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## EXPERIENTIAL / IMMERSION TOURISM / TRAVEL

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**Abstract:** *This paper introduces a new trend in tourism – experiential / immersion tourism / travel. Rooting itself in experiential learning, it has close ties with experience economy, services economy, and experiential marketing, and has already produced an offspring – experiential virtuality. The paper investigates the main features of this type of tourism – activity-based travel, culinary travel, and cultural exploration experiences – which relate it to other types of tourism: authentic tourism, creative tourism, and transformative tourism. The paper also presents new concepts such as immersion in the local culture and way of life, tourist experience, experiential tourism descriptors, and standards for experiential tourism.*

### • Introduction

Experiential tourism is intrinsically interconnected with experiential marketing, hence the importance of the former for the experience economy ("an economy in which many goods or services are sold by emphasizing the effect they can have on people's lives" – Cambridge Dictionary) and for the services economy. Recently, authors have identified a new trend in experiential tourism – experiential virtuality.

It consists mainly in activity-based travel, culinary travel, and cultural exploration experiences. Examples:

- Climbing: Mount Toubkal (Morocco);
- Cooking street food: Vietnam;
- Diving: Dahab (Egypt);
- Going hiking: Patagonia (South America);
- Going on a road trip: Canada;
- Making wine: Bordeaux (France);
- Staying in a homestay and getting to know the local people and culture;
- Taking a city break (with a cooking class, a food tour): Shanghai (China);
- Taking a volunteer tourism trip;
- Travelling to places that are off the beaten path: Chinese Silk Road (China), Inner Mongolia (Mongolia);
- Trying halal tourism ("any tourism object or action which is permissible according to Islamic teachings to use or engage by Muslims in tourism industry"): Indonesia, Malaysia.

Experiential tourism / travel draws its name from experiential education, a concept introduced by "American educational reformer, philosopher, and psychologist John Dewey (1859-1952)" in his book *Experience and Education* (1938), whose core idea is an education that emphasizes the need to learn by doing (i.e., through a "hand-on" approach). The term experiential travel was first mentioned by Gattorna .

Immersion in the local culture and way of life consists in:

- Booking a cooking class making local dishes;
- Booking a homestay;
- Doing some volunteer work;
- Eating at independent restaurants;
- Experiencing local entertainment (e.g., football game, gig, or theatre show);
- Getting off the beaten path;
- Joining in with a community-improvement activity (e.g., beach clean-up);
- Speaking to as many people as possible;

### • Material and method

The material studied in this paper consists in books and articles on experiential tourism / travel. The method used is documentation.

### • Results and discussions

We propose a set of 20 standards for experiential tourism:

1. "People create meaning through direct experience.
2. The experience includes the people met, the places visited, the activities participated in and the memories created.
3. The experience includes pre-departure trip planning and post-trip follow-up.
4. Experiential tourism draws people into local nature, culture, and history.
5. Experiential tourism is low impact (a 2-4-h stay), low volume (small groups), and high yield (200-300 USD per visitor).
6. Experiential tourism is very personal, unique, and individual for each visitor.
7. Quality, memorable visitor experiences are a shared outcome between the visitor and the experience provider.
8. Experiential tourism opportunities allow for personal growth and reflect the values and interests of the individual visitor.
9. Experiential tourism provides diverse experiences that match the visitor's interests and provide a sense of personal accomplishment, thereby creating their own unique memories.
10. The desired outcome of experiential tourism is to achieve a complete participatory experience that provides new knowledge and authentic experiences (e.g., taking care of a horse).
11. Experiential tourism opportunities encourage the meeting and coming together of different cultures, their problems and potential.
12. Cultural elements are shared in an atmosphere of traditional ways of life.
13. Experiential tourism shows rather than describes.
14. Experiential tourism opportunities expand personal horizons e.g., witnessing calving).
15. Experiential tourism opportunities should provide personal enrichment, enlightenment, stimulation, and engagement as motivators (e.g., exercise, experience, learn).
16. Experiential tourism attracts people to places.
17. Experiential tourism attracts markets (i.e., tourists) to merchandise (e.g., handmade products).
18. Experiential tourism engages all five senses.
19. Experiential tourism opportunities include learning a new skill or engaging in a new activity.
20. Experiential tourism includes "the story of the place".

### • Conclusions

Experiential learning has been introduced in the practical teaching of experiential tourism. Experiential tourism can have a positive impact on a country's economy;

Experiential tourism provides experiences with transformational qualities. Experiential tourism shares "some of the features of other types of tourism – other types of tourism: authentic tourism, creative tourism, and transformative tourism".