

# Adventure, Nature and Commodification

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Many (though not all) adventures have nature-based orientations, but, when established as commodities defined as marketable products, they are premised on destinations that normally comprise a wealth of natural environments. Adventure 'tourism' as 'guided commercial tours where the principal attraction is an outdoor activity that relies on features of the natural terrain, generally requir[ing] specialised sporting or similar equipment, and is exciting for the tour clients' (Buckley 2006, 1) is part of the emerging genre of provision. It can be positioned alongside 'nature tourism' where the emphasis is on travelling to enjoy and understand undeveloped natural areas and/or 'wildlife tourism', or 'ecotourism' which includes overtly educative and sustainability components. It is the interplay of adventure, nature and their emergence and manifestations through the concept of tourism which is the subject of this chapter.

Although definitions for 'rational' tourism (tourism with a purpose) are multifarious (see for example Swarbrooke *et al.* 2011), one key defining factor is that they are activities that are entered into voluntarily. Adventure tourism has emerged from the outdoor recreation industry which has been established for longer, with its roots in outdoor activities, journeying and expeditions. It is generally contextualised in environments that are rich in landscapes and are perceived to be relatively natural and unmodified, at least in historical times. The emphasis is on 'adventure', although this creates an interesting paradox when aligned with 'tourism' in that if 'adventure' relates to 'uncertainty of outcome' (Hopkins and Putnam 1993; Priest 1999), participants who are purchasing support often do so to reduce their perceived risk. Ecotourism is seen as a different subset, even though for many participants it may include an adventure, as they perceive it. It involves travel to a relatively pristine area with challenges to clients of the unknown. It is differentiated in the literature from adventure tourism in that the objective is to be immersed in that relatively undisturbed environment, to study and enjoy the landscape, flora and/or fauna as well as any cultural manifestations, past or present (Fennell 2003; 2015).

## HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Beyond the discovery of new territories, exploration focused on the polar regions (Scott and Shackleton, for example) and thence from conquering the highest mountains to aeronautical and space exploration. Interest in mountaineering, however, stems from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the Romantic movement in Europe, when mountains were thought to have spiritual and mystical qualities and when contact with nature was important. Following on from this, the upper classes strived to test themselves in mountain sports in the Alps (for example, Edward Whymper). The focus throughout all of these explorations was on first ascents/descents and journeys with specific goals. For naturalists such as Charles Darwin, the adventure was intel-

lectual in the search for new floral and faunal species and thus had an overtly 'nature' context. While Darwin's adventures could be framed as scientific exploration, John Ruskin is credited with a more philanthropic contribution to environmentalism, realising that unmodified nature could be captured through poetry and art, which was substantially enhanced by the extensive and privileged travels he enjoyed. He epitomises the emergence of a more aesthetic intent, captured through spending time in nature with emergent psychological and spiritual understandings – perhaps more of a nineteenth-century 'nature' tourist.

The post-Darwin, post-Ruskin self in modernity in the Western world saw the rise of the working class, the distribution of wealth and the availability of leisure time to 'escape' from the workplace coupled with the individual constructing the moral self. Interestingly, in Victorian times, for key figures such as Millican Dalton ('Professor of Adventure') and Ernest Thompson Seton (founder of the Woodcraft Folk), living simply and in harmony with nature was important as well.

Expeditions in the early twentieth century were sponsored or scientific and private, with members invited to join on the basis of skill or experience, or towards optimising the group performance as a whole. This continues today although some organisations (for example The British Exploring Society) provide expedition opportunities which are available to a range of young people through application and selection, and they would see their mission as exploration with components of learning and scientific work, not as adventure or ecotourism. Critics, however, would still question the elitist nature of the clientele, privileging public-school and middle- and upper-class pupils. In terms of the adult population, with more urbanised lifestyles lacking outdoor components, there has been a shift to more commodification propelled by social mobility, aspiration and choice for 'cash rich, time poor' people.

Loynes' (1998) seminal paper on the development of outdoor adventure as 'recreational capitalism' was inspired by 'The McDonaldisation of Society' (Ritzer 1993) in which he proposes that much of life's experience is provided in terms of a safe, dependable and standard product akin to a McDonald's hamburger. Adventure was at that time developing marketplace branding and marketplace values, and adopting terms such as 'customers' and 'services'. There was deep concern about the move away from the values of the social movement with its relationship towards place and community. Through McDonaldisation the activity is no longer part of a cultural story, nor does it explore a particular landscape but is a 'replicable structure' (Loynes 2013, 141) with the same elements everywhere. It is one expression of globalisation with its spread of ideas, culture and institutions, as well as business around the world. Ecotourism, with its foundations in natural environments, might be seen as an amelioration of such criticism in so far as it does consider place and culture, and the identity of destinations mitigates against replication.

In retrospect, this was a turning point for the expansion of these tourism paradigms servicing the consumer with a product. However, many adventure and ecotourism companies would advocate that they do provide tailored experiences and respect for culture and landscape. Although an experience might be marketed as a safari, whale watching, rafting trip or bungee jump (McDonaldisation) and thus be expected to contain defined key elements, it will also offer clientele the opportunity to visit new and different environments.

In the last twenty years, there has also been an increase in commercial providers of adventure holidays for young people (e.g., PGL) and adults (e.g., Explore Worldwide; KE Adventure Travel). The direction of adventure for the development of self-constructs (self-confidence, self-efficacy, self-reliance etc.) is still present in formal education, for example through initiatives