

# The Experience Economy

## Walking to new experiences

The experience economy takes many forms, involves many different types of consumers and draws upon a vast array of natural and cultural assets. In the world of contemporary tourism, individuals and groups seek insights, opportunities and excitement that is authentic, unavailable in the daily lives of individuals and not associated with conventional notions of mass tourism. Bungee jumping in New Zealand is one dimension of the experience economy, as is participating in a boutique cruise of Antarctica or riding a mule down the Grand Canyon in the USA. Many forms of the experience economy are unique: they depend on a distinctive and non-reproducible set of conditions that only one location on the planet can provide (think of trekking to the Base Camp on Mount Everest). But other parts of the experience economy can be built upon by other regions and communities to offer visitors their own distinctive set of memories.

Long distance walking or trekking is one part of the experience economy that has grown rapidly over the past two decades. It is an activity that is accessible to Baby Boomers and other older persons, as well as younger generations able to take extended periods away from paid work. One of the most famous – and popular – walks is ‘the Camino’, the traditional pilgrimage to Santiago De Compostela in Galicia, in the north east of Spain. While ‘the Camino’ is often thought of as one path starting in northern France, it is comprised of many routes, with some commencing in Portugal, while others start in southern and eastern Spain.

The Pilgrim’s Office in Santiago has reported that 327,378 people walked the Camino in 2018. However, this only represents people who completed the walk in Santiago, and not all the networked trails finish there. It’s estimated that another 400,000 walk other sections of the various Camino routes or walk parts of the Camino as their recreation leave and schedules allow.

The Camino has contributed to the rebirth of many cities and communities along the way. Bilbao was once a declining industrial city, but the establishment of a Guggenheim art gallery and associated cultural experiences – including a concentration of famous restaurants – has created a new future. The fact that the Camino passes



*The end point of the St James Way, Santiago De Compostela is a place of celebration for many and a place of considerable spiritual significance for some.*

through the town has also helped, and no doubt has contributed to the 1 million-plus visitors to the Guggenheim each year.

The success of the Camino has served as a model for other places in Europe and beyond. The Francigena Way runs from Canterbury in England to Rome, Italy and has been developed with the support of the European Union. In 2017 it was estimated that some 40,000 individuals walked the



*There is no ignoring the important role of the EU in establishing the via Francigena*

Francigena Way, with the smaller numbers due to the lower profile of this walk relative to the Camino, the ruggedness of some of the terrain (it crosses both the Alps and the Apennines) and because it lacks the accommodation and support facilities of other historic pilgrimages. Provincial authorities in Italy continue to seek ways to further develop this walk, including re-emphasising its religious significance and the development of an extension south of Rome to Puglia.

Such opportunities, of course, are not limited to Western Europe: many parts of Eastern Europe – such as Romania – have developed reputations as walking destinations and ‘trekking’ is a core part of the tourism offerings of New Zealand, where the Routeburn walk and the Milford Track (amongst many) have well developed reputations. In the US, the Appalachian Way attracts many walkers, with significant numbers completing the entire 2,000 miles (3,200km) each year.

<http://www.appalachiantrail.org/home/community/2000-milers>