitor is a traveller taking a trip to a main destination outside his/her usual environment, for less than a year, for main purpose (business, leisure or other personal purpose) other than to be employed by a resident entity in the country or place visited. A visitor (domestic, inbound or outbound) is classified as a tourist (or overnight visitor) if his/her trip includes overnight stay, or as a same-day visitor (or excursionist) otherwise [sic].

### ***Domestic Tourism***

Domestic tourism comprises the activities of a resident visitor within the country of reference, either as part of a domestic tourism trip or part of outbound tourism trip [sic].

### ***International Tourism***

International tourism comprises inbound tourism plus outbound tourism, that is to say, the activities of resident visitors outside the country of reference, either as part of domestic or outbound tourism trips and the activities of non-resident visitors within the country of reference on inbound tourism trips

Source: [www.unwto.org](http://www.unwto.org); Understanding Tourism; Basic Glossary.

## **Growth and development of the tourism sector**

The tourism industry has experienced phenomenal growth from its humble take off after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War (Pender, 2005; Weaver, 2006; Edgell et al., 2008; UNWTO, 2013). International tourist arrivals have grown from a total of 25 million in 1950 to 685.5 million in 2000 and reached a total of

1.5 billion in 2019 (UNWTO 2020). According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTTC, 2019), the sector contributed 10.4% of the GDP of the world economy and accounted for 10% of global employment in 2018. In its Vision 2020 which used 1995 as the base year, the UNWTO had forecasted that tourist arrivals would grow annually by 4% and estimated that the total number of global arrivals would reach 1.6 billion in 2020 (UNWTO, 1996). However, the total arrivals reached 1.5 billion in 2019. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in China in January 2020 and the subsequent international imposition of a global travel ban on internal and external flights resulted in a decline of 72% in arrivals in 2020 compared to 2019 (UNWTO 2021). Figure 1.1 below shows the trend of arrivals since 1950 and the forecast to 2030.

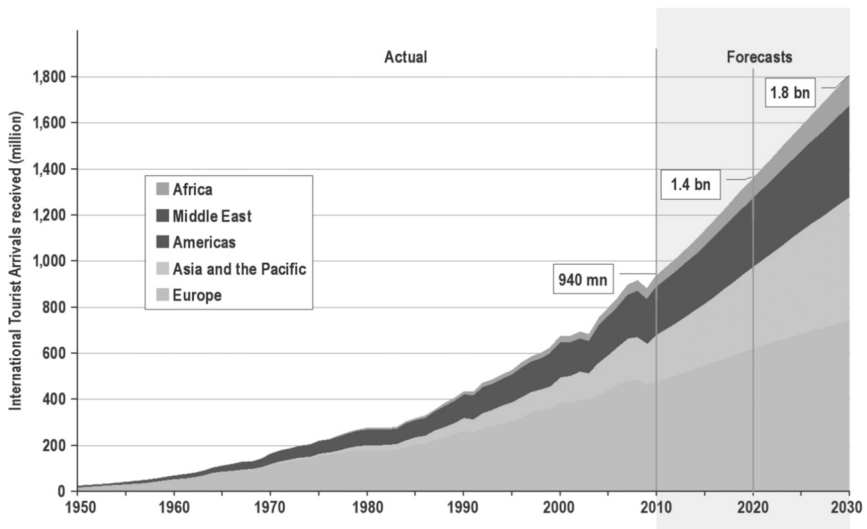


Figure 1.1: International tourist arrivals: actual and forecast 1950-2030: Source: UNWTO: Tourism Highlights 2013 Edition.

Figure 2 below shows the effects of different global events on the growth of the industry.

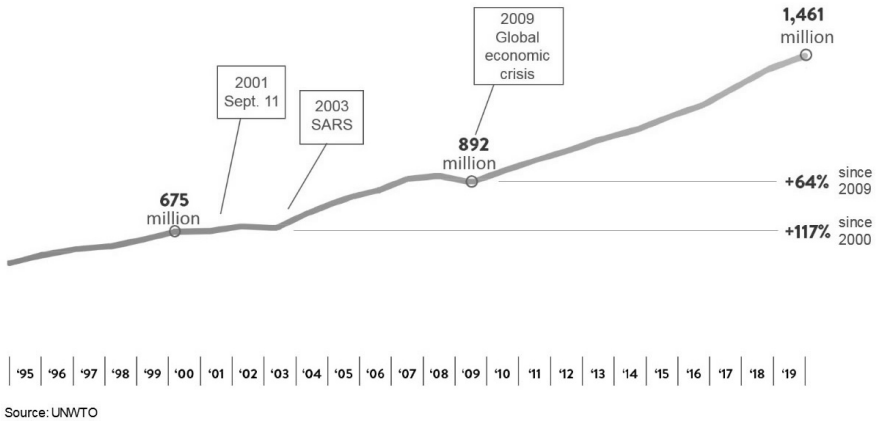


Figure 1.2: Effects of global events on tourism growth. Source UNWTO (2020).

