

North American Adventure Travelers: Seeking Personal Growth, New Destinations, and Immersive Culture

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INTRODUCTION

According to the Adventure Travel Trade Association, adventure tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors of the tourism industry (UNWTO, 2014).

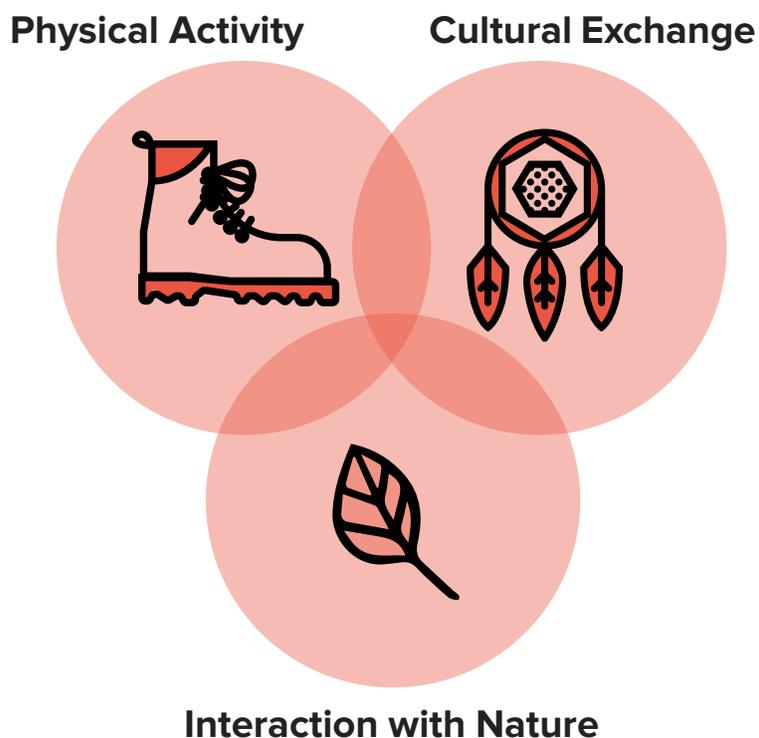
Research shows that adventure travel:

- attracts high-value customers—the average daily rate for adventure travelers using companies based in North America, for example, is \$470;
- supports local economies—adventure travel companies estimate that 67% of the trip cost per guest remains in the local region;
- encourages sustainable practices because tourism business can encourage wilderness and wildlife conservation—for example, an elephant is estimated to be 76 times more valuable alive than dead, worth \$1.6 million in ecotourism opportunities over the course of its lifetime.²

Thus, continued growth of this sector creates net positive impacts not only for tourism, but also for destination economies, their people, and their environment (UNWTO, 2014). According to the Adventure Travel Trade Association (2014) the adventure travel market is worth \$263 billion per year. It is attracting attention from national governments around the world for its emphasis on rural areas and local culture, and because it can often be developed within the constraints of existing infrastructure. In an effort to capitalize on this growing market segment, understanding adventure travelers is important to the adventure industry.

In 2006 consumers identified three main components of adventure travel: physical activity, interaction with nature, and cultural learning or exchange (Schneider, Vogt, & Smith, 2006). Based on that research, the Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA) defines adventure tourism as a trip that includes at least two of these three components. (See Figure 1.)

Figure 1. Adventure Travel Trip Components



2. <http://iworry.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Dead-or-Alive-Final-LR.pdf>

In partnership with the Adventure Travel Trade Association and with the support of *Outside* magazine, a follow-up to the 2006 research was undertaken in 2015–2016. The goal of this new research was to understand whether and how adventure traveler attitudes and preferences had shifted in the previous 10 years.

The results presented in this report provide a perspective on adventure traveler motivations, personality traits, leading activities, and destinations of interest. For the key topics of destination preference, activities associated with adventure travel, and motivations for adventure travel, the results of the most recent survey were compared with two data sets assembled in 2006 and 2007, revealing interesting results with respect to what has changed and what has stayed the same.



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SECTION 1: RESEARCH METHOD

This research was conducted by East Carolina University in partnership with the Adventure Travel Trade Association and with the support of *Outside* magazine.

Outside magazine subscribers were used as a sampling frame, and a systematic random sample of 8,000 subscribers was selected and stratified for gender. The primary benefit of this method is to ensure that cases from smaller strata of the population are included in sufficient numbers to allow comparison.³

Based on research from the ATTA⁴ indicating that 50% of adventure travel consumers are female, responses to this survey were weighted to achieve a balanced response from men and women. That is, responses from women were weighted more heavily than responses from men.⁵

The questionnaire consisted of questions about past travel experiences, preferred adventure activities, characteristics of adventure, definitions for adventure travel, and perceived personal benefits (Schneider & Vogt, 2006; 2012).

The survey consisted of four sections. The first section focused on past recreation and travel experiences and future recreation and travel plans. The second asked about personality characteristics. The third section explored the definition of adventure travel. Finally, section four asked about general demographic information for descriptive purposes.

Respondent Demographics

Respondents' demographic characteristics, including gender, age, marital status, education, income, and employment status - were gathered. Respondents were 68% male and 31% female; 1% preferred not to identify their gender. (To correct for under-representation of women, results were weighted. The values in the table reflect weighted results.)

A total of 62.7% of respondents were married, and 89% were Caucasian. Respondents were mostly over the age of 45: 26% were between the ages of 45 and 54, 28% were between the ages of 55 and 64, and 15% were older than 65. Other respondents were between 18 and 34 (14%), and 35 and 44 (16%).

Almost all respondents had either a college degree (43.4%) or an advanced degree (40%). With regard to household income (i.e., 2014 gross household income), most respondents reported earning between \$75,000 and \$149,999.

3. In this case researchers oversampled females since the *Outside* magazine subscriber base is heavily male. The survey was administered from late 2015 to early 2016, following a modified Dillman procedure. Five (5) email reminders were sent using a Qualtrics online survey (Dillman, 2000; Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2009). A total of 1,017 surveys were returned for a response rate of 13%.

4. Understanding the U.S. adventure traveler. 2014 Adventure Pulse, ATTA.

5. Although the sample had been stratified for gender, results in this case still indicated a larger proportion of male respondents. Therefore the results were also weighted to adjust for gender.

TABLE 1. DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

Characteristics	Total
Gender	(N = 745) %
Male	50
Female	50
Age	(N = 1,003) %
18–34	14.0
35–44	16.2
45–54	26.2
55–64	28.3
65 and up	15.3
Marital Status	(N = 740) %
Single	22.4
Married	62.7
Widowed	1.3
Divorced	6.6
Living w/significant other	6.1
Other	0.9
Annual Income (2014)	(N = 704) %
Under \$35,000	9.4
\$35,000–\$49,999	10.9
\$50,000–\$74,999	19.7
\$75,000–\$99,999	19.5
\$100,000–\$149,999	23.3
\$150,000–\$199,999	7.2
\$200,000–\$249,999	4.2
\$250,000 or more	5.6

Race	(N = 740) %
White/Caucasian	89
African American	0.3
Hispanic	3.4
Asian	3.1
Native American	0.8
Pacific Islander	0.3
Other	3.0
Employment Status	(N = 738) %
Working full time	68.4
Working part time	10.2
Going to school	2.3
Homemaker	3.8
Retired	10.5
Other	4.7
Education	(N = 740) %
Some high school/degree	.1
High school	1.7
Some college	9.3
Associate's degree, two-year college	6.6
College degree, four-year college	42.8
Advanced degree	39.5

Table results reflect weighted values



SECTION 2: TRAVEL EXPERIENCE AND INTENTIONS

To learn which regions of the world adventure travelers have visited in the past and are most interested in visiting in the future, previous vacation travel experience and future vacation travel intentions were queried.

The majority of respondents held a valid US passport (85.6%). Of the 2007 respondents, a small number (14.4%) indicated they did not have a valid passport.

