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## UNPLUGGED TOURISM A growing trend

**Abstract:** The aim of this paper is to look at a specific trend in tourism, in this case unplugged tourism. Unplugged tourism refers to travels to destinations where there are no internet connections and limited or no cell phone reception. Digital detox and disconnected are two terms closely linked to unplugged tourism. Some research show that always being connected can help increase health issues, such as insomnia and mental illnesses. A digital detox or unplugged travel away from screens can be beneficial not just to prevent this health issues but also on relationships between individuals. Further the destinations that lost clients because they did not have internet or cell phone reception, are now becoming attractive.

**Keywords:** Digital detox, unplugged tourism, Tourism; tourism trends.

## TURISMO DESCONECTADO Uma tendência em expansão

**Resumo:** Este artigo tem como objetivo analisar uma das novas tendências do turismo denominada de *Unplugged Tourism* (Turismo desconectado). Esta nova tendência refere-se a viagens para destinos onde não existem ligações à internet nem acesso a redes de telemóvel. O *detox* digital e desconectado são dois termos que se apresentam interligados ao conceito de *unplugged tourism*. Vários autores destacam o facto de que a permanente ligação e conexão à internet e o abuso da utilização de telemóvel pode originar problemas de saúde, como por exemplo insónias e até mesmo problemas mentais. O *digital detox* vem assim oferecer uma nova forma de viajar e de fugir destas novas formas de ligação permanente com benefícios para a saúde e relacionamento entre indivíduos. No mercado encontramos hoje vários destinos que, no passado deixaram de ser procurados por terem fracos acessos à internet e pouca rede ara telemóveis, e que agora voltaram a ser atrativos.

**Palavras-chave:** *Detox* digital, *turismo desconectado*, turismo, tendências do turismo.

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## 1. Introduction

The tourism industry just like any other world-wide industry experience trends. These trends can change quickly and have big impacts on the tourism industry. Nowadays where almost everyone is connected to the internet and smartphones 24-7, going on holiday can still feel like work according to Lopez (2016). This is supported by the consumer trends survey conducted by JWT Intelligence in 2014, where they found that 43 percent of the generation X and 41 percent of the millennials are so connected to their phones while traveling, they get the feeling of missing out of living in the moment (Lenhart, 2014). This paper aims to look at unplugged tourism, a trend that has grown, as people want to escape their always being connected everyday lives.

## 2. Unplugged tourism

Unplugged is a relatively new term in tourism and a growing niche often connected to personal well-being and digital detox. Unplugged is also referred to by researchers as disconnected. The characteristics of unplugged tourism is that the travellers go to remote places or destinations with no internet and no or limited cell phone connections where they can be disconnected from technology, work and everyday life (Brothwell, 2016).

“In the recent years, the Internet has become an important source of information and also a place where tourists document their travels and share their experiences using social media” (Pawlowska, 2016).

As a result of the increasing growth in technology the trend of being unplugged while on holiday is growing. According to Gonzalo (2015) it is now a trend that consumers wanting to go on holidays where they can be totally unplugged and disconnected from their work. This indicates there is a move from the constantly ‘switched on’ tourist trends. In their study Dickinson et al. (2016) found that up to 50% of travellers wanted to disconnect from their mobiles.

Internet and cell service which once was a must and main selling points for many hotels and for some still are, has now becoming something people want to escape

from and pay to not have. As people value to escape their modern everyday lives, unplugged travels to “remote hotels are starting to make a feature of their lack of internet and phone signal” (International Air Transport Association (IATA), 2014), this can according to experts become a more attractive way of holidays. According to Paris et al. (2015) there are now tourist who chose to be unplugged when traveling and seek experiences where you are not connected to the digital online world. A confirmation of this is the fact that you can find more and more tour operators which are now starting to sell unplugged travels. For instance, trips in Morocco where tourist can travel to destinations in the desert, with no cell service or electricity, only luxurious tents for sleeping and relaxing (Lopes, 2016).

Additionally, according to Gonzalo (2015) in 2013 there were as many as 69 percent of travellers who distancing themselves from work and technology while on holiday, a number that was anticipated to grow in the future. Even though the demand for unplugged tourism has grown there are still consumer who struggle to unplug, because they do not know how to disconnect (Lopez, 2015). Lopez (2016) further state that people are willing to spend quite a lot of money on holidays where they are unplugged from the digital world. Unplugged tourism is accommodating the soul searchers, the consumers who are wanting to find themselves or to become acquainted with themselves again (Lopez, 2016).

“Lonely Planet recently released a number of predictions on the future of travel. They believe the pressures of modern life will cause growth in ‘unplugged travel’. People will seek places that deliberately have no emails or mobile device access, so that guests can immerse themselves in their destination and forget about work and everyday life” (Cooper, 2014).

## 3. Digital detox

When talking about unplugged tourism it is essential to look at digital detox. Digital detox is according to Booth (2014) to switch off all electronic devices such as mobiles, tablets and computers for a minimum of 24 hours. Further, Duran (2016) refers to digital detox being is similar to being on a health food cleanser, where

you instead of staying away from fast food, you stay away from screens. Whereas the “phone is the most important device to regulate” (Duran, 2016).

In a digital world it can be hard to imagine and also to follow through a whole day without technology in everyday life, since the use of computers can be crucial for your job. So for people wanting to take smaller steps there are numbers of mobile apps which can be downloaded. For instance, the app called ‘Forest’, this app’s aim is to make people leave their smartphones and so that they can focus on more important things in life such as studies, work or dinner with friends (Forest, 2014).

