Trends in hard and soft adventure holidays

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In August 2010, a report published by George Washington University (GW), Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA) and Xola Consulting confirmed that travellers are becoming more adventurous and seek new experiences.

According to the survey, which was carried out across Latin America, North America and Europe in late 2009, adventure travellers globally represent a significant and growing market, worth some US$89 billion annually. Such consumers are therefore of increasing interest to tour operators, travel agents and other travel companies, as well as manufacturers of a variety of outdoor wear and equipment.

In the countries surveyed, 26% of respondents indicated that they participated in adventure travel activities. The term 'adventure holiday' is open to some interpretation. The study breaks it down into 'hard adventure', which involves high risk activities that require a high level of skill, such as trekking, climbing and caving; 'soft adventure', which involves less taxing activities such as skiing, scuba diving, archaeology trips, etc; and 'other', which includes cruises, walking holidays and cultural activities.

Table 1 Activities by Type

Activity	Hard	Soft	Other
Archeological expeditions		X	
Attending local festivals/fairs			X
Backpacking		X	
Birdwatching		X	
Camping		X	
Canoeing		X	
Caving	X		
Climbing (mountain/rock/ice)	X		
Cruise			X
Cultural activities			X
Cycling		X	
Eco-tourism		X	
Educational programs		X	
Environmentally sustainable activities		X	
Fishing/fly-fishing		X	
Getting to know the locals			X
Hiking		X	
Horseback riding		X	
Hunting		X	
Kayaking/sea/whitewater		X	
Learning a new language			X
Orienteering		X	
Rafting		X	
Research expeditions		X	
Safaris		X	
Sailing		X	
Scuba Diving		X	
Snorkeling		X	
Skiing/snowboarding		X	
Surfing		X	
Trekking	X		
Walking tours			X
Visiting friends/family			X
Visiting historical sites			X
Volunteer Tourism		X	

Source: Adventure Tourism Market Report 2010 (George Washington University School of Business, ATTA and Xola Consulting)

Soft adventure increasing in popularity

According to the study, hard adventure trips accounted for less than 2% of the population, while 25% went on soft adventure trips and 74% on 'other' adventure holidays. In all three regions, soft adventure increased steadily over travellers' past three trips and continued to do so with regard to future travel intentions. Latin Americans took the most adventure trips (35% of total outbound travellers, compared to 23% for European travellers and 18% for North American travellers), while around 43% of Europeans indicated that for their next holiday they would take a soft adventure trip. Germans, in particular, drove growth in “hard adventure” trips.

The GW/ATTA/Xola study found that adventure travellers place importance on exploring new places and meeting and engaging with local cultures while on holiday. Overall, adventure travellers are equally likely to be single or married, and equally likely to be male or female. The majority are between 35-47 years old. They are also more highly educated than other types of travellers, with 70% of hard adventurers and 63% of soft adventurers having post-secondary education. Consequently, adventure travellers also have higher levels of disposable income.

Soft adventure travellers don't necessarily travel far, but spend a lot

It is important to note that 75% of hard adventure travelers have passports while only 56.5% of soft adventure travellers have them, which suggests that a lot of soft adventure is happening in the domestic tourism market. 63.7% of other travellers have passports. However, soft adventure travellers spend more on average than the other two types of adventure travellers.

Table 2 Average Spending per Trip Excluding Airfare by Adventure Type

US$	Hard	Soft	Other
European Travelers	500	525	483
North American Travelers	500	914	605
Latin American Travelers	375	861	835
All 3 Regions	462	822	591

Source: Adventure Tourism Market Report 2010 (George Washington University School of Business, ATTA and Xola Consulting)

Adventure travellers segmented by age group

The characteristics of adventure travellers vary according to age group, according to the GW/ATTA/Xola study, and the needs of these different groups must be addressed by tour operators and travel agents.

The younger generation, Generation Y, tend to have small budgets but plenty of time to travel, since they often take a 'gap year' after university, or between jobs, in order to fulfil their dreams of travelling. This type of traveller tends to seek authentic experiences, connecting with local people or trekking long distances or taking long bus or train journeys. Budget and value are the key selling points for this group, although sustainability/responsibility plays a surprisingly high role in decision making.

Generation X travellers have often travelled extensively in their youth or studied abroad during college. They are confident navigating the internet to find good deals and new destinations. However, now that they have demanding jobs they are time poor and want to get the most possible out of their limited holiday time. They demand once-in-a-lifetime experiences, such as hiking Mount Kilimanjaro, and are prepared to splurge to achieve them.

The Baby Boomer generation is either discovering or re-discovering the adventure travel experience later in life. Many empty nesters have extra time and money on their hands and are still fit and healthy. They are curious to do things they could not do in their working years or have not done since their youth. They have large budgets and value adventure combined with a cultural experience. They tend to book through tour operators and may take more than one trip per year.

