

Big business beyond the beach holiday

BBC News

TOURISM is one of the world's largest industries - worth around \$7.2tn a year to the global economy. But if your idea of hell is joining the crowds on a sun-drenched beach, you're not alone. Adventure travel is one of the industry's fastest growing segments, almost tripling in economic value in the last five years. It's now worth around \$263 billion globally.

Focusing on physical activity and often involving interaction with the environment and cultural exchange, adventure travel includes "soft" pursuits such as canoeing and hiking, and "hard" activities such as rock climbing and trekking.

And it's changing the way many retailers do business.

"Fifteen years ago people were acquiring things. Now the focus is on acquiring experiences," says Wes Allen, president of the Grassroots Outdoor Alliance, a group of 62 independently-owned outdoor specialty shops across the US.

Retailers who previously focused on selling top brands now find themselves catering to customers who want to express their outdoor independence. Instead of fashion, customers are looking for products and clothes made from technical fabrics that will help them attain the experience they seek.

"At the end of the day you may sell many of the items you sold before - but you're selling them for different reasons," says Allen.

Social media and changing demographics are driving the trend in adventure travel, says Kristin Lamoureux, associate dean at New York University's Tisch Center for Hospitality and Tourism.

"Millennials need to have experiences that are meaningful. They want to get closer to the natural environment, to the social environment, and



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they want to have an authentic experience. Can you wake up in the morning and look out of the window and know where you are? Is there a sense of place? Whether it's breaking bread with a local or climbing up a mountain, adventure travel fits that need very well," she says.

"And people aren't just taking trips - they're showcasing what they're doing on social media," Lamoureux adds.

"Think about the Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram opportunities when you're hiking in the Rockies

versus lying on a beach. There's just a lot more to brag about."

A popular hashtag on Instagram for instance, is #vanlife which features more than 650,000 images of the lifestyle associated with camper-van vacations. As a result, hammocks have become a hot seller, says Wes Allen.

For retailers like North Carolina and Virginia-based Great Outdoor Provision, being part of the experience has become an important marketing strategy.

Two years ago the company

launched its GetHiking! program and was amazed by the response. More than 3,000 people are now part of online meet-up groups which are complimented by newsletters and in-store gatherings.

"We give a preview of the hike and talk about some of the gear that will make the experience all the more enjoyable," says co-owner and company president Chuck Millsaps. "It raises visibility."

He says they don't have data to prove an increase in sales. "But the anecdotal evidence is strong enough

to suggest that sales are up in areas where we spend energy engaging with our customers to get them outside."

Engaging with customers also helps the company compete with online retailers. Millsaps says his staff have their own passion for the outdoors and try to pass that on to consumers.

"It feeds off itself," he says. "The homerun in this business is to get people who will pay full price. The holy grail is when they tell other people they paid full price but it was worth it because [the store] added so

much value to their experience."

Great Outdoor Provision doesn't sell products online, but Millsaps says the company has a robust online presence with a website offering information and ideas for trips. Studies show that adventure travellers are far more likely to research vacations online and consult friends and family than to use travel agents.

Other companies are also tapping into the digital market. The Clymb is a Portland-based website offering exclusive deals on gear, clothing and adventure travel around the world. It was founded in 2009 with backing from Oregon Angel Fund investors and is now privately owned with 40 employees.

"It's not just about the stuff, it's what you do with it," says Luis Vargas, The Clymb president and chief brand officer.

And increasingly for adventure travellers that also means leaving a light footprint.

"Millennials want to make sure they're not hurting the places they visit," says Lamoureux. "But it's not just millennials. In the western world at least, we're seeing people uncomfortable with the tourist-local dichotomy where tourists parachute in, spend a couple of days and then leave."

But the growth in adventure travel owes something to baby boomers too. The notion of an authentic and personal experience began with the older generation seeking to give back while on vacation.

"Ten years ago, when we started talking about volunteer tourism, the baby boomers were one of the largest participating groups," says Lamoureux. "That is the precursor to trends like adventure travel."

It doesn't take much to transform even an indolent beach holiday. Throw in a little paddle boarding or wind surfing and you too could become an adventure traveller.

Pokemon GO launches in Japan, bringing smash-hit game home



REUTERS

A woman plays the augmented reality mobile game 'Pokemon Go' by Nintendo, as a visitor uses an automated teller machine (ATM) at a branch of Sberbank in Russia.

REUTERS, Tokyo

EAGER Japanese rushed to their phones on Friday to start hunting as Pokemon GO, the hit Nintendo-backed smartphone game, finally launched in Japan, home of the colourful cartoon characters.

The game has been an unexpected, runaway success from Spain to Australia, doubling Nintendo's value since the game's launch in the United States earlier this month.

Japan, however, had been made to wait, as Niantic, the developers behind the game, and Nintendo sought to ensure servers would withstand the game's popularity. Finally, after days of rumours, it launched on Friday.

"Everyone was talking about why we couldn't do it here, since Pokemon is Japanese," said Maho Ishikawa, a 16-year-old high school student who said she had already captured a monster.

"Since I really wanted to play, I'm very, very glad."

The augmented reality game has players out in their real life neighbourhoods 'capturing' monsters on their smartphones as they turn up even in ordinary offices and taxis.

In a video address to Japanese fans, Junichi Masuda, head of development at Game Freak and co-creator of the game, apologised for keeping players waiting so long.