Destination Experience and Intentions

When reviewing the destination results, it is important to keep in mind that 99% of Outside magazine's circulation is U.S. based and most of the 1% that is not, is in Canada. Beyond past travel experience in North America, respondents have visited Western Europe (66.1%), Mexico (65.9%), and the Caribbean (53.8%). (See Table 2.) One-third of respondents have visited Central America (38.7%) followed closely by Central Europe (31.1%). One-quarter of the respondents have visited South America (25.1%) and North Asia (24.3%).

The top five destinations respondents in the 2016 survey planned to visit in the future are New Zealand (62.1%), Australia (59.8%), South America (54.4%), Western Europe (50.1%), and Central America (48.8%). (See Table 2.)

Researchers compared the findings from the 2016 survey with the results of a similar study conducted in 2007 by researchers at Michigan State University in partnership with the Adventure Travel Trade Association, sponsored by National Geographic Adventure magazine.⁶ Results from the 2007 survey showed the top continent/region adventure travelers planned to visit was North America (83%) followed by Western Europe (59.9%), Australia (56.8%), the Middle East (50.6%), and New Zealand (50.6%).⁷ (See Table 2.)



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6. Schneider, P. P., & Vogt, C. A. (2012). Applying the 3M Model of personality and motivation to adventure travelers. *Journal of Travel Research*, 51(6), 704–716.

7. Schneider, P.P. (2010). Exploring the Motivation and Personality Traits of Adventure Travelers: A Hierarchical Model Approach (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Michigan State University, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing (3435247)

TABLE 2. DESTINATION, VISITATION COMPARISON 2016, 2007

2016 and 2007 comparison of continents/regions adventure travelers have visited (actual behavior) or planned to visit (intentions), sorted with continent/region respondents planned to visit in descending order.

2016				2007			
Rank	Continent/Region	Have Visited %	Plan to Visit %	Rank	Continent/Region	Have Visited %	Plan to Visit %
1	New Zealand	13.8	62.1	1	North America (Canada or U.S.)	97.2	83
2	Australia	15	59.8	2	Western Europe (Germany, France, U.K., etc.)	65.1	59.9
3	South America (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, etc.)	25.1	54.4	3	Australia	17.9	56.8
4	South Pacific (Fiji, Samoa, Tahiti, etc.)	9.5	51	4	Middle East (Israel, Jordan, Turkey, etc.)	13.9	50.6
5	Western Europe (Germany, France, U.K., etc.)	66.1	50.1	5	New Zealand	14.5	50.6
6	Central America (Belize, Costa Rica, Guatemala, etc.)	38.7	48.8	6	Central America (Belize, Costa Rica, Guatemala, etc.)	28.4	45.4
7	North America (Canada or U.S.)	92.7	44.9	7	South America (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, etc.)	23.5	44.4
8	Central Europe (Austria, Czech Republic, Poland, etc.)	31.1	43.9	8	Caribbean (Aruba, Cuba, Jamaica, etc.)	54.3	38.9
9	Caribbean (Aruba, Cuba, Jamaica, etc.)	53.8	43.3	9	Mexico	73.1	38.6
10	Africa	17.5	36.5	10	Africa	19.8	36.7
11	North Asia (China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, etc.)	24.3	35.4	11	South Pacific (Fiji, Samoa, Tahiti, etc.)	11.7	35.8
12	South and Southeast Asia (India, Malaysia, etc.)	17.9	33.6	12	North Asia (China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, etc.)	23.1	32.1
13	Mexico	65.9	28.5	13	Central Europe (Austria, Czech Republic, Poland, etc.)	31.2	31.8
14	Eastern Europe (Russian Federation, Ukraine, etc.)	9.7	28.3	14	South and Southeast Asia (India, Malaysia, etc.)	17.3	24.4
15	Antarctica	1.2	25.4	15	Eastern Europe (Russian Federation, Ukraine, etc.)	11.1	19.1
16	Middle East (Israel, Jordan, Turkey, etc.)	18	23.5	16	Antarctica	1.2	14.2
17	Arctic	5.6	21	17	Arctic	3.1	12.3

Although respondent demographics were slightly different in the two surveys, they were both North American based, and as subscribers to outdoor publications, the respondents were reliably assumed to be “adventure travelers.”

Based on this comparison, North American adventure travelers’ dreams of where they would like to travel appear to be expanding. Although North America remains the most visited region for respondents, in 2007 it also topped their wish list. In 2016, in contrast, the region most respondents said they planned to visit was New Zealand.

Other notable shifts in the rankings of destinations that adventure travelers have visited and planned to visit:

In terms of travelers’ intent to visit the Middle East, researchers found that although in 2007 only 13.9% of adventure travelers had been to the region, 50% of travelers had the region on their list for future travel plans. In contrast, the 2016 survey data indicates that 23% of respondents had visited the region, a significant increase in visitation over the course of 10 years. However, in 2016 far fewer people had the region on their wish list—only 16%.

South America is another region that has experienced significant movement since 2007, moving from number seven in terms of regions people hope to visit up to number three. In 2007, 23.5% of travelers had visited the region, with 44.4% intending to visit. Ten years later, 25% of travelers had visited the region and 54.4% intended to visit.



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TABLE 3: ACTIVITY EXPERIENCE AND INTENTIONS

The survey presented respondents with a list of both adventure and non-adventure activities and asked them to indicate those in which they had participated in the past and those in which they planned to participate in the future. (See Table 3.)

Activity	Have Participated %	Plan to Participate %	Neither %
Hiking	92.3%	51.6%	3.1%
Visiting friends or family	92.1	51.4	4.1
Stand-up paddle boarding	38.2	51.3	27.9
Visiting historical sites	93.4	50.2	2.8
Getting to know the locals	78.3	47.9	10.3
Cultural activities	77.6	47.4	11.1
Kayaking—sea/whitewater	60.7	46.7	19.3
Walking tours	71.8	44.5	15.5
Safaris	12.8	44.1	47.7
Camping	87.0	44.0	6.6
Attending local festivals/fairs	81.3	43.9	9.0
Snorkeling	78.8	43.2	12.3
Rafting	67.1	41.9	16.3
Backpacking	82.3	41.4	8.8
Trekking	47.3	41.3	29.0
Learning a new language	44.4	40.9	30.6
Educational programs	59.6	40.3	25.2
Volunteering on vacation	26.5	39.0	44.4
Road cycling	65.8	38.8	23.3
Mountain biking	67.0	38.5	21.7
Skiing/Snowboarding	77.2	38.3	16.8
Scuba diving	39.9	37.6	36.9
Sailing	58.0	37.2	23.8
Canoeing	74.9	36.8	16.2
Cruising—small ship	25.7	35.2	46.1

Surfing	36.9	34.8	40.5
Fishing/Fly-fishing	50.9	33.2	34.1
Climbing—mountain/rock	53.3	29.2	34.7
Motorized sports—motorcycle/snowmobile	44.9	28.7	41.8
Research expeditions	10.4	27.1	65.7
Horseback riding	64.1	25.5	27.3
Caving	36.3	24.7	47.2
Orienteering	29.4	23.7	53.6
Cruising—large ship	35.4	22.9	50.0
Heli-skiing	4.9	22.8	73.6
Kite surfing	4.6	22.4	73.9
Paragliding	10.1	20.4	71.4
Sand boarding	6.4	16.9	77.6
Archaeological expeditions	8.8	16.1	76.9
Bird-watching	31.2	15.8	61.6
Hunting	24.8	14.0	67.4

In terms of activities experienced in the past, the top activities were visiting historical sites (93.4%), hiking (92.3%), and visiting friends/family (92.1%). Also high on the list were camping (87%), backpacking (82.3%), and attending local festivals (81.3%).

At least three-quarters of respondents had participated in snorkeling (78.8%), getting to know the locals (78.3%), cultural activities (77.6%), skiing/snowboarding (77.2%), and canoeing (74.9%).

