

# ADVENTURE TOURISM IN INDIA! GAME ON...

Tejbir Singh Anand, the former President of ATOAI and Mandip Singh Soin, Founder & Managing Director, Ibex Expeditions Pvt. Ltd, India, talk about the latest trends in the adventure tourism industry.

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## Mandip Singh Soin, Founder & Managing Director, Ibex Expeditions Pvt. Ltd, India

As per growth per say, things are looking very positive for the adventure tourism segment with more players entering into the market, more customers open to trying something new and more demand for experiential travel.

Run-of-the-mill adventure activities like trekking, cycling, hiking, camping etc. and has made way for extreme adventure activities including bungee jumping, sky diving, rappelling, paragliding, kayaking etc. With the gradual shift towards a more advanced world in terms of Globalization, consumer activities have experienced a profound transformation. The routine getaway of the everyday tourists has been replaced to a great extent by experiences that are more authentic and moreover unique. As per the reports from 2015, 69% of global travelers aspire to try some novel, something that they are previously unaccustomed to, in 2016. This also indicates that millennials plan to be more adventurous by engaging in more challenging activities. Adventure tourism has therefore been catering

to the new generation tourists who prefer venturing out into the unknown rather than joining the crowd.

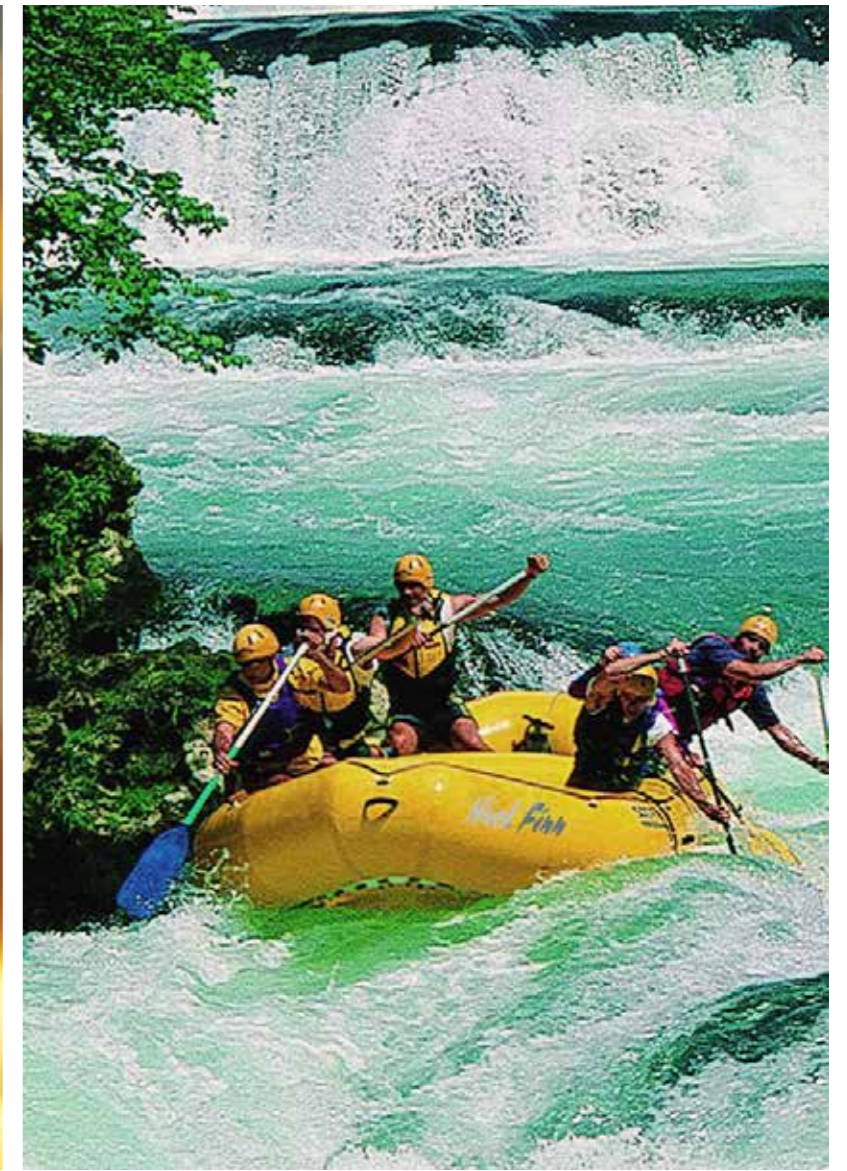
In the opinion of Mandip Singh Soin, Founder & Managing Director, Ibex Expeditions Pvt. Ltd, India, "As per growth per say, things are looking very positive for the adventure tourism segment with more players entering into the market, more customers open to trying something new and more demand for experiential travel. The Achilles Heel though in the adventure tourism segment, is the entry of many uncertified tour operators and agents who sell adventure without adequate expertise or knowledge about safety and environment".