The upward trend in the sector has been maintained despite a plethora of challenges during the last four decades. These have included among others:

- The 1972 dramatic rise in the price of oil pushed the cost of travel to unprecedented levels
- The Gulf War of 1990-91
- The bombing of the Twin Towers in New York on September 11th, 2001
- The invasion of Iraq by the United States of America and her allies in 2003
- The tsunami in Southeast Asia on December 26th, 2004
- The protracted civil war in Angola which ended in 2004
- The bombings of several buildings in London, Britain in July 2005
- The bombings in Bali, Indonesia in 2005
- The development and spread of SARS in China as well as avian flu in Southeast Asia in 2005
- The political disturbances of Kenya in 2007
- The political crisis and disturbances of Thailand from 2008-2010
- The swine flu which originated in Mexico in April 2009
- The eruption of the Icelandic volcano in April 2010
- The political uprising in the Arab world: “the Arab Spring” of 2011
- The spread of COVID-19 in 2020.



There are a number of reasons that help to explain the resilience that the sector has shown during the last four decades. In the majority of developed countries holidays are now part of one's normal lifestyle, hence people endeavour to take their annual holidays regardless of the general global political and economic outlook. Tourists adjust their destinations as well as the length of their holidays depending on the prevailing circumstances. For example, during the economic downturn of 2008 most European and North American tourists switched from taking long-haul holidays to taking short-haul holidays. Further, the length of the holiday period was reduced in order to accommodate reduced family incomes (UNWTO, 2009). A study by the European Commission (2013) indicated that, despite the economic problems that the region was experiencing, 75% of the participants indicated that they plan to take their holiday during the year. In situations where destinations are perceived as unsafe due to political instability and crime tourists switch to alternative destinations. For example, during the 2007 political disturbances in Kenya tourists looking for safari holidays switched from East Africa to Southern Africa.

The resilience of the sector has also been facilitated by the development and growth of the emerging markets of Asia and South America. For example, countries like China, South Korea, Thailand, Brazil, Mexico and Argentina have experienced unprecedented growth in outbound tourism in recent years. Hand in hand with the growth of new tourism-generating countries have been the changing demands and characteristics of the tourists. The "new" tourist (Poon, 2000; Centre For Responsible Travel, 2009) is extensively travelled, is ICT literate and is searching for more personalised, responsible, experiential and authentic holiday experiences. New destinations have therefore opened up to cater for the needs of these tourists, thereby helping to maintain the momentum of global tourism growth.

Destinations in both the developed and developing countries are competing intensively for the Chinese market which has established a reputation for spending heavily on shopping for luxury branded products wherever they go. In 2012, Chinese outbound tourists spent a total of US\$102 billion, a 37% increase on the 2011 figure (UNWTO, 2013). China, therefore, became the highest spending outbound market displacing Germany which has traditionally held that position. A 2013 study indicated that 47% of the total amount spent on overseas holidays by Chinese tourists was on shopping (China Confidential, 2013).

## Global distribution of tourists

Although there have been noticeable shifts in recent years in terms of where the majority of tourists are going, there is still a high concentration of tourist arrivals in Europe and North America. For example, in 2012 Europe received 52% of the arrivals, the Americas, 16%, Asia and the Pacific 23% and Africa and the Middle East 5% each. Figure 1.3 below shows the global share of tourist arrivals in 2000, and this had not changed substantially in 2019.

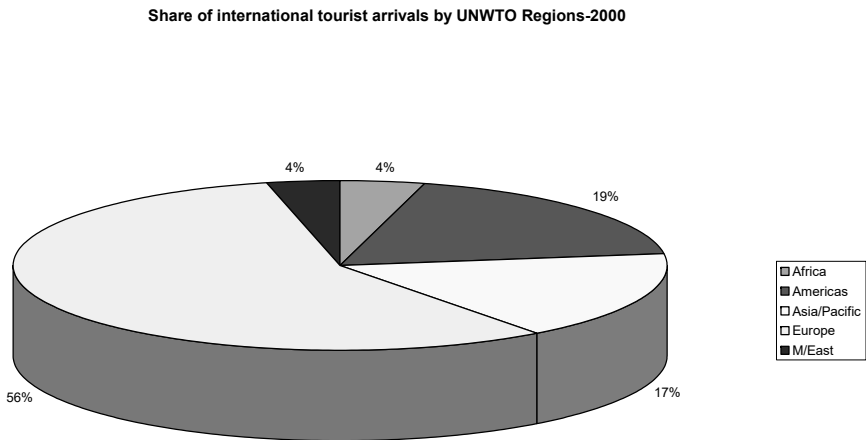


Figure 1.3: Market share of international tourist arrivals in 2000. Source: UNWTO, 2001.