More than half of the respondents planned to engage in hiking (51.6%), visiting friends/relatives (51.4%), stand-up paddle boarding (51.3%) and visiting historical sites (50.2%).

Other activities of interest were getting to know the locals (47.9%) and cultural activities (47.4%), as well as kayaking (46.7%), walking tours (44.5%), safaris (44.1%), camping (44%), and attending local festivals (43.9%).

Activities respondents were least interested in were sand boarding (77.6%), archaeological expeditions (76.9%), kite surfing (73.9%), heli-skiing (73.6%), and paragliding (71.4%).

TABLE 4. ACTIVITIES IN WHICH RESPONDENTS MOST FREQUENTLY PARTICIPATED

Activity Frequency

In relation to the activities respondents have participated in previously, respondents were also asked to identify the three activities in which they most frequently participate (not ranked).

Of the activities listed, the five most frequently mentioned were hiking (44.9%), visiting friends or family (27.1%), camping (24.8%), road cycling (22%), and skiing or snowboarding (21.7%). (See Table 4.) The activities reported least often were archaeological expeditions, caving, kite surfing, paragliding, heli-skiing, and sand boarding, with each activity reported less than 0.3% of the time.

	Activities	%
	Hiking	44.9%
	Visiting friends or family	27.1
	Camping	24.8
	Road cycling	22.0
	Skiing/Snowboarding	21.7
	Visiting historical sites	17.5
	Mountain biking	16.4
	Backpacking	15.1
	Attending local festivals/fairs	14.8
	Cultural activities	10.2
	Fishing/Fly-fishing	9.7
	Kayaking—sea/whitewater	7.3
	Climbing—mountain/rock	6.1
	Getting to know the locals	6.0
	Walking tours	5.1
	Snorkeling	5.0
	Motorized sports—motorcycle/snowmobile	4.4
	Scuba diving	4.4
	Trekking	3.9
	Stand-up paddle boarding	3.4
	Hunting	3.2

Activity Frequency

Canoeing	3.0
Surfing	2.9
Rafting	2.8
Cruising—large ship	2.4
Sailing	2.4
Bird-watching	2.0
Educational programs	1.2
Learning a new language	1.2
Cruising—small ship	1.1
Horseback riding	1.1
Volunteering on vacation	1.1
Orienteering	0.6
Research expeditions	0.4
Safaris	0.4
Archaeological expeditions	0.2
Caving	0.2
Kite surfing	0.1
Paragliding	0.1
Heli-skiing	0
Sand boarding	0

SECTION 3: PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS



Leading research in recreation has demonstrated that an individual's personality influences his or her behaviors and experiences in a leisure setting. Collectively, these studies support the contention that leisure and recreation behavior can be viewed as a reflection of the individual's personality.

In this study, respondents were asked to select adjectives to describe how they see themselves in everyday life. The majority reported having traits such as being kind ($M = 7.3$), efficient ($M = 7.0$), organized ($M = 6.8$), imaginative ($M = 6.8$), finding novel solutions ($M = 6.8$), agreeable ($M = 6.7$), creative ($M = 6.6$), and original ($M = 6.6$). (See Table 5.)



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TABLE 5. ADJECTIVES RESPONDENTS USED TO DESCRIBE THEIR PERSONALITY

Personality Characteristics	Never 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Always 9	Mean
Kind	0.6%	0.2%	0.6%	1.1%	8.7%	13.4%	26.4%	28.7%	20.3%	7.3
Efficient	0.4	0.8	1.8	2.9	12.4	14.7	22.3	28.6	16.1	7.0
Organized	0.9	1.9	3.5	4.7	11.1	15.8	20.0	25.7	16.3	6.8
Imaginative	0.2	1.3	2.2	3.8	12.8	16.7	25.7	22.5	14.9	6.8
Find novel solutions	0.5	0.3	2.6	3.6	14.9	17.5	22.3	24.6	13.7	6.8
Agreeable	0.3	0.4	1.5	4.0	16.4	15.3	28.9	23.8	9.5	6.7
Creative	0.2	1.8	3.7	4.7	14.0	18.0	20.8	22.7	14.0	6.6
Original	0.3	0.6	2.7	5.4	15.8	21.9	23.2	19.0	11.1	6.6
Precise	0.6	1.6	4.2	6.6	17.0	19.2	22.9	19.8	8.2	6.4
Orderly	1.2	2.6	4.5	7.9	15.3	14.8	21.1	22.4	10.3	6.4
Tenderhearted	1.4	2.4	4.3	7.4	15.0	17.5	19.3	19.8	12.7	6.4
Softhearted	2.1	1.4	5.5	8.9	16.6	15.5	20.2	18.9	10.8	6.2
Quiet	4.2	8.5	11.8	12.7	22.9	12.8	15.1	8.3	3.8	5.1
Emotional	2.8	11.5	12.3	13.0	22.1	14.1	13.9	6.4	4.0	4.9
Introverted	10.5	13.0	11.3	9.5	18.1	12.6	12.2	7.4	5.5	4.7
Shy	12.2	15.4	15.5	13.9	15.5	9.9	11.0	4.7	1.9	4.1
Temperamental	9.3	19.2	17.6	13.2	20.0	9.4	5.9	3.4	2.0	4.0
Touchy	8.3	20.3	17.3	12.3	18.4	11.0	7.0	3.5	1.8	4.0
Bashful	13.7	20.7	16.7	12.2	17.5	7.2	7.5	2.5	2.0	3.8
Moody	9.5	18.6	21.9	13.1	16.8	9.8	6.4	3.1	0.8	3.8

Based on a scale where 1 means never and 9 means always

In a similar personality question probing situational factors, respondents were asked to share how often they experience specific personal feelings, and their feelings about travel.

Overall, respondents agreed that in everyday life they actively seek new experiences (M = 7.3), that travel should be about enriching knowledge (M = 7.1), that they enjoy working on ideas (M = 7.1), and that they embrace the world by celebrating its nuances (M = 7). (See Table 6.)

