

Trekking tourism from Europe to Asia

Europe is a key source market for adventure tourism such as trekking trips. This type of tourism fits in well with an increased interest in slow travel. It offers great opportunities for developing country destinations with unspoiled nature and good (local) guides. Treks should be graded according to their level of difficulty, so travellers know what to expect. Solo trekking and combinations with community-based tourism are increasingly popular.

Contents of this page

1. [Product description](#)
2. [Which European markets offer opportunities for trekking tourism?](#)
3. [What trends offer opportunities on the European market for trekking tourism?](#)
4. [What requirements should your trekking product comply with to be allowed on the European market?](#)
5. [What competition do you face on the European market for trekking tourism products?](#)
6. [Which channels can you use to market your adventure tourism products in Europe?](#)
7. [What are the end-market prices for adventure tourism products?](#)

1. Product description

A trek is a long (multiple day) adventurous trip on foot, in mountainous areas where common means of transport are generally not available. Trekking is considered a form of hard adventure tourism. This study focuses on holidays where trekking is the main purpose.

Tip:

For more information on adventurous travel in general, see our study about [adventure tourism](#).

Health and safety measures

When European adventure tour operators and travellers consider new destinations, they first check the safety. Vehicles, equipment and accommodation also have to be safe. Guides need to have good knowledge of the local safety status and potential dangers. They must know which places are safe to visit and which are not.

The safety of treks is of utmost importance to European trekking travellers. As treks are often done in lesser-developed and mountainous areas, trails can be easily damaged by natural disasters, flooding, heat or drought. Trekking equipment has to be safe and of good quality. Trekking travellers from Europe check the equipment and education, training and certificates of guides and instructors. Also, if you use animals during the trek (horses, mules), make sure they are well treated and well fed.

Tips:

Pay attention to safety measures. Tour operators should, for example, regularly check vehicles and equipment, and hire experienced guides that know the area. Accommodation establishments should have safety measures in place such as smoke detectors, fire extinguishers, emergency exits, first-aid kits and 24-hour medical assistance.

Team up with local authorities and other tourism stakeholders on local safety issues for trekkers. For example, cooperate on safe trekking trails, safe bridges or other crossings, and good signposts.

Show the outcomes of safety checks and licences to your clients.

Provide clear descriptions of your safety procedures and emphasise relevant background and experience (preferably certification) of guides and instructors.

Political stability

Safety is important to European travellers, especially because some developing countries are politically unstable. Most commercial tour operators do not offer holidays to countries that their Ministry of Foreign Affairs has declared unsafe. This has previously led to a drop in tourism arrivals in countries such as Mali, Egypt and Kenya.

Tips:

Keep (potential) customers updated on changes in the safety situation in your area, for example via your website and staff. Be open and honest in your communication regarding which areas are safe, or where safety might be an issue. Your client has plenty of information sources too.

Share safety experiences from customers on your website. Let them write about how safe they felt, since people value the experience of other travellers.

If your region is “unsafe”, commercial tour operators will probably not go there. In this case, focus on volunteer organisations and individual travellers. Check your country’s current safety status on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website of your target countries, such as [Ireland](#) and the [United Kingdom](#).

Untouched natural environment and sustainability

Trekkers generally expect and prefer an untouched natural environment for their trekking holiday. Trekking is a great way to explore such regions, as it usually takes place in remote areas where most forms of transport are unavailable. Trekkers expect trekking tourism companies to be actively involved in preserving their local natural environment.

Tips:

Maintain the quality of your local environment. This is essential to the appeal of your destination, as well as for sustainability.

Consider implementing a rubbish clean-up programme. When people leave garbage behind, others will think that this is accepted and also leave theirs, resulting in a growing amount of rubbish along the trekking routes.

Emphasise the natural surroundings of the treks you offer in your marketing.

Show your guests that you are active in preserving the natural environment. Mention your goal to leave no footprint in the natural environment in your marketing message.

Give tourists information on how to behave responsibly towards the local environment and culture, for example by using less water, energy or paper towels. For inspiration, see wikiHow’s [How to Create a Green Hotel](#) and Global Stewards’ [tips for green accommodation](#).