Though the industry is still reeling under the sudden demonetization

move, the demand in the market for adventure tourism is gradually on the rise due to the increasing amount of disposable income and the way adventure tourism can pique the interest of the customers through exciting experiential holidays. The burgeoning Indian middle class can now afford the luxury of a holiday and a greater percentage of them choose transformative adventurous outings. This demand for adventure tourism is affected to a great extent by the varying consumer expectations, improving technological infrastructure and the demographics of the specific region. Another reason behind the increasing demand is the low barrier level for the companies to enter the adventure tourism markets.

In the year 2012, arrivals of global

tourism surpassed one billion, which also resulted in the increment of arrivals in adventure tourism. In 2010, the George Washington University, the ATTA and Xola Consulting together, conducted the first study of the market sizing of global adventure tourism and it was observed that the value of adventure tourism globally, was USD 89 billion. In the following two years, the demand surged and it was observed through yet another similar study that 42 percent of the total travelers embarked on adventure trips which resulted in the net worth of the sector becoming close to a staggering USD 263 billion at the end of 2013, an incredible increase of 195 percent in just 2 years. Factors like average expenditure, the number of international departures and the number of travelers who



## Tejbir Singh Anand, the former President of ATOAI

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choose adventure trips have also increased.

### Latest Trends

The global travel industry is on a trail of growth, led by Asian and US travellers. The number of outbound trips is likely to increase by about 4 - 5% next year. Also, despite 2016 being a year of political unrest, upheavals and terror attacks, the overall volume of foreign trips remained unchanged.

Tejbir Singh Anand, the former President of ATOAI says "Adventure tourism has grown exponentially in terms of market size over the years. All categories of people, ranging from school groups to families to corporate groups, especially between the age group of 12-40, are increasingly coming forward to savour the exhilaration

of a plethora of adventure sports in one single trip. Both corporate as well as educational institutions have become more discerning to the importance of sports based activities for holistic health and for nurturing the love for the environment. This would also entail that people are interested to experiment with multiple activities in a single trip. Technological advancements with respect to the internet and mobile phones have been revolutionary for tourism in general and have catapulted adventure tourism to a whole new level by being the much needed thrust to the industry resulting in a growth in the segment." In other words, technological innovations are making the travelling process more convenient by helping them to dream, plan, book and experience. The noteworthy increase in demand

has resulted in the emergence of new markets in adventure tourism. Referring to the facts, of the total international departures 69 percent of it originates in North or South America and Europe. In the years 2009 and 2010 South America has emerged as potential adventure tourism partaker with an increase from 1.4 percent to a decent 8 percent of all departures consisting of hard adventure enthusiasts while the soft adventure lovers increased by 5 percent. Reports also expose that Chinese travelers have spent the most in adventure tourism markets. Favorable rates of exchange for Chinese and Russian travelers due to inbound tourism will be beneficial for developing economies.

On the other hand, reduced power of purchasing of their currency in

the United Kingdom has resulted in increasing levels of tourism.

Tejbir explains, "India stands as a relatively new yet growing market for adventure tourism and is gaining popularity amongst young travelers and travel groups. Adventure travel to foreign destinations is still aspirational to Indian outbound tourists though New Zealand, Switzerland and Cape Town have been thriving as favourite adventure spots for Indians. Indians still favour Indian adventure destinations like Rishikesh and Dharmshala as compared to foreign destinations."

Adventure travel provides a multitude of opportunities for India, which offers unique destinations for exploration and adventure. India has a plethora of both soft and hard adventure activities that can be



carried out by any traveller. Mandip says, "Ladakh, Uttarakhand, Kashmir Valley are hot spots for adventure tourism in India. The State of Uttarakhand has seen a surge in the number of boutique hotels offering relaxed adventure experiences with activities like trekking for the general traveler. On the contrary, we have destinations in the North East for the hardy adventure enthusiasts. The novel concept of Yoga Trek is gaining marketability. Cultural destinations offer a blend of adventure and cultural experience, creating a niche of their own. The same applies to wild life adventure destinations like Madhya Pradesh"

In terms of the top adventure activities in India with respect to domestic and foreign tourist estimates, jeep safaris, trekking and camping have emerged as the most popular land-based adventure tourism activities. Water rafting, house boat stays and boat safaris are the most popular water-based adventure activities whereas parasailing, paragliding and hot air ballooning have become the most popular air based adventure tourism activities.

Commenting about the prevailing Indian outbound scene Mandip says, "The number of outbound travelers is twice as compared to inbound travelers and continues to grow at a fast pace. Ibex caters to travelers or adventure enthusiasts who like to undertake journeys to unique, exotic locations which are less frequented by tourists. Less explored destinations like Peru, Chile, Siberia, Mongolia, Madagascar etc. finds a place on Ibex's adventure itinerary. However, service tax being levied even from outbound travelers is quite disconcerting and might come in the way of outbound tourism."