Table 3 Characteristics of Adventure Travellers by Age Group

Characteristic	Age segment
Small budgets, seeking value	Generation Y
Time for travel, hence longer trips	
Seek authentic experiences/connect with local people	
High users of the internet to research travel, especially social networking	
Sustainability/responsibility play a high role	
Experience of travelling throughout their youth	Generation X
Adept at navigating the internet to find good deals and new destinations	
Time poor	
Big budgets	
Demand once-in-a-lifetime experiences	
Seek new experiences or want to recreate experiences from youth	Baby Boomers
Empty nesters have extra time and money to dedicate to holidays	
Big budgets	
Prefer soft adventure combined with cultural experiences	
Less experienced with internet, more likely to book through tour operators	
May take several trips in one year	

Source: Adventure Tourism Market Report 2010 (George Washington University School of Business, ATTA and Xola Consulting)

Reaching the adventure traveller

Most adventure travellers use the internet to research their trips, with the majority of these going directly to Google with generic search terms such as the destination name. Around 20% use social media to learn about the destination, either by reading a blog post or viewing a friend's photos on a social networking site.

Table 4 Most Used Social Networking Sites by Adventure Travellers %

Social network	%
Facebook	34.3
MySpace	11.9
Twitter	8.6
Hi5	7.1
Orkut	5.9
Flickr	3.3

Source: Adventure Tourism Market Report 2010 (George Washington University School of Business, ATTA and Xola Consulting)

Table 5 Top Magazines Being Read by Adventure Travellers in the US only

Magazine	Rank
Local daily newspaper	1
People	2
National Geographic	3
Newsweek	4
Time	5
Reader’s Digest	6
Cosmopolitan	7
CondeNast Traveler	8
Glamour	9
GQ	10

Source: Adventure Tourism Market Report 2010 (George Washington University School of Business, ATTA and Xola Consulting)

Europe leads the way in adventure/trekking travel retail sales

Not surprisingly, seven out of the ten largest markets for adventure/trekking travel retail sales are Western European. With a culture of sabbaticals and gap years, many Europeans travel to explore nature.

Although most countries saw declines in sales, Switzerland and Australia saw increases. In the case of Australia, the target consumer group for this product – those in their 20s and 30s – is the demographic that has been least impacted by the economic downturn. Without sufficient wealth to lose in the stock market, and with mortgage rates falling, this demographic took advantage of the bargains that the crisis has produced. The focus on adventure travel by leading travel retailer Flight Centre Ltd, since it formed a joint venture with Intrepid Travel in 2008, has provided an additional stimulus. Furthermore, adventure /trekking holidays will continue to grow due to the increased accessibility of many of the most desirable locations with a growing number of more affordable flights to South Asia, Africa and Latin America.

For Switzerland, backing this growth in adventure/trekking sales are several trends, among which nature-affined travelling is the strongest. Also, holiday makers tended to holiday closer to home in 2009. Finally, accommodation for these kinds of holidays tends to be basic, and cheaper, than with other types of holiday. The hostels category benefited from this growth both inside Switzerland and outside.

A representative survey conducted in September 2009 by Zurich-based LINK Institute for Coopzeitung (514 interviews) showed that for 41% of Swiss holiday makers (44% of women, 38% of men), peace and quiet is the most important factor. 23% want to get to know their holiday destination, and 18% are after adventures and new experiences (23% of men, 14% of women). For 13%, the weather and the climate are decisive factors, and only 4% make food and drink the basis of their holiday.

Table 6 Adventure/Trekking Travel Retail Sales US$ Million)

Top Countries			
Top Countries	2008	2009	% Growth 2008/2009
USA	5,058	4,750	-6.1
United Kingdom	2,792	2,473	-11.4
Japan	1,355	1,283	-5.3
Switzerland	725	801	10.5
Germany	825	779	-5.6
France	796	737	-7.4
Italy	715	704	-1.6
Austria	470	453	-3.5
Netherlands	441	401	-9.0
Australia	351	367	4.5

Source: Euromonitor International

Table 7 Number of Backpacker Departures, '000

Top Countries			
Top Countries	2008	2009	% Growth 2008/2009
Germany	2,825	2,634	-6.8
France	2,057	1,919	-6.8
Japan	1,808	1,718	-5.0
Belgium	1,724	1,679	-2.6
United Kingdom	1,912	1,549	-19.0
Italy	1,351	1,430	5.8
Russia	1,113	1,022	-8.1
Sweden	987	998	1.1
Netherlands	749	744	-0.7
Switzerland	731	735	0.5

Source: Euromonitor International

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