The prevailing distribution pattern is a result of a number of economic, social and historical factors. For example, Europe and North America have historically been the centres of economic development which helped to increase the disposable incomes of their populations. This, in turn, enabled the citizens of these countries to go on holidays to different parts of the world. The majority of the population initially took holidays to countries that were within close proximity of their own. However, with the general improvement in household disposable incomes, families have been able to afford long-haul holidays. This has helped to create demand for hitherto unexplored holiday destinations.

## Costs and benefits of tourism development

Whilst tourism has gained prominence in recent years as a tool for economic development in both developed and developing countries, it is important to point out that the sector is a double-edged sword (Young, 1973; Doswel, 1997; Page, 2009). Its development, like that of any other sector, demands the ability to maximise its benefits as well as the ability to curtail its costs. It, therefore, entails deliberate and careful planning in order to ensure its long-term sustainability. Table 1.1 below summarises the benefits and costs of tourism development.

**Table 1.1: Costs and benefits of tourism development.**

Benefits	Costs
It brings in foreign currency	It encourages the debasement of the local culture
It is a major creator of employment, including women and the youth	It stimulates negative social habits—drugs, prostitution, etc.
It brings in revenue to the government through taxes	It leads to environmental pollution
It economically empowers local communities	It can benefit outsiders
It encourages natural resource conservation	It stimulates high land prices
It encourages the preservation of local cultures	It leads to loss of land by rural communities
It stimulates the development of infrastructure	It can lead to host/guest conflicts
It fosters international peace	It can lead to the poaching of natural resources
It helps in regional economic development	It can lead to the destruction of cultural artefacts
It is a major tool for economic diversification	It is prone to cause the destruction of sensitive ecosystems, e.g., coral reefs

Source: Author's own compilation.

Given the above benefits and costs of tourism development, it is not difficult to understand the constant call for the need for effective planning in tourism development. However, there are often a number of forces that inhibit countries from putting in place sound tourism plans. These include among others:

- Politically and economically strong lobby groups who use their influence to disregard set rules
- Lack of skilled manpower to draw up the necessary policies and regulations to guide the development
- The fear of losing foreign direct investments to competing destinations leads to making compromises on the set regulatory frameworks
- Endemic corrupt tendencies of politicians and bureaucrats.

### **Sustainable tourism**

The concept of sustainable development has become a major global agenda since the publication of the Brundtland Report in 1987. The main focus has been to come up with global policies and frameworks that guide overall economic development, in order to ensure that future generations are able to meet their own needs with the resources that are available in the world. The notion of sustainable tourism was, on the one hand, a result of the diffusion of the general concept of sustainable development to the tourism sector. On the other hand, it was a reaction to the overall negative economic, social and environmental impacts of the growth of mass tourism that occurred during the 60s and the 70s (Sharpley, 2009). The extensive global advocacy on sustainable tourism development has led governments and the private sector in different parts of the world to attempt to adhere to the principles of the sustainable development agenda (Sharpley, 2009). However, the level of commitment to the concept differs from country to country depending on broad national approaches to economic development. At the centre of sustainable tourism development is the need to ensure that the current utilisation of a destination's resources has an inbuilt mechanism that guarantees the long-term continuity of the sector. This concept led the UNWTO (2005) to define sustainable tourism in the following way: "Tourism that takes account of the current and future economic, social and environmental impacts addressing the needs of visitors, the industry and host communities."

In 2000, the major international tour operators formed the Tour Operators Initiative for Sustainable Tourism Development, whose main focus has been the creation of awareness for the need to practise sustainable tourism within the industry. This was in response to their customers' demands for sustainable tourism products in the places they take their holidays. The tour operators have, therefore, put in place a number of guidelines and frameworks that guide their members and their business partners in

implementing sustainable tourism strategies which help to ensure the future continuity of the businesses and the attractions which lure tourists to the different destinations of the world. Figure 1.4 below shows the core elements of sustainable tourism development.



Figure 1.4: Elements of sustainable tourism development. Source: adapted from [www.researchgate](http://www.researchgate).