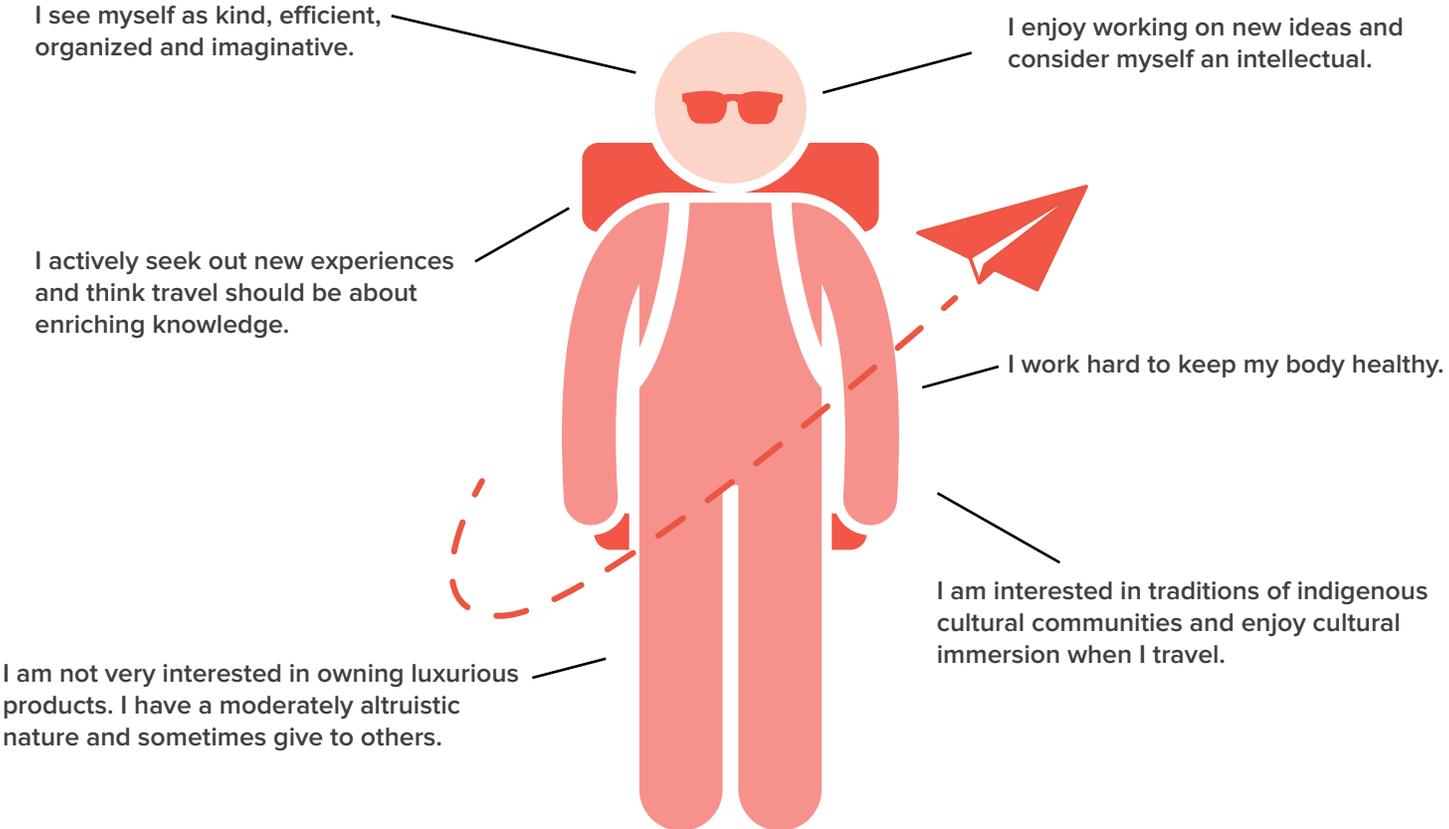
Respondents were less likely to characterize themselves as interested in acquiring new, valuable products (M = 4), enjoying luxurious products (M = 4), and enjoying owning expensive products (M = 4.4).

TABLE 6. RESPONDENTS' PERSONAL INTERESTS AND FEELINGS ABOUT TRAVEL

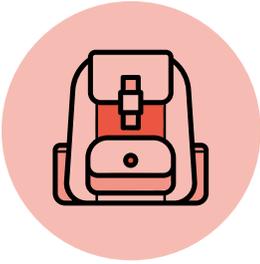
Interest/Feeling About Travel	Never					Always					n	M
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9			
Actively seek new experiences	0.2%	0.4%	1.2%	1.6%	8.4%	14.9%	22.9%	28.0%	22.5%	814	7.3	
Travel should be about enriching knowledge	0.5	0.5	2.1	4.6	10.1	14.6	20.3	26.2	21.2	813	7.1	
Enjoy working on new ideas	0.2	0.2	1.2	2.5	9.1	17.1	27.4	25.1	17.2	814	7.1	
Embrace the world by celebrating its nuances as I travel	0.2	0.7	2.5	4.2	11.7	14.6	24.6	20.6	20.9	814	7.0	
Enjoy learning new things more than most people	0.1	0.5	1.8	3.1	11.1	16.2	27.0	23.0	17.2	814	7.0	
I consider myself to be intellectual	0.1	1.0	2.2	2.3	9.5	15.7	27.8	26.9	14.5	814	7.0	
Value information as the most important resource	0.2	0.7	1.2	3.4	13.9	19.4	24.3	20.4	16.4	815	6.9	
Work hard to keep my body healthy	0.5	1.3	3.9	5.0	11.0	14.2	24.9	21.0	18.0	815	6.8	
Enjoy cultural immersion when I travel	0.6	1.2	4.1	4.3	10.6	14.6	24.2	21.5	18.9	814	6.8	
Interested in traditions of indigenous cultural communities as I travel (festivals, rituals etc.)	0.7	1.7	3.1	6.0	11.9	15.1	21.7	20.9	18.8	814	6.8	
Seek hands-on cultural encounters as I travel	0.9	1.3	4.3	5.5	12.6	17.2	21.3	19.8	17.1	815	6.7	
Focus on my body and how it feels	0.1	1.0	3.6	5.3	13.8	17.1	28.7	18.9	11.5	814	6.6	
Devote time each day to improving my body	0.6	2.9	4.9	6.0	14.4	14.6	22.7	16.7	17.2	815	6.5	
Try to visit local museums or art galleries as I travel	1.3	4.2	4.8	7.2	12.0	14.7	18.4	19.5	17.8	815	6.5	
Give to others	0.1	1.1	3.2	4.7	16.5	18.8	27.7	17.8	10.1	813	6.5	
Have an altruistic nature	1.3	4.2	4.8	7.2	12.0	14.7	18.4	19.5	17.8	815	6.5	
Seek an adrenaline rush	0.5	0.9	3.6	5.5	21.2	21.2	23.8	15.5	7.9	812	6.3	
Enjoy taking more risks than others	2.8	6.1	6.6	7.1	16.0	18.1	19.5	15.2	8.5	814	5.9	
Selfless in giving time to others	3.1	4.9	7.6	7.9	13.9	16.8	20.4	18.1	7.4	814	5.9	

Drawn to experiences with an element of danger	0.9	2.5	4.9	10.4	20.9	21.4	21.4	11.8	5.9	814	5.9
Sacrifice my goals to help others	0.4	2.3	5.7	10.7	24.7	23.0	19.3	10.4	3.6	814	5.8
Enjoy testing my abilities against others	3.3	4.9	7.4	8.9	15.7	17.7	19.6	14.8	7.7	813	5.8
Looking good is important	2.8	6.4	9.3	8.2	15.7	15.6	19.8	15.0	7.1	814	5.7
Enjoy competition more than others	5.4	10.3	10.2	11.2	15.7	14.6	16.1	11.3	5.3	815	5.2
Feel is is important to outperform others	9.6	13.1	13.9	10.9	17.0	16.6	10.8	5.8	2.3	814	4.5
Feel winning is extremely important	8.1	13.6	15.1	10.7	17.9	15.4	11.2	6.0	2.0	814	4.5
Like to own nice products more than most people	8.5	14.5	15.0	14.0	16.0	12.7	10.1	6.8	2.5	813	4.4
Enjoy owning luxurious products	9.8	15.8	14.5	11.8	16.8	11.2	10.9	6.1	3.1	815	4.4
Enjoy buying expensive products	14.1	17.5	15.0	12.3	16.7	10.4	6.0	5.3	2.7	815	4.0
Acquiring valuable products is important to me	11.7	15.2	19.3	13.1	15.5	11.5	6.9	4.5	2.2	814	4.0

Based on a scale where 1 means never and 9 means always.



EMOTIONAL PROFILE



SECTION 4: DEFINITION OF ADVENTURE

Based on research conducted in 2005–2006, the current definition of adventure travel used by the Adventure Travel Trade Association is “any tourist activity that includes at least two of the following: activity; a cultural exchange or interaction; engagement with nature.”

In 2016, respondents were asked their level of agreement with this definition, and the majority agreed or strongly agreed (77.5%) with it. A small number neither agreed nor disagreed (10.6%), and 11.9% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the proposed definition of adventure travel.

From this, researchers conclude that the current definition of adventure travel still holds value for the majority of adventure travelers.

Going a bit deeper, respondents were next asked how much they agree with the role of six elements associated with adventure travel experiences.

The results indicate that adventure travelers think the most important elements of adventure travel (with net agree scores higher than 80%) are (1) being in a natural environment, (2) learning, (3) meaningful human experiences, and (4) experiencing a new culture. (See Table 7).

