A POINT OF VIEW



Two weeks away. Fifty at home.

The Monday After

Why adventure travel's biggest opportunity lies in the 50 weeks between tours

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01

The need doesn't end when the tour does

People want the excitement and sense of adventure from their tour to last. But most tours last only a week or two. The connection often fades soon after.

Consider the Monday morning after a tour. A work colleague asks, "How was it?" The traveller lights up, shares their stories and wants to hold on to what has changed. The positive changes from a tour often fade quickly. Research shows that for many, the boost from a holiday has faded within a week of returning to daily routines. After two months, it has usually disappeared, well before the next tour.

Harvard's Clayton Christensen argued that people don't just buy products. They "hire" them to do a job. For many customers, the job an adventure tour does is personal growth. It makes them feel they are still growing, learning and living life to the full. It has a personal side of being stretched and coming home changed. It also has a social side of having a story to tell.

That job does not stop when they return home. It continues throughout the other 50 weeks of the year. Yet across the industry, the relationship between operators and customers is built almost entirely around the tour itself. Between tours, customers turn to other things to continue their personal growth, such as starting a course, joining a club or taking on a new challenge. Those 50 weeks are not a quiet period between travelling. They are a gap waiting to be filled.

> CHRISTENSEN'S BEST KNOWN EXAMPLE
>
> **Morning commuters hired a fast food milkshake to make a long, dull drive more bearable and to stay full until lunch. Its real rivals were bananas, bagels, doughnuts and chocolate bars, not other milkshakes.**
>
> The same is true of an adventure tour. Its rivals are anything else that does the job.

02

Why the tour is the unit of business

In small group adventure travel, businesses are organised around the tour. This makes sense, as the tour is what operators design, sell and deliver exceptionally well. But it has turned the category into one of very good, very similar products. Comparable itineraries, expert local guides, small groups and similar prices.

THREE LEADING UK SMALL GROUP ADVENTURE OPERATORS, SIDE BY SIDE

	Operator A	Operator B	Operator C
1 Key messages			
Small groups	●	●	●
Expert local guides or leaders	●	●	●
Years of experience	●	●	●
Flexible booking	●	●	●
2 Product offering			
Small group tours	●	●	●
Solo travellers	●	●	●
Private or tailor made tours	●	●	●
Family tours	●	●	●
Walking, cycling, wildlife and polar	●	●	●
3 Countries			
Countries offered	90+	Around 100	100+
4 Tours			
Tours offered	500+	350+	1,000+

Taken from each operator's UK website in October 2026. Countries and tours are as each operator states them.

70%+

of travellers already use AI to research and compare trips

Skift (2026)

A NOTE ON AI

AI will sharpen the focus on price. More than 70% of travellers already use AI to research and compare trips. An AI assistant comparing two tours to Morocco sees dates, inclusions and price. It cannot see why one brand matters more to a customer than another. Only the customer can.

That has three consequences.

1 **Products can appear interchangeable to customers.**

Operators know their itineraries differ, sometimes considerably, because they live and breathe them. A customer has no way of knowing which of two tours would satisfy them more. They will almost never try both. Unless one matches a passion such as food or walking, they are choosing between product pages that look much alike. Faced with two appealing tours to India on the same dates, for example, price often becomes the deciding factor.

2 **The brand can fade once the tour ends.**

Travellers remember their experiences in vivid detail. Yet operators and travellers I have spoken to say the same thing. Many customers cannot recall which company took them to Morocco. The memory attaches to the destination and the experience rather than to the company.

3 **Loyalty is still measured in tours taken.**

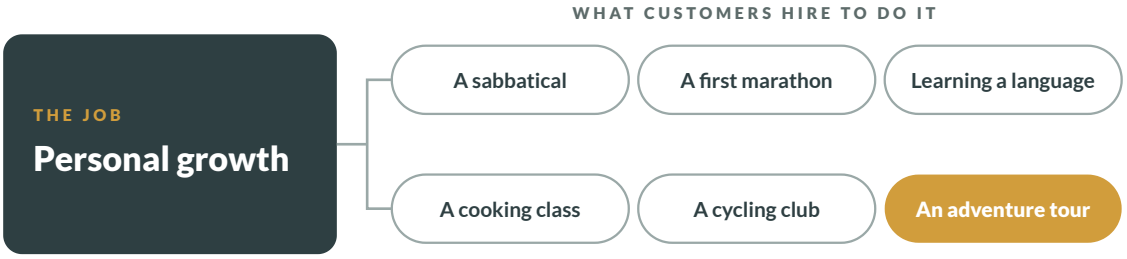
Loyalty programmes are evolving well beyond discounts, offering early access, magazines and member events. Some operators even recognise a competitor's loyalty tier to attract new customers. Nevertheless, membership is still determined by the number of tours taken. However generous the rewards, a benefit tied to the next tour secures a booking. On its own, it does not build a lasting preference. The same pattern holds across travel. People belong to three or four loyalty programmes in each sector, consider around three brands a year and give even their preferred brand only half to 60% of their spending.