### **Linkages in the tourism sector**

The tourism industry is multifaceted. It is linked to and influenced by a range of economic and non-economic sectors (Institute for Integrative Tourism and Development, 2009). Table 1.2 below summarises the linkages that the sector has with a number of other sectors.

**Table 1.2: Sectorial linkages of the tourism industry.**

Sector	Linkage with the tourism sector
Agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• supplies of fresh vegetables, fruits, meat and meat products, fish etc. to hotels, restaurants and fast-food outlets</li> <li>• source for all processed agricultural products of the sector</li> </ul>
Manufacturing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provision of all linen items for the accommodation sector</li> <li>• source of furniture and fittings needed in different subsectors of the industry</li> <li>• provision of different forms of transport products—vehicles, aircrafts</li> </ul>
Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• beach tourism which was the nucleus of the growth of mass tourism is based on global oceans and seas</li> <li>• niche adventure and luxury holiday markets—diving, whitewater rafting, cruising—all depend on the availability of the world's water bodies</li> <li>• tourism growth is dependent on the availability of water supplies for both direct consumption for tourists and the sewage system of the accommodation sector and other amenities</li> </ul>
Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the transport sector is the backbone of the tourism industry globally</li> <li>• innovations in air and rail transport have helped to improve the accessibility of different destinations in terms of both time and costs leading to the general growth of the tourism sector</li> </ul>
Energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tourism components like airlines and hotels are intensive users of electricity and fuel, without which the industry is unable to function</li> </ul>
ICT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• global competitiveness in tourism is now being driven by ICT</li> <li>• the growth of e-commerce in tourism is a direct result of the growth of ICT</li> <li>• the internet is now the largest source of information on destinations and holidays for tourists worldwide</li> </ul>
Meteorology and Climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• climatic change is threatening the sustainability of tourism in different destinations</li> <li>• tourism activities are currently responsible for 4-6% of global carbon emissions and hence are contributing to climatic change (UNWTO; 2007)</li> </ul>

Source: adapted from SADC: Infrastructure Dev. Master Plan: 2012

## Composition of the tourism sector

The tourism industry is made up of a wide range of components some of which are often peripheral to the sector, for example, banking and insurance. Figure 1.5 below shows the main components of the sector.



Figure 1.5: Components of the tourism sector; Source: author's own compilation.

Details of the role and functions of the various components of the sector can be found in a wide range of general textbooks on tourism (Davidson, 1993; Holloway & Robson, 1995; Horner, 1996; Middleton, 2003, Page, 2009). The fragmentation of the product components of the industry emphasises the need for a middleman who is able to package the different parts into a single saleable product. This is the role that is played by the tour operator.

## **What does a tour operator do?**

### ***Definitions***

According to Yale (1995: 1) “A tour operator is a person or a company who purchases the different items that make up an inclusive holiday in bulk, combine them together to produce package holidays and then sell the final package either directly or through a travel agent”.

Similarly, Page (2009: 648) defines a tour operator as “An organization assembling and selling tourism products and services”.

In essence, a tour operator is a wholesaler who sources different components of the tourist products and packages them into an attractive holiday product to sell to potential customers.

Tour operators can broadly be divided into two categories: inbound and outbound tour operators. Inbound tour operators focus on creating holiday packages for tourists wishing to visit the destinations in which they are based, for example, Shearwater Adventures in Zimbabwe. Outbound tour operators are those that concentrate on creating package holidays for tourists from their source markets who wish to travel to other destinations around the world, for example, TUI (Touristik Union International) in Germany who sells holiday packages to German tourists who wish to take their vacations in different parts of the world.

### **Conclusion**

In both developed and emerging economies, tourism has become a major driver of economic and social development. It generates foreign currency, creates employment, contributes to countries' GDP and is a major tool for poverty alleviation. Whilst in the past, Europe and North America were the major source markets, China is proving to be the source market for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Destinations, however, need to properly plan the development of the sector so as to mitigate against its negative economic, social, political and environmental impacts.

### **Discussion questions**

1. How far do you think African countries have benefitted from tourism development? Use specific examples in your discussions.



2. What challenges do destinations face in promoting themselves in the Chinese market?
3. How successful has your country been in implementing its tourism policies and plans?

### **Recommended further reading**

- Page, S. J., Connel, J. J. (2009). *Tourism: A Modern Synthesis*. Third Edition Butterworth Publications; London.
- Dieke, P.C.U. eds. (2000). *The Political Economy of Tourism Development in Africa*, Cognizant Communication Corporation; New York.
- Nyaruwata, S. (2021). *Introduction to Tourism Development in the Southern African Development (SADC) Region*. University of Zimbabwe Publication; Harare.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE GENESIS OF TOUR OPERATIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the historical role that has been played by tour operators in the development of the tourism industry.