TABLE 7. ELEMENTS THAT PLAY A ROLE IN ADVENTURE TRAVEL EXPERIENCES

Factor	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Net Agree
Being in a natural environment plays a large role in adventure travel.	0.2%	0.4%	5.2%	35.4%	58.8%	94.2
Learning plays a large role in adventure travel.	0.6	0.2	8.7	50.5	39.9	90.4
Meaningful human experiences play a large role in adventure travel.	0.7	1.4	11.6	48.2	38.2	86.4
Experiencing a new culture plays a large role in adventure travel.	0.5	2.1	15.0	50.7	31.7	82.4
Risk plays a large role in adventure travel.	3.7	17.0	34.7	37.2	7.5	44.7
Physical danger (real or perceived) plays a large role in adventure travel.	7.6	20.4	36.8	30.0	5.1	35.1

Risk and physical danger, although still regarded as an element of adventure travel, are much less important than the other factors. In fact, the statement “Risk plays a large role in adventure travel” has a net agree score 45% lower than the statement “Experiencing a new culture plays a large role in adventure travel.”

Essential Qualities of Adventure Travel Experiences

Respondents were also asked in an open-ended question to share what comes to mind when they think about adventure travel. They tended to create descriptions of places, activities, and experiences (e.g., “traveling to a new place,” “going to off-the-beaten-path locations,” and “anchoring in secluded lagoons overnight”).

Researchers coded the open-ended responses to this question, identifying keywords such as *journey, history, wilderness, growth, unfamiliar, and new*. Once keywords were identified, the 120 most commonly occurring terms were grouped into 15 themes. The themes were then ranked based on the frequency of the keywords found within them. Table 8, below, shows this ranking of themes as well as the common keywords found within them.

TABLE 8. ESSENTIAL QUALITIES OF ADVENTURE TRAVEL EXPERIENCES (ADVENTURE TRAVEL CHARACTERISTICS): THEMES AND ASSOCIATED KEYWORDS

Theme	Keywords
Novelty Seeking/Uniqueness	New, Unique, Unusual, Original, Unknown
Whole Experience	Journey, Travel, Adventure, Explore, Experience
Natural Environment	Scenery, Outside, Views, Environment, Outdoor
Challenge	Limits, Risk, Rush, Dangerous, Action, Reward
Culture	History, People, Values, Culture, Authentic, Local
Physical Health	Active, Fit, Exert, Health, Sport, Stamina
Excitement	Exhilarating, Excitement, Thrill, Extreme, Adrenaline
Off the Beaten Path	Solitude, Far-flung, Wilderness, Tough, Remote
Fun	Smile, Fun, Enjoy
Learning	Knowledge, Education, Learning
Mental Health	Enriched, Discovery, Perspective, Memories, Growth
Planning	Plan, Cost, Gear, Equipment, Spontaneous
Relationships	Family, Crowd, Friend
Food/Culinary	Food, Beer, Eating
Altruism	Serving

The four most essential qualities in an adventure travel experience mentioned by respondents were (1) novelty seeking/ uniqueness, (2) whole experience, (3) natural environment, and (4) challenge.

From this question it is clear that risk continues to be embedded in people’s understanding of adventure, with respondents offering terms such as *risk, dangerous, rush, and action* when asked what comes to mind when they think of adventure travel.

Considering the findings from the open-ended question in tandem with the findings from the previous question about elements that place a key role in adventure presents an interesting contradiction with respect to risk and danger. Although respondents do not rank risk as highly as other factors such as culture in playing a role in adventure, they clearly cannot describe adventure travel experiences without mentioning it.

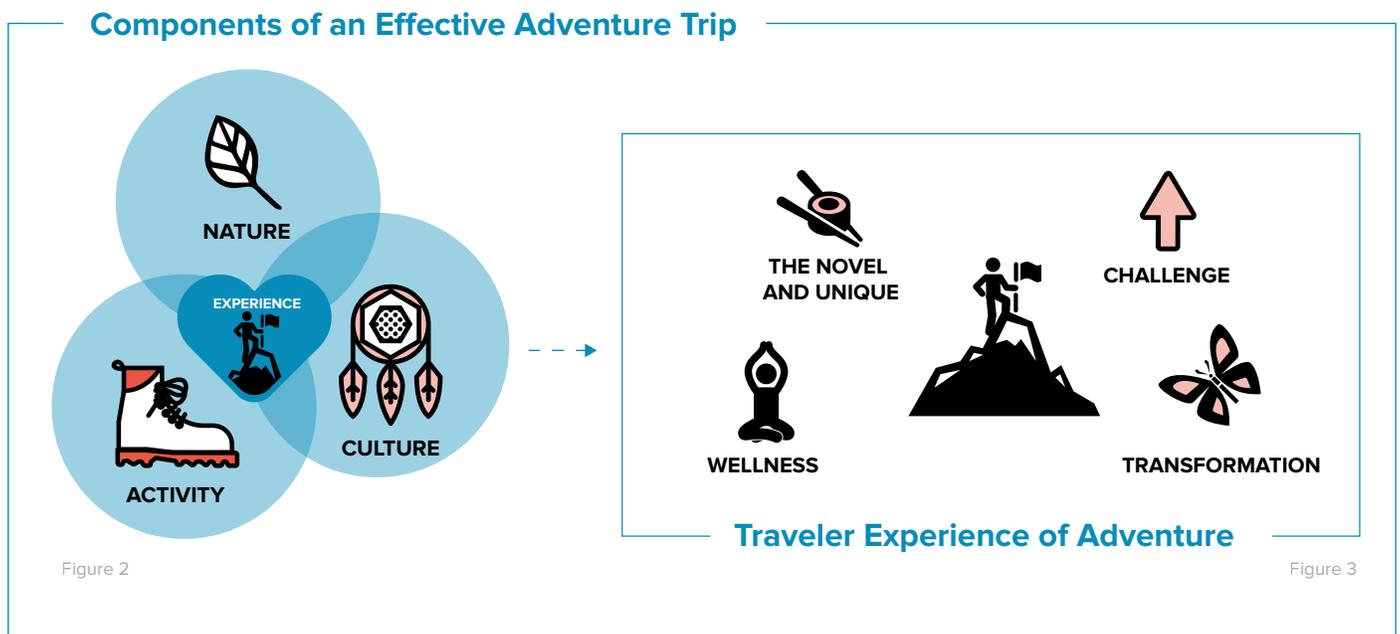
An Updated Definition of Adventure Travel

Although the top four themes are overwhelmingly more prevalent than others, it is also important to recognize that *Culture, Physical Health, Excitement, Off the Beaten Path, and Fun* were also notable themes firmly within the realm of the adventure travel experience.

A more refined definition of adventure travel for industry practitioners taking all this information into account might be as follows:

Adventure travel describes trips that provide experiences (both mental and physical) to places which are novel or unique to the traveler, emphasize the natural environment, and provide challenge through experiences of culture, activities that promote physical health, and excitement/fun.

This definition encompasses both external (the distinct elements of adventure travel) and internal (the benefits and emotional orientation of adventure travelers) components. To summarize the definition graphically, the following two figures were developed. Figure 2, “Components of an Effective Adventure Travel Trip” illustrates the definition of adventure travel from the external perspective, showing the key ingredients of an adventure travel trip, coming together to deliver an overall Adventure Experience. Figure 3, “Traveler Experience of Adventure” illustrates the adventure travel ideal from the traveler perspective, highlighting the personal benefits and emotional appeal of adventure travel.



Themes that emerged in 2016 that were not present in 2006 were *Relationships, Fun, Planning, Mental Health, and Food and Culinary*. Respondents’ use of keywords relative to these themes indicates that these are trends to watch in adventure travel.

Adventure Travel Activities

To understand the activities respondents identify as being included in the adventure travel category, they were asked to indicate level of agreement with a list of 41 physical and cultural activities.

The five activities respondents most agreed belong in the adventure travel category were hiking (89.6% either agree or strongly agree), backpacking (87.1%), trekking (86%), kayaking—sea/whitewater (85.3%), and rafting (84.5%). (See Table 9.)