#### **4. Impacts of unplugged tourism and digital detox**

Unplugged tourism can be said to be built from digital detox, people wanting to not just take a day off from technology but also escape when on holidays. As a result of the demand for unplugged tourism and digital detox, days like ‘National Unplugging day’ and ‘National day of unplugging’ has appeared. In the United States this day was established in 2010 (Sabbath Manifesto, 2010) and in the United Kingdom in 2015 (National Unplugging Day, 2016), as well as digital detox retreats and unplugged festivals. Further, also travel agencies have started to sell unplugged travels.

People are connected to the same devices and networks like Facebook when they are traveling as in their normal everyday lives, this impacts the lines between home and travel. Making it more blended into each other, as well as the concepts of time and space, often referred to as digital elasticity (Paris et al., 2015). According to Segran (2015) there is not a lot of research on how always being connected influence us. What Segran (2015) found is for instance that “social media appears to promote narcissism, smartphones could be causing insomnia, and screens seem to be making our kids less empathetic”.

#### **5. Impacts on the market and destinations**

Unplugged tourism can impact on destinations in the way that new markets open up, like places which are remote without technological connections may become more attractive. In a world where people are searching for authentic experiences, niche products that applies to

this with unique features is what tourists who wants to disconnect are searching. For instance, like going to the Moroccan desert, remote beaches or the Amazon rainforest. Segran (2015) refers to a study where a group of people went on a trip, where on the first day of the trip everyone was allowed to use their phones and so. From the second day they went to the Moroccan desert for four days without their phones. The results of this study was that the benefits of being disconnected was that the participants improved their postures and got into more meaningful and deeper conversations with each other. The study also showed that their memories improved, they got a more efficient sleep and new perspectives.

Despite that unplugged travels are getting more common “WiFi remains a key requirement for many tourists, which creates a difficult balance to strike for hoteliers and destinations” (Fuggle, 2015). Now you can find that some remote hotels that do not get internet connections have changed the way they advertise themselves, due to the rise of unplugged tourism. What for many have been a weakness have now become a strength (Fuggle, 2015). Hotels without internet now emphasize on how a stay at their hotel without internet connection can help you connect to your own body and mind, as well as with your close ones (Anda Travel, 2016).

Moreover, they highlight how you can listen to the ocean, or smell the sand and fresh winds (Anda Travel, 2016). There have been problems with tourist not being aware of what the destinations have to offer in terms of the locations of wellness and health retreats (Smith and Puczkó, 2009). With the rise of unplugged tourism and globalization of wellness and health tourism the demand for these kind of retreats are increased, which can be seen in the fact that more hotels offer spa and wellness facilities (Smith and Puczkó, 2009). How to differentiate as a wellness destination is becoming increasingly harder though with this growth, as more destinations offer spa and wellness facilities. One way to differentiate according to Smith and Puczkó (2014) is by emphasizing on the local, unique and traditional natural or regional specialities and treatments. This on the other hand can help make the destination a sustainable one, by using the resources closely available.

## 6. Behavioural and health impacts

There are studies that show people who are heavy users of technology often experience trouble sleeping and are more exposed to gain mental illnesses (Pedersen, 2015). Taking a time out or doing a digital detox can have increasing health benefits for the consumers, “a day without technology can be extremely helpful as a step toward developing healthy technology habits” according to Lyons (2015). Always being connected has some negative impacts on the way consumers interact with their family and friends when it comes to the intimacy level, attentions and level of presence (Paris et al., 2015). In addition, research that look at how the constantly being connected impacts on work, family and mental health are increasing according to Paris et al. (2015).

Technology is easy to mishandle, and you can find people that admit to feeling like it has taken over their lives in the sense of getting the feeling of being overwhelmed by it (Vincci Hoteles, 2016). An example used by Vincci Hoteles (2016) is when forgetting the mobile at home, people experience feelings such as anxiety and sense of being lost, and all they would like to do is go home to collect the mobile. Just to make sure they do not have any unanswered calls or texts, even if the missed calls and text are unimportant. Besides, a survey conducted in 2010 shows “the average mobile phone user checks their phone every six and a half minutes, that’s 150 times a day, and 59 percent of mobile users check their email from the bathroom” (Brothwell, 2016).

Further, just by spending days without technology people experienced positive reactions like better memories and sleep. The reasons for this could be that they were more present while engaging in conversations with each other and when going to bed they did not look at the blue light from the screens before sleeping (Sergan, 2015; Lopez, 2016). In addition, spending time un-

plugged from screens helped people better their postures (Fluggle, 2015). The most interesting findings were that people were more likely to make changes in their everyday lives after being disconnected, such as their career patterns or getting the motivation to live healthier lives (Sergan 2015). The one thing that can be criticized for not being considered in these research are how people would be affected if they were to be unplugged in the same way while still being in their normal routines at home and work.

## Conclusion

To conclude, even though there is little research done on the subject unplugged tourism it is a common acknowledgement that it is a growing trend, as tourist want to escape their normal always on lives while on holiday. Nonetheless, there are still a lot of tourist who enjoy being connected while on holiday, so that they can share their experiences with loved ones. Others feel they have to be in the moment and unplug to connect with local people and have the feeling of really being on vacation. Travellers want to invest in experiences, which according to Lenhart (2014) makes people feel happier, no matter if you want to stay connected or not.

Unplugged tourism can be said to have the most positive impacts on the tourist themselves, as a time spent without technology is said to give them better health and mentality, as well as better relationships with the people around them. With improvement to memories, posture and more restful sleep. For the destinations it affects how they position themselves and do their marketing. It also changes the dynamics by what was ones unattractive for tourist becoming more important. As mentioned above with the rise of the trend unplugged tourism, you can find more and more travel agencies offering unplugged travels.

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