03

From tour provider to job fulfiller

What creates this need is usually a moment in someone's life, not their age. A career that has plateaued, children leaving home, a milestone birthday or retirement can lead people of very different ages to hire the same tour for the same reason. A traveller of 35 and a traveller of 62 may be looking for exactly the same thing. These life triggers are strong. As people near a new decade, they often look for more meaning. For example, people aged 29, 39, 49 or 59 are 48% more likely to run their first marathon than people at other ages. Retirement has a similar impact. Of recent retirees, 41% spend more time on hobbies or start new ones.

This shifts the competition. Operators aren't just competing with other tour companies. They're up against anything people use for personal growth, such as sabbaticals, marathons, language courses, cooking classes or cycling clubs. Tour operators only offer the tour. Everything else comes from somewhere else.



A tour is just one way operators can help customers grow. An operator that understands this can offer more before, between and after tours. It can build an ecosystem around this need, with the tour at the centre. It also has an edge, since it knows what each customer has done and what they might want next. Instead of competing tour by tour, the brand becomes the first place people turn to when they want to keep moving forward.

04

What serving the job looks like

Some operators are already moving in this direction. WeRoad has built its business around the job of friendship. It offers small groups of solo travellers, group chats before departure and, since 2025, local events in the cities where its customers live. The company closed 2025 with record revenue of €130 million. Others, from Intrepid to Flash Pack, now position travel as an answer to loneliness. Connection is fast becoming the industry's next battleground. Operators built on community may well follow their customers up the age range. But WeRoad has chosen to serve one job. As far as I can see, no one has yet built a business around the growth job. The opportunity for other operators is to go further and serve the jobs their own customers hire them for.

This model already works outside of travel. Rapha, a cycling clothing brand, has created a club with 23,000 members, 21 clubhouses with cafés, regular group rides and tours. If a clothing brand can branch into travel, a tour operator can branch out in the other direction.

Two territories illustrate what this could look like.

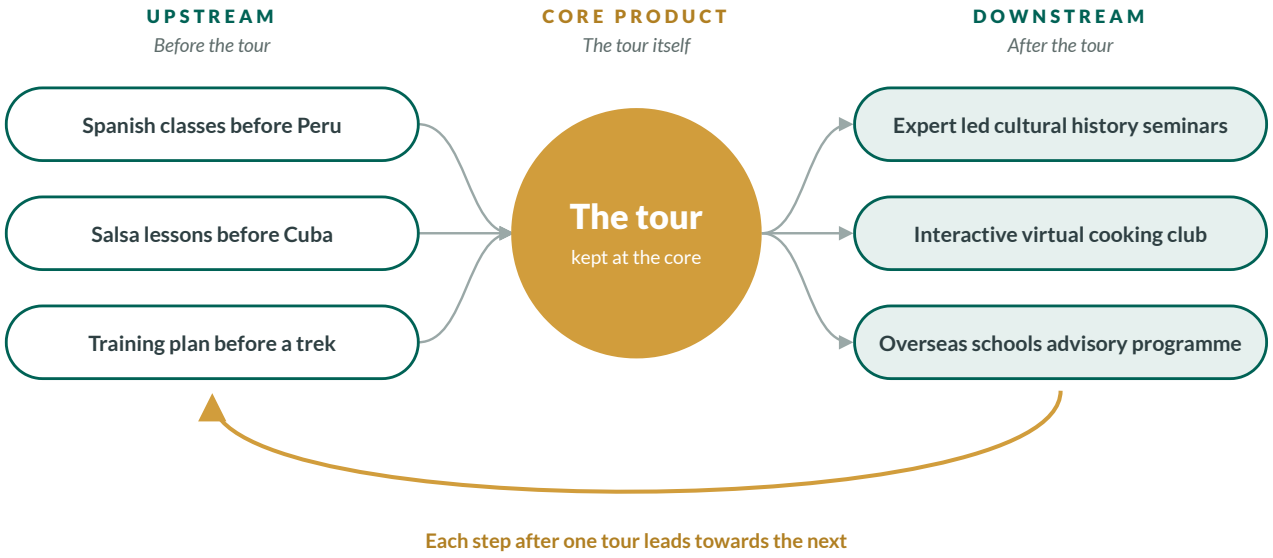
TERRITORY ONE

Between tours

Help customers to keep growing at home, so the next tour feels like a natural next step, not just another purchase. Before a tour, this could be Spanish classes before Peru, salsa lessons before Cuba or a training plan before a trek. After it, the ideas can go further from the tour itself, such as expert led seminars on a region's cultural history or an interactive virtual cooking club. Some customers might even share their professional skills with schools in places they have visited, through an overseas schools advisory programme. Not everything has to be travel. It only has to serve the same job. A partnership with a language app fits. A sports car would not.