Activities respondents indicated align the least with adventure travel were large-ship cruising (60.9% disagree or strongly disagree), visiting friends or family (39.3% disagree or strongly disagree), small-ship cruising (32.1% disagree or strongly disagree), hunting (30.1%), and bird-watching (26.8%).

TABLE 9. ACTIVITIES IN THE ADVENTURE TRAVEL CATEGORY 2016 STUDY

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree (Net)
Hiking	0.3%	1.2%	8.9%	59.8%	29.8%	89.6%
Backpacking	0.3	1.2	11.4	55.2	31.9	87.1
Trekking	0.5	1.1	12.3	58.8	27.2	86.0
Kayaking—sea/whitewater	0.9	1.6	12.2	55.2	30.1	85.3
Rafting	0.8	2.1	12.6	59.4	25.1	84.5
Climbing—mountain/rock	1.2	2.3	12.2	49.1	35.3	84.4
Mountain biking	0.3	3.1	15.1	53.2	28.3	81.5
Scuba diving	1.2	3.1	15.2	57.8	22.7	80.5
Caving	1.1	3.2	16.9	53.5	25.3	78.8
Camping	0.8	2.4	18.4	58.1	20.3	78.4
Canoeing	1.3	2.8	18.5	61.0	16.3	77.3
Skiing/Snowboarding	0.	4.7	18.9	52.1	23.4	75.5
Safaris	1.7	5.2	18.8	47.3	26.9	74.2
Heli-skiing	3.1	5.4	18.7	39.7	33.2	72.9
Sailing	1.5	3.6	22.3	57.1	15.5	72.6
Snorkeling	1.1	3.2	23.4	58.4	13.9	72.3
Surfing	1.6	4.0	23.0	51.7	19.7	71.4
Archaeological expeditions	1.3	4.7	22.6	51.5	19.8	71.3

Road cycling	1.7	4.0	23.3	54.4	16.5	70.9
Research expeditions	0.9	5.9	22.6	49.0	21.6	70.6
Getting to know the locals	2.0	7.2	23.5	46.0	21.3	67.3
Paragliding	2.1	8.0	23.6	45.4	20.9	66.3
Orienteering	1.5	4.0	29.0	50.5	15.0	65.5
Kite surfing	2.5	7.1	25.5	45.2	19.7	64.9
Cultural activities	1.5	7.7	29.1	43.1	18.7	61.8
Stand-up paddle boarding	2.4	7.1	30.4	49.7	10.4	60.1
Visiting historical sites	1.7	11.2	28.2	42.2	16.7	58.9
Walking tours	2.3	13.2	28.1	45.6	10.9	56.5
Attending local festivals/ fairs	2.6	13.3	28.4	41.8	13.9	55.7
Horseback riding	2.3	8.2	34.4	46.6	8.6	55.2
Fishing/Fly-fishing	3.1	9.5%	33.4	43.4	10.6	54.0
Educational programs	2.1	11.9	34.2%	40.2	11.5	51.7
Motorized sports— motorcycle/snowmobile, etc.	5.1	13.3	30.6	39.5	11.5	51.0
Sand boarding	3.2	10.5	36.2	40.1	9.9	50.0
Volunteering on vacation	3.7	11.6	38.3	36.0	10.3	46.3
Learning a new language	4.8	17.6	33.6	34.8	9.3	44.1
Hunting	12.2	18.0	30.1	30.2	9.5	39.7
Cruising—small ship	9.4	22.7	31.3	31.9	4.7	36.6
Bird-watching	6.7	20.1	38.1	30.1	5.0	35.1
Visiting friends or family	10.7	28.6	37.0	18.5%	5.1	23.6
Cruising—large ship	26.5	34.4	24.8	11.9	2.4	14.3

Researchers compared the findings from the 2016 survey with the results of a similar study conducted by researchers at Michigan State University co-sponsored by the Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA) in 2005–2006. The sample consisted of consumers who attended adventure travel trade shows held in three major U.S. cities (Chicago, New York, and Washington, DC). Although the activity lists in the two surveys were not identical, it is possible to compare the activities respondents most agree fit in the adventure travel category.

TABLE 10. ACTIVITIES IN THE ADVENTURE TRAVEL CATEGORY—2006 STUDY

Activity	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree (Net)
Climbing—mountain/rock	0.6	1.7	6.1	44.8	46.7	91.5
Rafting	0.8	1.5	6.2	50.2	41.3	91.5
Trekking	0.5	1.4	7.2	52.8	38.1	90.9
Kayaking—sea/whitewater	1.3	1.7	6.7	47.2	43	90.2
Canoeing	0.2	2.4	7.3	57.5	32.6	90.1
Hiking	0.5	2.1	7.9	53.5	35.9	89.4
Backpacking	0.5	2.9	7.2	54	35.3	89.3
Scuba diving	0.3	3.3	8.3	49	39.1	88.1
Camping	0.4	2.8	9.2	56.5	31.1	87.6
Safaris	0.6	2.6	9.9	46.3	40.7	87
Sailing	1.1	3.6	12.9	52.6	29.7	82.3
Snorkeling	1.1	5.6	11.5	53.7	28	81.7
Skiing/Snowboarding	1.5	7	13.7	49.5	28.3	77.8
Research expeditions	1.4	4.6	16.3	48	29.6	77.6
Archaeological expeditions	0.9	7.5	14.8	50.1	26.7	76.8
Orienteering	0.8	4.2	19	46.1	29.9	76
Horseback riding	1.2	6.9	16	51.2	24.7	75.9
Walking tours	1.8	12	18.4	46.8	21	67.8
Cultural activities	1.2	10.9	21.6	45.3	21	66.3
Educational programs	1.3	10	27.2	44.1	17.3	61.4
Fishing/Fly-fishing	3.3	14.5	21.3	45.3	15.6	60.9
Visiting historical sites	2.9	17.4	23.8	37.2	18.6	55.8
Bird-watching	1.7	19.9	22.9	38.1	17.4	55.5
Hunting	14.6	16.9	14.5	36.8	17.1	53.9

In 2006, the five activities respondents most agreed belong in the adventure travel category were climbing—mountain/rock (91.5%), rafting (91.5%), trekking (90.9%), kayaking—sea/whitewater (90.2%), and canoeing (90%).⁸

A key observation from the two data sets: in 2016 no activity registered a “net agree” score of more than 89.6%. In contrast, the 2006 survey showed five activities with a net agree score of more than 90%: climbing, rafting, trekking, kayaking, and canoeing. This indicates there was more consensus among adventure travelers about what constituted adventure in 2006 than in 2016. Other notable findings from this question include the following:

Hiking has nearly the same net agree score in both data sets (89.4% in 2006 and 89.6% in 2016), although in 2016 this percentage qualifies it as the activity most associated by travelers as an adventure travel activity.

Canoeing dropped in rank from 2006 (from 90% agreeing that it qualified as adventure travel to 77% in 2016). Climbing (mountain or rock) dropped from the activity most associated with adventure travel in 2006 (90.1%) to sixth place in 2016 (84.4%).

Understanding Motivation for Adventure Travel: Exploring Perceived Benefits of Adventure Experiences

To understand motivation for participating in adventure travel experiences, researchers asked, “What are the most important personal benefits you gain from adventure travel?” More than 1,000 responses were analyzed and grouped into themes. Through this process, 17 themes were identified. Within those themes, common terms were identified and the frequency with which respondents used them was captured.



Transformation (359)

From the responses, 359 people indicated that a benefit they gain from participating in adventure travel has something to do with transformation. Researchers captured the following themes and grouped them into the “Transformation” category.



Personal Challenge (n = 160)

Keywords: *accomplishment; achievement; challenge; push limits; overcome; testing limits*

Representative Quote: “Experiencing the world, getting out of my comfort zone! Seeing the world and learning new things! Pushing myself to not sit!”



Personal Growth and Development (n = 152)

Keywords: *awareness; confidence; fulfillment; personal growth; self-understanding*

Representative Quote: “Self-awareness—it helps me to learn about myself, my limits, and opens my eyes to the wonders of the world.”