Incorporate sustainable and environmentally friendly practices, for example by installing water-saving

taps and showers, working with local products or using solar power and/or solar cookers.

For more information and best practices, see the [UNESCO World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Toolkit](#). In addition, see our study about [the need for sustainable suppliers](#).

Experienced and knowledgeable guides

Guides that are able to tell interesting facts and stories about the trek they are doing add value to the experience. For trekkers, guides can make or break their holiday experience. If trekkers have good experiences with a guide, they are likely to recommend that trek to friends and family, or share their experiences online.

Tips:

Make sure your trekking guides have thorough knowledge of the destination and its history, as well as its flora, fauna, culture and people.

Make sure your guides speak good English. Especially in potentially dangerous situations, good communication is of the utmost importance. Consider, for example, providing them with English language courses by native speakers.

Use a quality monitoring system for your tours. Not through your guide, but anonymously, for example by having customers fill in a questionnaire, which could be an online one. You can use a free tool such as [SurveyMonkey](#) for this.

Trek grading system

Trekkers need information on the kind of trekking they can do at your destination, so they know what to expect in terms of difficulty. A trek grading system classifies different trekking routes as for example: easy, moderate, strenuous and difficult.

Tip:

Describe the difficulty of your trek(s) according to a trek grading system. Explain what each level of difficulty means and how travellers can prepare for it.

Traveller profile

Trekking travellers seek a physical and mental challenge (in different degrees), authentic experiences and like to connect with local people. Sustainability and responsible tourism are important to them and they are looking for a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Besides these general characteristics, trekking travellers can be divided into four segments, based on age and their level of trekking enthusiasm (Figure 1):

Figure 1: Trekking travel segments



Leisure trekkers

This is the largest segment. Travellers in this segment mainly opt for less strenuous treks. Trekking is often their main holiday activity, but they like to include cultural activities and a relaxing (beach) break at the end of their holiday as well. In general, their treks are safe and not very challenging.

Young leisure trekkers look for an adventure and a challenge and like to take risks, within limits. They search the internet for good deals and new destinations. Some prefer some days of relaxation at the end of their trekking holiday, especially those travellers with demanding jobs.

Mature leisure adventure travellers have often experienced trekking as a part of their holidays in their youth and like to continue doing it. They generally:

- have more time and money for holidays than younger travellers
- take several holidays per year
- book through tour operators more often than younger travellers
- keep fit in their daily life by exercising regularly
- like a physical and mental challenge, although they prefer lower risk activities
- require more comfort than other segments, although this doesn't have to mean luxury.

Tips:

When targeting leisure trekkers, be flexible. Offer both physical and cultural activities, such as a sightseeing tour by jeep or a visit to a local market.

Provide different levels of treks in both length and difficulty to meet the needs of both young and mature leisure trekkers.

To appeal to younger leisure trekkers, emphasise the adventurous nature of your product.

For mature leisure trekkers, offer extra comfort options such as more comfortable beds and luggage services.

Promote your products locally to attract individual leisure trekkers, for example by distributing flyers at airports or accommodation establishments in your area.

Trekking enthusiasts

This group is the most active in trekking. However, it is a small segment. Trekking is not only the main purpose of their holiday, but it is often the only thing they do. Trekking enthusiasts like to be physically and mentally challenged by the treks they are doing. They do not mind some discomfort, but safety is very important.

Young trekking enthusiasts are generally energetic people, looking for physical challenges. They are interested in high-adrenaline and high-risk or higher-risk activities.

Mature adventure tourism enthusiasts are not directly thrill-seekers, but are generally very fit and active. They do not need a special programme for their age.

Tips:

When targeting adventure tourism enthusiasts, focus on the challenges that you can offer them. Provide plenty of information about the trek. For instance about the difficulty level, the elevation and the weather they can expect.

Do not distinguish between young and mature in your marketing message. “Older” trekkers do not like to be addressed as “older” or “mature”.

