

The Make-It-Happen Stance

Travel teaches us plenty, when we set our minds to it

By Paul Lasley and Elizabeth Harryman
Illustration by Steven Salerno

Experiential travel”—trips that promote immersion in the local culture—is the industry’s hottest trend (and marketing term). To us, it’s not a trend. “Experiential” is in travel’s DNA.

Whether attempting the latest dance moves at a club in Fuzhou, China, or chatting with pork cracklings expert Rocky Sonnier of the Bayou Boudin and Cracklin’ bed-and-breakfast in Breaux Bridge, Louisiana, we’ve always sought out authentic local experiences.

Experiential travel is the latest iteration of the mantra “be a traveler, not a tourist,” and companies today are making this kind of travel more accessible. They offer opportunities beyond the ordinary: giving clients the chance to go behind the scenes at Rio’s Carnival, for example, or to learn pasta making in Parma, Italy.

“It’s the Instagram effect,” says Johanna Jainchill, news editor at industry publication *Travel Weekly*. “People see things on social media and want to post their own experiences. It’s no longer enough to just go to the Louvre in Paris—you have to have met the tour guide’s brother, who owns a little croissant shop.”

Some might argue that you can’t be a traveler on an escorted tour, but to us, the mode matters less than the mind-set. We travel with an open mind and reach out to residents. In foreign countries, we learn a little of the language, not only for practical reasons, but also to show respect. We honor local customs, wearing modest clothes when visiting religious sites and observing cultural mores.

Traveling in this way opens our hearts to deeply experience a place. Every trip changes us. We never come back quite the same people we were when we departed. We’ve learned something that impacts our daily life back home. It could be as simple as returning from Beaune, France, with a fresh appreciation for artfully prepared food. Or as profound as returning from Dachau, Germany, with a resolve to be ever vigilant against oppression.

That brings us to the latest marketing term being proffered: “transformational travel.” Travel is by its nature transformational—and experiential. Let’s just call it travel.



WORTH THE TRIP

The **Allison Inn and Spa**, about 25 miles southwest of Portland, Oregon, might bill itself as a simple country inn, but it ranks among America’s great hotels. Balconies outside the 85 rooms and suites overlook the Willamette Valley and surrounding vineyards. Above the fireplace in the room, the TV hides behind a panel. Wi-Fi is fast, with no log-in. A basket of locally produced snacks in each room is complimentary, as is filtered water in the fridge, and the Jory Restaurant serves seasonal produce. But it’s the service that stands out. If you need a boarding pass for your flight, someone will deliver it to you prior to your departure. Everyone on the staff makes you feel truly welcome, and the smiles are genuine. Just what a great hotel should be. Rates start at \$420. theallison.com.

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From the Insiders Before **checking a bag**, take a photo of it that you can show to authorities if the bag doesn’t appear on the luggage carousel. Also, be sure you have your name and contact information inside the bag.