

Destination marketing

The impact of social media on travel

Since the advent of technology and social media, the traveller's journey has become very different to what it used to be. Tourists don't rely on guidebooks with out-of-date information or even paper maps to navigate their latest destination anymore. Instead, they now have the privilege of instantaneous access to information across the Web in the form of BuzzFeed guides, TripAdvisor reviews and travellers' Instagram photos of their latest holiday.

Additionally, consumers no longer decide on a destination, research what to do or where to stay and then purchase the required tickets. Instead, their path to travel has become nonlinear. User-generated social media content has become a popular source of inspiration for modern travellers and often impacts the initial decision to make a trip, particularly among millennials. According to travel site Expedia, the biggest priority for young people travelling abroad is how Instagrammable their destination is. The research, which analysed what inspires millennials and Gen X to travel, found those aged 18-34 research how good a location will look on their Instagram feed before booking, with two thirds saying the Instagrammability of a location is the most important factor when booking. The results make sense considering the rise in the number of social media influencers paid to travel to exotic places and post enviable pictures.

According to Expedia, the Instagram travel posts actually inspire one in four millennials to book vacations to these spots.

A lot of tourism industries are capitalising on the popularity of social media to inspire future travel. Here are a few ways that they are doing this:

- **Encouraging the use of a branded hashtag:** Tourists share their holidays online and, to capitalise on this, organisations encourage the use of a branded hashtag in these posts. This promotes a destination and increases engagement with a searchable hashtag. An example of this is Texas Tourism, which promoted its #TexasToDo hashtag to new visitors and residents. The result was a 33% increase in return visits to traveltexas.com.
- **Inspiring tourists during the vacation:** While on a trip, 60% of tourists, and 97% of millennial tourists, share their travel photos. This not only impacts the planning stage of a trip, but also the trip itself. Posting real-time images during events inspires tourists to attend an event or attraction they hadn't planned before their trip.
- **Encouraging tourists to share post-trip:** Most people don't spend a long time travelling, but they do spend a lot of time thinking about or planning their next trip. Travellers gain inspiration weeks or months before they really begin to plan their trip. Organisations often encourage tourists to share their holiday images to social media and create content with their hashtag by organising a contest or offering a discount or free gift. It keeps people talking about the brand, putting it at the front of their travel plans.

(sources: Olapic / *The Independent*)

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