Journeys into authenticity and adventure: analysing media representations of backpacker travel in South America

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Abstract
In November 2007, at the end of my PhD candidature, I travelled to South America. Having spent the preceding four years studying backpacking culture and examining the role of travel in the lives of young people, this was to be a reward of sorts. I envisioned this trip as compensation for my hard work; as a chance to unwind, relax, and experience something, somewhere, new. Although I had heard plenty about South America over the course of my research, I had not actually travelled there, ethnographic fieldwork instead being confined to Central and North America, Europe, and Central and South-East Asia. Though my trip was configured as a holiday, as an opportunity to remove myself from the world of analysis and do something practical – to improve my Spanish, to volunteer, to engage in physical activity – I found it harder than expected to extricate my ‘traveller self’ from my ‘researcher self.’

South America Travel. A land awash in ancient history, mind-boggling landscapes, entrancing culture, and non-stop fun, there’s a side of South America that’s perfect for every traveller – including you. The colossal peaks of Patagonia and the Andes beg to be climbed, while the enveloping rainforests that surround the mighty Amazon seem designed to be explored. Along the way, reminders of the Inca, the conquistadors, and others who came before dot the landscape, and the intoxicating pull of the vibrant cities is never far away. The time of your life awaits down here. All you have to do is find Backpacking may include wilderness adventures, local travel and travel to nearby countries while working from the country in which they are based. They also displayed a common commitment to a non-institutionalised form of travel, which was central to their self-identification as backpackers.”[1] Backpacking, as a lifestyle and as a business, has grown considerably in the 2000s due to low-cost airlines and hostels or budget accommodations in many parts of the world.[2]. Backpacking in Europe, South America, Central America, Australia and New Zealand has also become more popular and there are several well-trodden routes around the world that backpackers tend to stick to.