Gratitude and Mindfulness (n = 47)

Keywords: *gratification; appreciation; value; inspiration; sense of wonder*

Representative Quotes: “Greater appreciation of the world and its people” and “New perspective on the world, my place in the world, and appreciation for others.”

8. Note that the list of activities is not identical from 2006 to 2016. In 2006, the survey explored the definition of adventure travel with a number of mainstream activities in an effort to derive a working definition. For the 2016 survey, the list was updated to include new activities or changes to existing activities (e.g., stand-up paddle boarding and skiing). Activities not included in the 2006 survey that did appear in 2016 were attending local fairs and festivals; caving; cruising (small ship and large ship); getting to know the locals; heli-skiing; kite surfing; learning a new language; motorized sports (motorcycle, snowmobile); paragliding; sand boarding; stand-up paddle boarding; visiting friends or family; volunteering on vacation; mountain biking; and road cycling.



Expanded Worldview (222)

From the responses, 222 people indicated that a benefit they gain from participating in adventure travel has something to do with a cultural experience resulting in an expanded worldview. Researchers captured the following themes and grouped them into the “Expanded Worldview” category.



Culture (n = 116)

Keywords: *cultural understanding; food; exposure to different cultures; history; tolerance*

Representative Quotes: “Educationally broadening individual knowledge about everything seen and experienced. Being able to discuss different cultures, locations, with some validity and knowledge” and “We also gain a wider perspective of the world both personally and as a race of humans. We see other cultures and begin to understand how they view the world, from micro to macro views. In other words, their daily lives and how they view world events. Life should be lived, and adventures give us the greatest opportunity to live.”



Expanded Worldview (n = 106)

Keywords: *expanded worldview; expanded horizons; broadened perspective; understanding the world*

Representative Quotes: “How quickly the real world moves. How freely it moves. How big and cool it really is” and “Seeing another part of the world that you aren’t used to seeing. Getting outside of what you see day to day and seeing how another part of this huge world lives.”



Nature and Discovery (188)

From the responses, 188 people indicated that a benefit they gain from participating in adventure travel has something to do with a feeling of discovery, often (but not always) related to nature. Researchers captured the following themes and grouped them into the “Nature and Discovery” category.



New Experiences (n=94)

Keywords: *experience new things; discovery; new experiences; trying new things*

Representative Quote: “Learning new skills, trying new things, tasting new foods, meeting fascinating people, and having amazing experiences!”



Nature, Environment, and Place (n = 94)

Keywords: *beautiful scenery; environment; experience new places; outdoors; seeing new places*

Representative Quote: “Pushing myself physically, experiencing the beauty of nature.”



Learning (260)

From the responses, 260 people indicated that a benefit they gain from participating in adventure travel has something to do with learning as a result of their experience, whether the learning is a new skill or a new perspective. Researchers captured the following themes and grouped them into the “Learning” category.



Learning (174)

Keywords: *education; knowledge; insights; learn new skills; wisdom*

Representative Quote: “Educationally broadening individual knowledge about everything seen and experienced. Being able to discuss different cultures, locations, with some validity and knowledge.”



Overall Experience (n = 86)

Keywords: *experience; overall experience*

Representative Quote: “Enriching my life experience and expanding my life limits.”



Mental Health and Escape (152)

From the responses, 152 people indicated that a benefit they gain from participating in adventure travel is derived from being able to escape their usual routine and claim some mental calm or peace. Researchers captured the following themes and grouped them into the “Mental Health and Escape” category.



Escape (n = 47)

Keywords: *get out of routine; escape everyday stuff; freedom; get away; peace; relaxation; disconnect*

Representative Quotes: “Turning off daily life” and “Stepping out of routine.”



Mental Health (n = 103)

Keywords: *clearer mind; recharge; sense of well-being; renewal*

Representative Quote: “New perspective on the world, my place in the world, and appreciation for others. It also allows me to expand or redefine my own limits and provides me ideas for what gives me the greatest pleasure and how I can best feel at peace in a crazy world.”



Fun and Thrill (142)

From the responses, 142 people indicated that a benefit they gain from participating in adventure travel is simple fun, excitement, and feeling delighted and thrilled by experiences. Researchers captured the following themes and grouped them into the “Fun, Thrill, and Adventure” category.



Fun, Thrill, and Adventure (n = 91)

Keywords: *adventure; adrenaline rush; excitement; sense of adventure; fun; thrill; feel alive*

Representative Quote: “Fun and excitement. Makes the mundane things done day to day tolerable because there is something around awesome around the corner.”



Satisfaction (n = 51)

Keywords: *enjoy; happy; satisfaction; personal enjoyment; pleasure*

Representative Quotes: “Sense of wonder and satisfaction at pushing myself a bit beyond my comfort zone” and “My experience has been that I learn much about myself and my travel companions. There is also a sense of joy in connection with the natural world, a sense of peace and well-being.”



Connection (83)

From the responses, 83 people indicated that a benefit they gain from participating in adventure travel is the social connection with other people.

Keywords: *meeting new people; camaraderie; social interaction; new friends; relationships*

Representative Quotes: “Relationships. People are the epitome of experiences” and “Wisdom, feeling a real connection, friends that instantly become family, realizing that me ‘being different’ doesn’t apply in adventure travel.”



Physical Health (55)

From the responses, 55 people indicated that a benefit they gain from participating in adventure travel is physical health.

Keywords: *exercise; fitness; strength*

Representative Quote: “Pushing myself physically, experiencing the beauty of nature.”



Meaningful Stories (54)

From the responses, 54 people indicated that a benefit they gain from participating in adventure travel is creating memories and having meaningful stories to tell.

Keywords: *memorable experiences; photography; sharing; stories; memories*

Representative Quote: “Confidence, satisfaction, new stories to share with others, impress and positively influence my daughters.”



Unique Experiences (37)

From the responses, 37 people indicated that a benefit they gain from participating in adventure travel is having a unique experience.

Keywords: *experiencing something others do not; unexpected experiences; going somewhere others don't; feeling of accomplishment*

Representative Quote: “Feeling of a more in-depth or unique experience compared to visiting typical resort with pool or nightclub that is just like every other.”

Shifts in Adventure Traveler Motivation 2006–2016

The survey question “What are the most important personal benefits you gain from adventure travel?” was also asked in 2006. However, at that time the responses were used to validate a method of understanding traveler motivations using Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. Researchers coded respondents’ answers according to how they aligned with Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, shown below:

Figure 2. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

The dominant motivations for adventure travel discovered by applying this framework were:

