

# **Community Based Tourism and Development**

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## **The Evolution of Adventure Travel**

**Jerry Mallett**

**President – Adventure Travel Society**

Over the last few years, the tremendous upswing in adventure travel, nature-based tourism and cultural interests has caught the public, and the travel industry, by surprise. Suddenly, huge numbers of people want to hike, run rivers, fish, view wildlife, scuba dive, bicycle, sail, mountain climb, ride horses and learn about other communities worldwide.

This interest in adventure has always been with us. Adventure travel began with early mankind and has increased steadily since. The first adventure travelers were explorers in search of new lands, cultures and resources.

After 1800, travelers were rich, young European men who had a longing to see the world. Because of the enormous time and expense involved, travel was a luxury the general populace could not afford.

Ironically, World War II opened up the doors for most people to experience the wonder and beauty of the great outdoors. For the first time in history, people had fast and relatively inexpensive transportation. Surplus military aircraft afforded many people the opportunity to visit the far corners of the globe.

Other surplus war equipment became available to the general public. Jeeps, rubber rafts, backpacks, winter camping gear, skis, guns and scuba diving gear were now readily available, as well as materials such as aluminum, nylon, rubber, and plastics, which further enabled people to reach for less-traveled horizons.

Because of extensive travel during the war, people became familiar with other regions, continents, cultures and activities. The isolation of countries was no longer an issue as soldiers made friends with those in other parts of the world and told stories of their daily lives, the world became a global community.

The U.S. Economy enjoyed excellent growth after the war. People had good-paying jobs, they bought homes and cars, and extra time and mobility increased their ability to discover the National Parks and National Forests of the country.

In the United States, several other events were taking place that would ensure the growth of adventure travel. In the 1960's, environmental issues became higher priorities for the country. People became more aware of nature, and outdoor recreation grew quickly. Protecting wildlands, wildlife and free-flowing rivers captured the attention of many. In the

1970's, social values changed as civil rights, the Vietnam War and women's issues became paramount. As a result, women started leaving Home Economics 101 for track, basketball and other outdoor activities. In the 1980's, we redefined aging and the lifestyle of those over 50.

In 1900, the average life span for a male was 49 years, and he spent approximately 3 percent of his life in retirement. Analysts predict that by the year 2000, U.S. males will live past 78 and will enjoy some 30 percent of life in retirement. Today, women outspend, outlive and out travel men. A new trend is grand parents taking grandkids on adventure trips.

More and more, adventure travel is becoming big business, as people continually find a better balance between work and recreation. Consider the following:

- **Visitors spent over 800 million recreation days on National Forests lands in the US in 1998.**
- **Nearly 8,500 tour operators in the US offer various adventure trips.**
- **Fifty-two percent of backpackers in the United States are women.**
- **Women, families and mature travelers make up the majority of adventure travelers.**
- **Over \$110 billion is spent on adventure travel annually in the US.**
- **Another \$100 billion is spent on outdoor recreational equipment.**
- **Adventure travel articles have appeared in over 80 publications in the United States.**

Many trends in society today indicate that the public's love affair with the great outdoors and learning about other lifestyles will continue to grow well into the next century. As examples:

- **As we spend more time in offices, the need to be more physically active increases, leading us to more outdoor recreation.**
- **The world is coming to realize that a healthy environment means a better quality of life. As a result, people will continue to become more involved in wildlife, wilderness and cultural issues.**

As our pursuit of excitement and solitude in wild areas grows, our main challenge will be to enjoy these areas while protecting them for future generations. We still do find a few undiscovered areas on earth today, however, these are becoming more and more rare. Travelers will continue to climb mountains, run rivers, scuba dive, bicycle, hike, watch wildlife and enjoy natural and cultural wonders, and are continuously searching for an experience that is enriching, rewarding and unique.

With the growth of adventure travel, those embarking upon adventures in nature are beginning to realize that in order to continue enjoying the wonders of nature it is necessary

to protect the resources they are utilizing. Ecotourism is the term that addresses this concern; environmentally responsible travel for the purpose of experiencing natural areas and regional cultures while promoting conservation and making an economic contribution to the local community.

It is interesting to note that in many countries, adventure travel is becoming a major economic resource and a great incentive to protect wild areas and cultures. Many countries are making long-term commitments to promote adventure travel as a major industry. Since the adventure traveler is seeking out areas and experiences that are unique and beyond the norm, this enables many regions throughout the world to easily intrigue this type of traveler. The recent growth in special events, such as the Eco-Challenge is an event that is held in rugged area that offers a large group of individuals a chance to explore the inner and outer world of extremes. The participants devote their time and their bodies to experience a challenge undertaken by few in an area with virtually little to no infrastructure. The extensive training by these people show that there is an audience ready, capable and interested in the next adventure, wherever that may be.

Countries, regions, and communities are looking more in-depth as to how tourism will not only improve economic conditions, but also work to protect and preserve both their natural and cultural resources. Ecotourism poses less of a threat to the environment and culture than that of a mining operation, hydropower station, or strip of hotels. Indigenous communities threatened by the depletion of their natural resources, change in climatic conditions, or lack of support from governmental bodies, have been able to remain intact due to the implementation ecotourism. Ecological areas that are in jeopardy from the possible development of a logging or mining operation and are suffering financially are able to preserve the natural beauty of the area while improving their economic conditions.

Internationally there is a need for natural resource sustainability and the preservation of cultural diversity. The global challenge requires a cooperative effort from countries, organizations, and individuals. Associations and partnerships must be formed to develop unique solutions that help retain resource integrity, provide for authenticity, and promote a deep understanding of the unique qualities of an area. Adventure travelers, indigenous communities, and endangered species will have much to look forward to if we are able to develop in a sustainable manner the natural and cultural resources of our earth.

**The Adventure Travel Society**  
228 North F Street, Salida, CO 81201 USA  
P (719)530-0171 F(719)530-0172  
[www.adventuretravel.com](http://www.adventuretravel.com)

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