

## Adventure Tourism: The Freedom to Play With Reality.

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### **Abstract**

Adventure tourism is defined and marketed as an experience of excitement, danger and risk. Contained in the understanding of risk is the potential of loss, injury and death. Are tourists paying for the potential to lose? Does the experience of adventure tourism correlate to the definitions of adventure tourism? What is the experience of adventure tourism? Is it serious leisure, narrated identity, or an accelerated short-lived society?

This thesis examines the experience of nine participants on a commercially packaged white-water kayaking tour of the South Island of New Zealand. It is not in the typical mode of tourism research, having at its focal point, a constructionist paradigm. Utilising an ethnographic methodology, within the confines of a case study, understanding is interpreted and constructed through observation of participation, purposeful interviews and conversations with the nine tourists in the context of a two-week kayaking tour. The research does not seek a definitive understanding of the 'real' experience of adventure tourism, rather it seeks to add further depth and complexity to the social understandings of the experience of adventure tourism.

The insights and understandings of this experience are not constructed exclusively within the two-week period of the tour. There is the influence of past tour experience, perspectives and understandings drawn from related experiences and fields of knowledge and the anticipation of how this experience will be viewed from some point in the future. The constructed understanding of the experience of adventure tourism of these nine participants is divergent from contemporary tourism academic understandings of adventure tourism, yet created on the foundation and within the dominant tourism discourses. It is argued the experience was one of freedom in understanding and narrating experience. It was an experience of play and playing with identity through experience. It was a lived experience and offered the potential to be viewed as a 'real' experience of 'reality'.

Through the engagement with a world expectant of potential meanings, this thesis constructs the experience of adventure tourism to be the freedom to play with reality.