2. Which European markets offer opportunities for trekking tourism?

Europe is a leading market for adventure travel

Europe is a key source market for adventure tourism, as most international departures are from Europe and the Americas. Adventure tourism is a large and growing market. The ATTA estimates [the international adventure travel market can be valued conservatively at €580 billion in 2017](#), with an average annual growth rate of 21% since 2012. Although hard adventure makes up a relatively small proportion of this market, trekking is a popular type of adventure travel.

For statistics on European source markets, see our study about [European demand for tourism in developing countries](#).

3. What trends offer opportunities on the European market for trekking tourism?

Combining trekking with community-based tourism

This trend especially applies to the less intensive forms of trekking tourism. Like European travellers in general, trekkers are increasingly interested in meeting local people. They also value sustainability and fair tourism. This combination fuels the trend to combine trekking holidays with community-based tourism.

Tips:

Include community-based tourism elements in your product offering. For example, let trekkers stay with a local family overnight. Allow them to participate in cooking a local dish and offer them the possibility to learn about their hosts’ culture (music, dance, handicrafts).

For more information, see our study on [community-based tourism](#).

Slow travel

A continuing trend on the tourism market is slow travel. European travellers are gaining a greater appreciation

for the journey itself through slow modes of transport, as opposed to rushing from one highlight to the other. This allows them to relax and connect to the nature and culture of their destination. Trekking fits perfectly into this trend.

Tips:

Emphasise the slow travel benefits of your trekking holidays in your marketing.

Include relatively “slow” itineraries in your offering, so trekkers do not feel rushed and have the opportunity to appreciate their surroundings.

Solo travel

Travelling solo is increasingly popular. It can be an attractive option for trekkers whose family and friends do not share their interest, or for those who simply prefer to travel by themselves. Trekking solo allows them to set their own pace and make their own schedule. They can also hire a local guide to accompany them, especially in challenging areas. Another option is to join a trekking group on location, in which case solo travel actually offers an opportunity to meet new people.

Tips:

Offer and clearly promote options for solo travellers, such as personal guides and/or group treks they can join.

For more information, see our study on [solo tourism](#).

Mobile trekking applications

Mobile applications (apps) have also reached the trekking holiday segment. They enable trekkers to find trails and walking paths and may contain points of interest. There are also apps that include or focus on such matters as packing checklists, a compass and survival tips, or that provide special interest information, such as on the constellations trekkers can see at night.

Many apps allow trekkers to plan their route and log the details of their progress using GPS (Global Positioning System). Some also include safety features. These apps can alert trackers when they wander off the trail or when, for example, there is an avalanche in the area. They can also allow trekkers to share their plan and notify selected friends and family if they have not arrived on schedule. This can be especially relevant for solo trekkers.

Tips:

For an overview of popular apps, see recommendations by [Hike & Cycle](#) and [National Geographic](#), for example.

Inform your guests about the best trekking apps for your area. Check if there is an app specifically for your destination, such as [Trekking in Nepal](#).

If popular trekking trail applications do not cover your destination, study the options to have your trail(s) included.

Increasing use of online research

European travellers increasingly research and plan their trip online. To gather information and share experiences they use:

- peer review sites, like [TripAdvisor](#) and [Zoover](#)
- travel forums, like Lonely Planet's [Thorn Tree forum](#)
- social media, like [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#).

Online research is a trend that has increased exponentially over the past years. Although growth has peaked, the use of internet to research tourism will continue to increase. It is predicted to remain the most important research channel for years to come.

Tips:

Maintain a strong internet presence and online marketing strategy, including social media.

Use photos and videos to bring your story to life. For more information, watch this [webinar series on visual communication in adventure travel](#) by ATTA and Libris.

Use current customers as ambassadors for your company and area. Encourage them to share their experiences and visuals on social media, write blogs and review your company.

For more information, see our [10 tips for online success with your tourism company](#).

For more information, see our study about [European tourism market trends](#).

4. What requirements should your trekking product comply with to be allowed on the European market?

For general tourism requirements, see our study on [what requirements your services should comply with to attract European tourists](#).

For adventure tourism and trekking in particular, there are some voluntary safety standards.