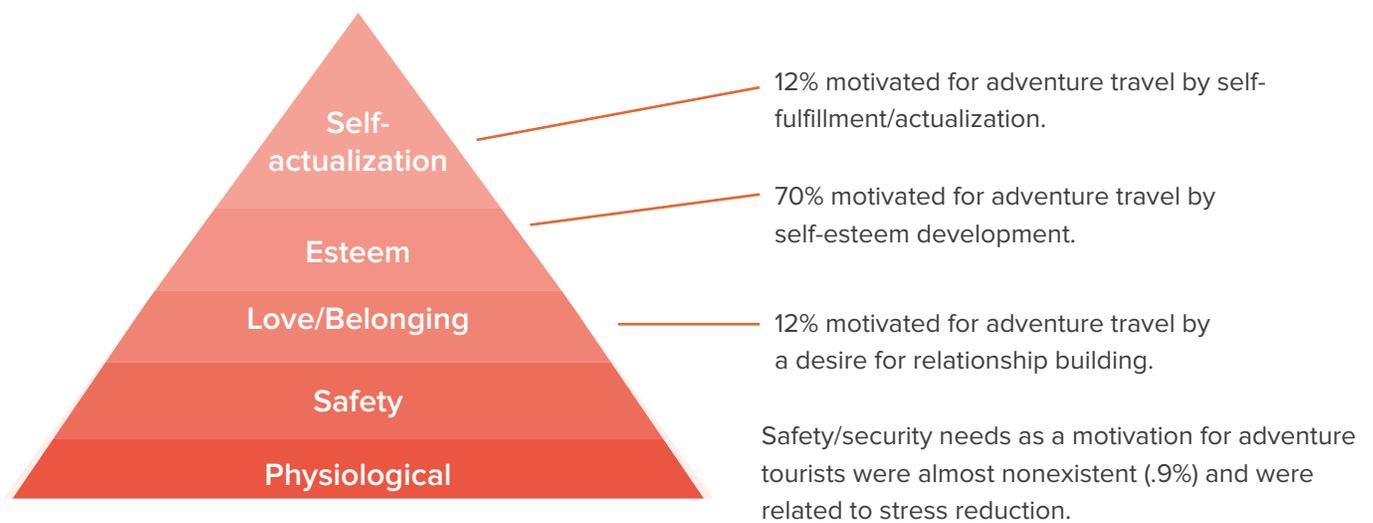


Figure 4

With the 2016 survey results in mind, however, researchers were able to return to the first data set and perform a new analysis on it. Rather than coding responses according to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, this time the team coded responses using the themes identified in 2016, allowing for a direct comparison of motivational themes.

When reviewing the 2006 data, researchers were not restricted from opening up new themes should they be revealed during the keyword analysis. Interestingly, the keywords from 2006 coded easily into the 2016 themes. From this work, researchers discovered that the leading motivations for adventure travelers in 2006 were remarkably similar to the 2016 findings, with one exception: the role of “Fun and Thrill.” Top motivations for adventure travel from 2006 are shown below with representative quotes from participants:

1. Transformation

“Learning more about myself through new, exciting, and sometimes difficult cultural experiences.”

2. Nature and discovery

“Feeling of being in a remote place seeing untouched environment”; “Being active and enjoying the natural surroundings at the same time.”

3. Expanded worldview

“Gaining a new world perspective and testing my physical and mental stamina in a nontraditional environment”; “Adventure broadens my horizons on how I look at the world.”

4. Fun and thrill

“Excitement, sense of the unknown”; “Feeling alive, fun, pleasure, excitement.”

5. Learning

“Educationally broadening individual knowledge about everything seen and experienced. Being able to discuss different cultures, locations, with some validity and knowledge.”

From 2006 to 2016, the top motivations have been remarkably stable. However, it is notable that “Fun and Thrill,” a leading motivator in 2006, had dropped from the top five by 2016, replaced by “Mental Health.”

SECTION 5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



The goal of this study was to understand, “How has adventure travel, and adventure travelers, changed in the past 10 years?” As such, it investigated adventure traveler motivations along with what adventure travelers regard as the essential qualities of an adventure experience. It asked questions about activity participation and travel destinations.

Motivations

With respect to motivations, from 2006 to 2016, the top motivations for adventure travel have been remarkably stable: Transformation, Expanded Worldview, Nature and Discovery, and Learning. The most notable shift in motivation during this period was the prioritization of Mental Health over Fun and Thrill.

Definition of Adventure Travel and Core Components of the Adventure Experience

When it comes to the definition of adventure travel, the survey results confirm a definition consisting of three elements: engagement with nature, physical activity, and cultural exchange.

The most important components of an adventure experience are (1) being in a natural environment, (2) learning, (3) meaningful human experiences, and (4) experiencing a new culture. Risk and physical danger, although still notable components of adventure travel, seem to take a backseat for travelers when considered in relation to culture and learning. In fact, the statement “Risk plays a large role in adventure travel” was favored 45% less than the statement “Experiencing a new culture plays a large role in adventure travel.”

However, even though respondents do not rank risk as highly as other factors such as culture in playing a role in adventure experiences, they cannot describe adventure travel experiences without mentioning it when given the opportunity in an open-ended question. Certainly an essential feature of adventure travel experiences, the theme of challenge is very present in adventure travel, with keywords such as *limits, risk, rush, dangerous, action, and reward* used.

The Adventure Personality

With respect to personality, researchers conclude that adventure travelers see themselves as kind, efficient, organized, and imaginative. When it comes to travel, they actively seek new travel experiences and believe travel should be about enriching new experiences.

Regions of the World Previously Visited and on the Adventure Traveler Wish List

Beyond past travel experience in North America, the regions most visited by adventure travelers for 2016 were Western Europe, Mexico, and the Caribbean. The top three regions of the world respondents said they planned to visit in the future were New Zealand, Australia, and South America.

Researchers compared the findings from the 2016 survey with the results of a similar study conducted in 2007. The 2007 survey indicated that the top continent/region adventure travelers planned to visit was North America, followed by Western Europe, Australia, the Middle East, and New Zealand.⁹

Although respondent demographics were different in the two surveys, it is reasonable to conclude from this comparison that North American adventure travelers’ dreams of where they would like to travel are expanding. North America remains the most visited region for respondents, but in 2006 it also topped their wish list. In 2016, in contrast, the region most respondents said they planned to visit was New Zealand.

9. Schneider, P. P., Vogt, C., & Smith, S. (2006). Segmenting the adventure travel market: An extension of Sung, Morrison, & O’Leary. Proceedings of the Travel & Tourism Research Association. Dublin, Ireland.

Activity Participation

Adventure travelers do more than just “adventure” when they travel: top activities for adventure travelers in the past were visiting historical sites, hiking, and visiting friends/family. Also high on the list for past participation were camping, backpacking, and attending local festivals.

In the future, when presented with a mix of both adventure and non-adventure activities to choose from, about half the respondents said they planned to hike, visit friends/relatives, stand-up paddle board, and visit historical sites.

Sand boarding, archaeological expeditions, bird-watching, and hunting were the activities lowest on the list for future travel.

Activities Central to Adventure Travel

Softer activities are moving up the list in terms of their importance to an adventure travel experience. Climbing—mountain/rock was in 2006 the activity most associated with adventure travel. In 2016 it ranked sixth after hiking, backpacking, trekking, kayaking—sea/whitewater, and rafting.

Hiking has maintained a top ranking as an activity core to adventure travel from 2006 to 2016.

Canoeing, previously a key adventure activity, was less popular in 2016.

Recommendations for Practitioners

Adventure travel companies need to know what benefits people truly seek from their trips so they can deliver successfully on those desires. In addition to the benefits sought, however, adventure travelers seem to have in their minds a vision of what an “adventure travel” experience should look like. The best adventure travel businesses will find a way to deliver on all fronts, creating opportunities for exploration, learning, and culture, and maintaining a physical component that includes some element of risk, or perhaps simply the perception of risk.

Based on the results of this study, adventure travel industry marketers and managers should take the following steps: (1) position and differentiate products based upon dominant personality or psychographic characteristics of the target market; (2) scan the environment to identify dominant cultural values of the target market; (3) use market research to identify the personality, self-concept, and psychographic characteristics that distinguish the target market; (4) develop promotions to be consistent with dominant personality characteristics of the target market—create products that fulfill the motivational needs of adventure travelers; and (5) use personality and psychographics to identify segments of consumers to target, such as culturally focused adventures for interest in cultural experiences.

The results of this allow adventure travel industry marketers and managers to optimize the effectiveness and efficiency of marketing activities by providing a nuanced understanding of how consumers are making decisions to purchase adventure travel experiences. Further, an understanding of the benefits sought from adventure travel experiences provides valuable information marketers and managers may use to shape their messaging, guiding consumers to certain products, which have been designed more effectively to address their particular goals.

Future Research

For researchers, adventure travel represents an interesting form of consumer behavior that has seen tremendous growth as a segment of the tourism industry. Results of this study have important implications for both future research studies and management of the adventure travel industry. By providing a comprehensive analysis of the adventure travel market that uses personality and motivation as a means of segmenting the market, this study hopes to make a unique contribution to future adventure travel marketing research.

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