"From today you can go out and find Pokemon to your heart's content," he said. "We hope the game enables users to see the world in a new, fulfilling way. Obey the

rules and have fun."

University students in Tokyo on their last day of classes before summer holidays did just that, jumping into the fray within moments of the launch, capturing monsters as a frenzy erupted between classes.

"This game is just as I imagined it to be, it's really fun," said Toshinori Ishibashi, 18, who was seen playing the game near a Pokemon goods store in Tokyo Station.

"It's also a great reason to go outside, so I'm really enjoying it."

The game was created by Nintendo, Niantic and Pokemon Co, part-owned by Nintendo. Both Nintendo and Pokemon Co have undisclosed stakes in Niantic.

As retailers and brands vie for a piece of a hit that takes players from place to place, fast food chain McDonald's Holdings Co Japan Ltd said its nearly 3,000 shops across Japan would serve as spots where Pokemon can be battled or "trained" in the game - within limits.

"Ultimately, McDonald's is a restaurant," said a company spokesman. "We will call on players not to become a bother to customers who are eating."

The game has enthralled players and boosted investors' view of Nintendo's future, as they bet the group can cash in on a treasure chest of other lucrative cartoon characters, from Donkey Kong to Super Mario.

But the game has also prompted warnings, as players glued to their phones become prone to tripping over, crashing cars, getting mugged or wandering into dangerous places.

What will Brexit mean for Polish 'ghost towns'?

BBC News, Poland

THE population of Podlaskie, an impoverished region in north-east Poland, is famous the world over.

Tens of thousands of white storks nest in its flatlands each summer, before heading south to warmer climes.

Such are the numbers that as one local guide quips, it can be said that one in four storks worldwide is Polish.

But in recent years, this area has gained renown for another form of migration - the exodus of its working-age population.

More than any other area in Poland, Podlaskie's residents have taken advantage of the freedom to live and work in other EU countries - particularly the UK.

In some towns, more than one in 10 has left, mostly young people - leaving none but the elderly behind.

"There used to be two cinemas, but they both closed," says Kasia, one of the remaining residents of Monki, a virtual ghost town with the distinction of having seen the highest number of its citizens depart to richer EU economies.

"And there are just two concerts a year," she adds.

"Everyone is going, everyone is leaving," one of the owners of a faded electrical store in the centre of town, unchanged for decades, laments.

"Only the disabled people stay - all the villages are empty."

Such is the suspicion of foreign influence, that the woman, who is in her 60s, won't give her name to the BBC. But on the topic of migration, she is loquacious.

"The tragedy of small towns is that old people can't follow the trend of globalisation and make the most of new technology. And the young people decide to leave to get by in the big towns and work for big corporations."

Despite it being a regular weekday, few customers are to be seen - the only life visible in the town centre are a scattering of older women, sitting on stoops and smoking idly.

The electrical store shopkeeper



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EU membership has brought a net benefit to Poland but small towns like Monki have been left virtually deserted.

blames this scene on Poland's accession to the EU in 2004.

"Things have changed a lot - it's like a desert. You drive through these villages and there's nobody here. They go abroad and make money and they leave these places empty."

Despite such local hardships, there is little argument that Poland has been a net beneficiary of its membership of the European Union.

It helped transform the country from a post-Soviet society to a robust, modern economy, so resilient that it became the only EU state not to plunge into recession following the 2008 financial crisis.

This, coupled with the fact that its economic value, or gross domestic product, doubled in just over two decades, had led to Poland being dubbed the "miracle economy".

With close to a million Poles living and working in the UK, and sending back more than a billion euros each year, many in the country were hoping that Britain would vote to remain a member of the EU.

But now that the divorce is under way, some see an opportunity.

"At the moment Poland has a

demographic problem," says Dr Przemyslaw Biskup, a European integration expert at the University of Warsaw.

"It is not that bad that we would have our compatriots returning - our labour market is becoming more and more hungry for employees. Such people would bring new experience, new skills and new qualifications back to Poland."

Are returnees a reality?

Indeed, a recent report by the IMF concluded that large-scale emigration may have slowed growth in Central and Eastern European countries.

Not that Brexit necessarily means Poles will be returning in their droves.

Many of those who settled in the UK are now permanent residents, or on the path to citizenship.

More and more, they tend to bring their families to Britain, rather than return to Central Europe.

But there is some evidence of "returnees" - even in an area with as few economic opportunities as Podlaskie.

On the main square of the remote historic town of Tykocin, local boy Kamil Swietorecki runs a cafe and gallery, catering to the

many tourists who visit the nearby 17th Century synagogue or 600-year-old castle.

"I went to Liverpool when I was 21 and worked in kitchens and various places," he says, pausing while brewing some strong Polish coffee.

"The aim was to make money and open a company back here." Stories like Kamil's are still an anomaly, however. Freedom of movement is vital to many Poles, particularly those who survive on the remittances sent back home from those working in Britain.

Which is why Jakub Wojnarowski, deputy director general of the Polish business organisation Lewiatan, thinks Poland will insist on open borders in any trade negotiations with the newly independent UK.

"There will be no concession," he says.

The Polish government, Wojnarowski predicts, "will not be trading freedom of movement for access to the common market" even if it ends up hurting some of the 4,000 companies Lewiatan represents.

The powers that be will have to listen to the "voice of the ordinary people," whose wives, sons and daughters are working in the UK, he believes.