> *Imagine a Thursday night in Manchester. Twenty people who trekked in Nepal in different years are cooking dal bhat with a Nepali guide and planning their next adventure together.*

It all starts the Monday after the tour, when travellers want to keep that feeling alive.



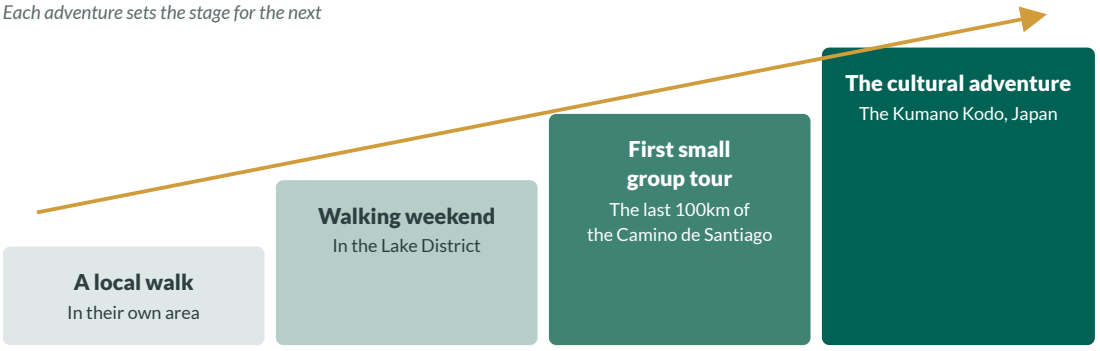
An ecosystem around the job. The tour stays at the core. Upstream products prepare people for it. Downstream products keep the personal growth going until the next one.

TERRITORY TWO

Focus on progression, not just points

Recognise who the traveller is becoming, not just how many tours they've taken. People start in different places. One might begin with a local walk, another with a walking weekend, another with their first trek. Each adventure sets the stage for the next. If an operator can't offer more, it risks losing customers just as they're ready for bigger challenges. Progression already motivates many, as any hillwalker working through Scotland's 282 Munros knows.

Instead of discount tiers, an operator could offer an adventure passport that tracks achievements, from a first group tour to a trek above 4,000 metres. Once the basics are covered, it opens up harder, more remote tours not sold to everyone. The idea is well established. Research on immersive experiences shows the most successful ones help people answer, "Am I making progress?" In hotels, the experience has four times more impact on bookings than points or other perks.



Progression, not points. People start on different rungs and look for the next step up.

Serving the job also changes how operators talk about what they offer. The focus moves from describing the product to presenting the progress customers can make. Described in this way, two tours on the same dates are no longer the same purchase. One is a holiday. The other is the next step in something the customer has already started.

	The Vendor (Selling the Tour)	The Movement (Serving the Job)
The Belief	"We sell logistics, flights and memorable holidays."	"We believe **life is meant to expand**, not repeat."
How Customers Choose	Comparing prices on spreadsheets and checking hotel stars.	Deciding **who they refuse to become** next.
The Core Pitch	Itineraries, inclusions and group sizes.	**The identity you earn** and the story you bring home.
The Loyalty Metric	**Tours taken** (counting stamps like a travel agent).	**Progress made** (tracking your growth against your own goals).

There are three main ways this approach can pay off for businesses.

Revenue beyond the tour

Customers already spend money on this job between tours, on courses, languages, clubs, kit and fitness. A brand that serves the job can earn a share of that spending throughout the year. It can do this largely through partners, from outdoor kit brands and cookery schools to organised walks, rides and races, with the operator's existing guides and AI rather than new teams.

Preference over price

The brands that stand out are those that sell a purpose, not just a product. Right now, two similar tours are often chosen on price. But when a brand becomes part of how a customer keeps growing, that changes. Some people will change their dates or pay more to travel with a brand they feel connected to. Studies show that emotionally connected customers are 25% to 100% more valuable than those who are merely highly satisfied.

Winning new customers

Many people hesitate to book their first small group tour because they wonder, "Will I fit in?" A cooking night or a local walk is an easy, low risk way to start. If someone has already met the community, booking their first tour doesn't feel like a big leap. It's just the next step.

05

Making the shift

None of this means creating a new product or brand. The tours offered today are already great. What needs to change is how businesses see their purpose. It's not only about selling the next tour. It's about serving the job throughout the year. The job described here is just one example. Some customers travel for connection, escape or achievement. What matters most is not which job an operator chooses, but making the shift from selling tours to serving these deeper needs.

The real opportunity is to compete for the 50 weeks between tours, not just for the next booking. An operator that is still there on **the Monday after** gives customers a reason to come back that isn't about discounts. In a market full of great, similar tours, this is how one brand becomes the first choice for customers.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James Eustace has worked in commercial and marketing roles for over 25 years, 15 of them in travel, including senior product roles at a UK small group adventure tour operator. He has travelled to over 50 countries. He advises travel and hospitality businesses on proposition and customer experience.

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