Online portal development and the affordability of the Internet have altered the scenario of mass adventure tourism drastically. This impact is however larger in case of the demand side than the supply side. The consumers avail the wide range of valuable information and tools provided to them by the internet which includes the immensely reliable and effected customer generated reviews. For instance, the total number of reviews in TripAdvisor, a popular website for travel reviews reached a staggering

150 million in February 2014 and the annual count of website visitors stands at more than 2 billion. Because of easy Internet access travelers feel more confident about their destination and the journey they are embarking upon.

Tejbir explains, "Travellers could thoroughly chalk out a potential plan of the journey, a tentative sketch of the route map and obtain food and lodging facilities beforehand by virtue of all the information gathered from the Internet. They have firsthand access to destination images, videos, reviews, weather reports and even maps and guides. In a word, the Internet has made the adventure tourism sector non-linear."

He describes, "The internet has led to the death of those agents and intermediaries who have failed to keep up with the pace of technological advancements. Concurrently, it has been an impetus in the sky-rocketing of sales of those agents who were fast to evolve with the rapidly changing trends of the digital realm." This 'disintermediation' is augmented through frequently opted online

systems of booking which allow customers to book services through online access. Statistics developed through recent studies indicate that 71 percent of the adventure travelers of the United States of America prefer to make travelling arrangements entirely on their own. In recent years the trend in adventure tourism has always been towards disintermediation which refers to the removal of the mediator or the middle man. Nowadays with online accessibility of required information and consumer reviews, one can directly connect to the provider without any mediation."

Search Engine Optimization has also been instrumental in developing adventure tourism markets. Surveys show that 58 percent of travelers begin their travel planning process with a general Internet search. The impact on social media on growth of adventure tourism market has also been instrumental nonetheless. Improvement on mobile device technology has also been monumental in affording easy accessibility of information while on vacation. In fact, 42% of travel



enthusiasts search for info using their mobile devices or tablets

Mandip, however, cautions about "...players who enter the market without proper knowledge, adherence to safety standards or respect for nature thanks to the easy access that technology offers", referring to the unauthorized tour operators who come into the market time and again. Naive first time adventure travelers fall for the gimmicks of online sellers who fail miserably at living up to the customer expectation. "It is always best to go to reliable travel operators who are certified by the Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI). In the best interest of the travelers, The ATOAI strictly maintains that all tour operators must comply with the basic minimum safety standards that they have outlined in terms of personnel, procedures and equipment", he added.

He also warns, "Sometimes there can be too much pressure on certain specific destinations leading to issues like overcrowding by tourists in particular areas which further culminates in social and

environmental issues for that region"  
**Popular adventure activities**  
 In Austria, Norway and Switzerland, Skiing and Snowboarding are taken up by 25 percent of the whole population. And, out of those skiers 44 percent visit the Alps and the Eastern European mountains. The general trend shows that in North America skiers tend to stay as close to home as possible while in Europe Skiers prefer crossing borders in order to get adventure. Manali, Auli, Gulmarg, Pahalgam etc. have emerged as the top skiing destinations in India.

Recent trends indicate a hike in cycling adventures with adventure investing in both road cycling and mountain cycling markets. About 44 billion Euros annually come into the adventure markets in Europe through cycling trips amounting to 2.3 billion, as per reports of the European Cyclists Federation. The trend is yet to catch up in India.

In the United States of America and to a certain extent in Asia, backpacking trends are on the rise. Travelers upon reaching a destination often tend to stay and explore the place for a few days thus having a deeper impact on

the regional economy. 18.1% of North Americans as well as 26.4% of Canadians have undertaken a hike ranging over a day while 7 percent Canadians and 4 percent Americans preferred overnight trips of backpacking. Hostelling International boasts of a mighty 4 million worldwide members, a large chunk of them being backpackers.

Non-traditional destinations for tourists such as Liberia, El Salvador and Peru are venturing out with their surfing assets enticing the non-surfing population to invest in their markets. In the ten years' interval between 2001 and 2011 number of worldwide surfers increased from a paltry 26 million to a considerable 36 million. Unfortunately, it is regarded as a fringe adventure activity.

#### Future of the industry

Mandip says, "The safety standards have to be improved, the environment has been cared for and travel operators need to strictly adhere to the rules drawn up by the ATOAI." Reports of the UNWTO (United Nations Worldwide Tourism Organization) suggests a prediction of 1.8 billion global arrivals by the end of 2030 showing

double pace in the increment of international tourism growth. Having said that, there is a need to make further investments in these markets and develop a fair understanding of the market in the countries where the knowledge is somewhat limited. Underdeveloped countries will benefit immensely from the active increment of the adventure tourism market which requires considerable investments from top class investors. Overall, the prospects of adventure travel companies look bright. In order to tap the maximum potential from the emerging new markets, tour operators need to adjust their marketing strategies by incorporating novelty into their products.

Adventure tourism is responsible for adding value to the lives of the travelers as they embark for an experience-based journey and connect with the local people through enriching interactions. Within the purview of the global context, adventure tourism builds within us a sense of respect for the natural and cultural aspects of the earth and incorporates the general values of tourism-wellness and tolerance, within the traveler.