

THE END OF EXPERIENTIAL TOURISM



Experiential tourism has died. Causes of death: overdose and abuse of the term. In fact, the concept was misused from the start. We have been looking at the finger – the experiences – instead of looking at where it has been pointing i.e. the emotions, said David Mora, consultant and lecturer in tourism.

The diagnosis has been confirmed by Jaime Leon Andrés, former general director of special operations at TUI Spain and currently a travel agent specializing on the creation of tour packages: **"We are at the second stage, which is emotional tourism."**

The truth is that in recent years the word "experience" has become an increasingly trite commercial slogan in the tourism market. Perhaps destinations and tourism companies saw a fashionable concept in this strategy that could help them differentiate themselves from their competitors.

"If a tourist experience is not something new, positive and pleasant, and if it does not manage to establish itself as an indelible memory in our minds, in my opinion, it cannot be considered an authentic experience," said David Mora.

"Unfortunately, the 'experiential tourism' concept has been crushed by marketing strategies. Today, there is no product or service that does not try to sell itself as a 'unique experience'. A weekend bed and breakfast package, with a romantic dinner and access to a spa will not be a memorable experience however hard we try by putting the word 'experience' in brochures and on the websites," insists Mr. Mora who is the author of the emoturismo.com website.

And in any case, David Mora adds, all tourist activity can be experiential if designed based on an analysis of the emotions generated in the client. Even the number one product of the Spanish tourism industry, sun and sand, should also be redesigned in this light so it will be "memorable."

How? By trying to find "new interactions for the visitor to have with the destination: complementary services, music, environment, theming, lighting, smells, etc." But it is not easy to create experiences that take us away from the everyday and become cherished memories.

Even psychology professor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, an expert in this area in his study on "The Psychology of Optimal Experience," talks about the importance of creating experiences with a "sense of joy" and a pleasurable feeling that will endure in one's memory.

This scholar has also theorized about the concept of "flow" which, "in very simple terms, would be when we almost do not notice time flying while we are doing something we like very much," David Mora explained.

Some destinations and tour operators tried to put these theories into practice by developing new products to arouse intense and almost immediate emotions. In Málaga, for example, a few months after being launched, the Caminito del Rey tour has been a complete success with the appeal of being "one of the most dangerous roads in the world" through a dizzying landscape with a great backstory.

Also having a major impact on the media and social networks are other gateways and bridges overlooking cliffs surrounded by nature, attractions that would fit the formula for vertigo-inducing

tourism.

"We are in the second phase, which is emotional tourism, when the traveler is moved by an area, a magical moment or an activity that is difficult to repeat if one is not accompanied by particular people," explains tourism professional Jaime León.

His travel agency, for example, has created a package tour where participants, with the help of firefighters, go on a trek through the mountain to find a local legend. The goal is to find a statue, the Pastoret Vilanova de la Sal, which disappeared during the Civil War. The search is real but this historical relic is still to be located.

"Trips should be designed for emotional experiences. Participants should think that the particular experience will be difficult to repeat in exactly the same way and that they have had a special privilege."

Will emotional tourism be an emerging tourism trend in 2016? David Mora thinks so. "For many years, tourists have been avoiding ordinary places and non-specific destinations. And the many studies of millennials, for example, support the notion that this trend will become the norm. "

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