Voluntary safety standards

Safety is extremely important for adventure tourism. Three international ISO (International Organization for Standardization) standards support safe practices in adventure tourism: [21101](#), [21102](#) and [21103](#). Additionally, some countries have their own voluntary standards, such as [BS 8848](#) in the United Kingdom.

Tips:

Study the ISO standards on adventure tourism. Use them to enhance your safety performance.

Check for possible voluntary standards in your target markets.

Porters' rights

Thanks to a [porters' rights campaign](#) by Tourism Concern, most trekking tour operators in the United Kingdom have adopted a code of conduct for improved working conditions for mountain porters. Its requirements include that porters have appropriate (protective) clothing, a dedicated shelter, life insurance and access to good medical care. It also sets weight limits for porters' loads, requires them to be 16 years old or over and states the proper procedure for dealing with illness or injury of a porter.

Tips:

If you work with porters, study Tourism Concern's porters code and develop your own policy based on this.

Clearly communicate that you are aware of the porters code and comply with it.

5. What competition do you face on the European market for trekking tourism products?

Some of the most popular destinations for trekking tourism are in developing countries. There are famous trails in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Leading destinations include:

- Nepal – Great Himalaya Trail, Annapurna Circuit
- Peru – Inca Trail
- Tanzania – Kilimanjaro.

Cross-border treks through, for example, the Patagonian lake district of Argentina and Chile are also popular. Special interest treks can provide access to interesting niche markets as well, such as the gorilla treks in Rwanda and Uganda.

Tip:

In your marketing message, emphasise the unique elements of your trekking offer that travellers cannot find in competing countries.

6. Which channels can you use to market your adventure tourism products in Europe?

Selecting smaller specialised tour operators

Adventure travellers such as trekkers are more likely to use professional services like tour operators and guides than non-adventure travellers, especially when it comes to lesser-known developing countries, or activities that are more challenging. Tour operators therefore remain the most important trade channel. Smaller European tour operators specialised in trekking tourism or your destination offer the best opportunities.

You can identify relevant tour operators via trade associations, events and databases, such as:

- [Adventure Travel Show](#) – annual adventure tourism trade event, January, London
- [Adventure Travel Trade Association](#) (ATTA) – global trade organisation for the adventure travel industry that organises the Adventure Travel World Summit ([search for members](#))
- [ITB](#) – annual tourism trade event, March, Berlin
- [TourNatur](#) – walking and trekking trade event, September, Düsseldorf
- [Wanderlust](#) – magazine for adventurous, authentic travel (browse their [tour operator directory](#))
- [World Travel Market](#) – annual tourism trade event, November, London.

Examples of tour operators specialised in trekking tourism are [Exodus](#) (United Kingdom) and [Hauser Exkursionen](#) (Germany).

Generating direct sales

Although European adventure travellers still prefer to book through more traditional channels, it is important to be visible online. It increases awareness of your product/service, your professional image and your trustworthiness. You can promote your product on (adventure) tourism websites/portals, such as:

- [Live for the Outdoors](#) (of Trail Magazine and Country Walking Magazine)
- [Trek & Mountain](#)
- [Wandering On](#).

7. What are the end-market prices for adventure tourism products?

Travellers have many destinations and types of holiday to choose from. This makes tourism a relatively price-sensitive and competitive industry. The price of a long-haul trip consists of three dimensions:

1. The exchange rate between the currencies of the country of origin and the destination country.
2. The costs of transport to and from the destination country.
3. The price of goods and services the traveller consumes in the destination country.

European tour operators are not open about the purchasing prices of their tourism products. According to industry experts, their margins vary between 10–25%. Prices of holiday packages vary widely as they depend on a lot of factors, such as:

- availability
- destination
- modes of transport
- period of travel
- number of travellers
- length of stay
- type of accommodation
- included activities.

Tips:


Check which countries have cheap (direct) flights to your destination, for instance at [Skyscanner](#). This gives you a competitive advantage in those countries.

You can compare prices for trekking travel products via portals like [Lonely Planet Hiking & Trekking Tours](#).


Tourism Council WA has some useful [online tools for pricing tours and accommodation](#). These help you determine the break-even point and ideal retail price of your tourism product.

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