The objectives of this chapter are:

- To explain the genesis of tour operations
- To describe the functions of the tour operator
- To identify and explain the role played by pioneers in tour packaging.

#### **Characteristics of early travel**

The idea of travel is as old as mankind itself. For a long time in the history of mankind, the traveller undertook the detailed planning himself, making sure that he had adequate supplies for the journey. There is extensive historical and religious literature which records a variety of journeys that were taken by both individuals and groups of people to different parts of the world. As is the case with current tourism there is evidence that ancient travel was motivated by different factors (Rabotic, 2014). Ancient Greeks and Romans allocated themselves time to visit places of interest in their known world for leisure. For example, for both Greeks and Romans places like Egypt were popular destinations (Friedlander, 1965) cited by Rabotic (2014: 105). These motives for travel included, among others, business, leisure, religion and sports.

The Phoenicians, who were astute traders, sailed to different parts of the ancient world to sell their goods as well as to buy products that were in demand in different parts of the world. The movements of the Phoenicians were emulated later by merchants from Europe during the period of the Voyages of Discovery (1400-1500). Renowned merchants like Marco Polo, Vasco da Gama and Christopher Columbus risked their lives and those of their crews for the sake of trade. The journeys were meticulously

planned in order to make sure that the round trip was successful, not unlike what tour operators currently do.

History also records different waves of movements of people for religious purposes. At a macro level, there were the pilgrimages of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Centuries which involved large numbers of people visiting the Holy Land and other places of religious significance. At a micro level, there were the annual Passover journeys of the Jewish people to Jerusalem well before the birth of Christ. Similar movements have also been made from time immemorial by people of Islamic faith to Mecca in Saud Arabia. A typical example is the journeys of St Paul which he made to parts of Asia Minor and the region around the Aegean and Mediterranean seas in his endeavour to convert the Gentiles to Christianity. Figure 2.1 shows the four itineraries of the journeys of St Paul during the period AD 45 – AD 61.

At the height of Greek civilisation, the different city states organised games and festivals that drew huge crowds of people from different parts of the country, for example, the Olympic Games held in Olympia, the Pythian games held at Delphi and the Isthmian games held at the Isthmus of Corinth (Rabotic: 107). The coming together of large numbers of athletes and spectators to these cities created a huge demand for accommodation and other services as is the case with present gatherings in cities that host the Olympic Games.



## **The Grand Tour**

The travels of the children of the aristocracy and of well-off members of European society during the period 1600-1800 sowed the seeds of present-day tour packages. Children took a three- or four-year tour of Europe (Brodsky-Porges, 1981: 9) once they graduated from high school or university. The main objective of the tour was to enable the young man to have a broader view of the world, through experiencing other cultures. From a national perspective, nations wanted their young people to get experience which would prepare them for service in the public sector as bureaucrats and diplomats (*ibid*). The young people were accompanied on the tour by a tutor whose responsibilities included guiding the young man, teaching him and protecting him. Those that could afford it were also accompanied by a number of other helpers throughout the tour. For the English young men, some of the activities on the tour were learning the popular languages of continental Europe, (French, German and Italian) learning French dances and etiquette, taking lessons in fencing and horse riding among others. A number of itineraries were followed during the three- to four-year period. Figures 2.2 and 2.3 show alternative routes that were selected by British young people touring continental Europe.

In general, the departure port for the British was Dover. The student and his entourage had the choice of entering into continental Europe through the ports of Calais or Le Havre in France or through Ostend in Belgium or through The Hague in the Netherlands. The itineraries were urban-based in order to ensure that the young person was fully immersed in the cultures and the civilisation of the societies he interacted with during his stay away from home. Visits to universities like the Sorbonne in Paris, Heidelberg and Berlin in Germany and colleges in Rome and Venice in Italy were a must (Brodsky-Porges: 11). Some of the young people took an opportunity to enrol for short courses in these renowned institutions of higher learning or took an opportunity to attend lectures being given by outstanding scholars of the period.

It is evident from Figures 2.2 and 2.3 that the tours took the groups through difficult terrain, for example crossing the Alps from Switzerland into Italy. Arrangements had, therefore, to be made to hire an experienced guide for the group. These people, known in Italy as the “vetturino”, (Brodsky-Porges: 10) were no different from the present tour guide who moves around with clients on a multi-destination tour package.



Figure 2.2: A Standard Grand Tour Itinerary in 1600-1800 Europe. Source Google Maps.