

LEADERSHIP
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OUTLOOK EXPEDITIONS

RESEARCH STUDY

An Exploration into the Transformational
Impacts of School Expeditions on
Travellers

This study explores the perceived benefits a school expedition has on its young participants and analyses to what extent these benefits can be transformative to an individual's life.

The study questions whether transformation through such a travel experience encourages sustainable behaviours and explores how school expeditions can have a wider impact on the responsible tourism agenda.

This research was conducted through Leeds Beckett University's Master's Degree Programme in Responsible Tourism Management - the only course of its type to be accredited by the World Tourism Organisation.

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WHY WAS THE RESEARCH IMPORTANT?

In a 2008 report by UNWTO and WYSE Travel Confederation, the importance of youth travel was demonstrated in the outcomes it can deliver, including learning, cultural exchange and understanding, career development and self-development. The most significant tourism sectors identified as being able to deliver such qualities to youth travellers include: educational, volunteer, and adventure (Reisinger, 2013).

Across the youth travel - and particularly school expedition sector - these benefits are also echoed by organisations and tour operators that sell these ideas of transformation and personal growth as part of the package (Magrizos et al. 2021).



RESEARCH AIM

This study aimed to critically analyse the impacts and perceived benefits a school expedition has on the teams, with a focus on the long-term transformational qualities of the experience. Using Outlook Expeditions as a case study.

To date, there have been no notable studies investigating the long-term impacts of school expeditions on travellers – despite companies within the sector, frequently making uncorroborated claims suggesting them to be part of the experience.

This study therefore sought to support wider research on youth tourism and address gaps in knowledge around the long-term impacts on youth and student travellers– both in terms of their own selves, but also in their subsequent attitudes towards responsible travel and sustainable behaviours.

This research can contribute to making expeditions more valuable, transformational experiences, ensuring sustainability is at the forefront of both the programme and the travellers' minds. In doing so, it can support how the industry adapts to the responsible tourism agenda going forward, and how it impacts young people, in how they will carry these changes with them into their future lives.

KEY FINDINGS

The study used a research sample of former participants (students and teachers) of an Outlook Expedition, whose answers were measured against a control group of individuals who had not previously travelled with Outlook Expeditions.

The average age at time of travel was 17, and the average age at point of interview was 23. The time between expedition and the research interview ranged from three years to 12 years, with the average time passed since their trips being six years.


EDUCATION & CAREERS

Five out of the six respondents attended (or will soon be attending) university with two of these going on to attain further academic qualifications. One student noted particularly how they felt **the expedition aided their professional development** with the experience being a key feature on their CV and job applications. Four of the five students interviewed believed their expedition **directly impacted what they went on to study and/or pursued as a career.**

All the students that went (or are going) to university also took a gap year before their studies. Interestingly the same proportion of control participants interviewed went to university however none of them took a gap year, suggesting **curiosity for travel** sparked through an expedition was what encouraged them to engage in further opportunities at a young age. Those that took gap years also viewed them as **opportunities to increase independence** – from solo travelling and volunteering overseas, to generating income for future study and trips.



KEY FINDINGS



"The week before I wouldn't leave the house, I was so nervous." [...] "[the expedition] pushed me to make friends, and at the end of it all my team said I'd come out of my shell a lot more, and I felt like I had."

Since then, it's really pushed me. I've had the confidence to apply myself to college and figure out that the course I was doing initially wasn't good enough for me and I needed to change. I don't think I would have done that had I not had the major confidence boost of going across the world."

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

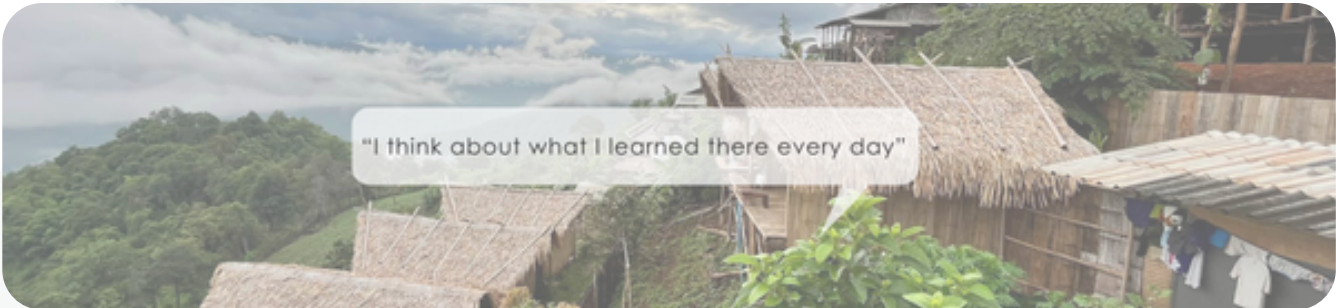
Resilience has been cited by the UK Government (2019) to be of equal importance to young people's future success as academic qualifications and as such, is a key focus for Outlook Expeditions. When discussing resilience and how participants overcame challenges in their youth with the control group, half felt they weren't equipped with the resources at a young age to overcome life challenges. Meanwhile, the Outlook alumni interviewed felt the expedition experience helped to develop a robust toolkit of skills for such scenarios including problem solving, flexibility, and self-belief

PERCEIVED VALUE

Two participants commented on the idea of being "sheltered" before travelling on expedition, and how powerful it was to be exposed to different cultures in this way, providing them with a greater understanding of the world, beyond their known life at home.

Interestingly, in a control group interview one participant also used this same language, suggesting that they remained sheltered for longer than friends who had travelled in their teenage years and felt behind socially as a result.

All of the participants remarked on how the expedition increased their confidence. From a teacher perspective also, they too became aware of students having increased levels of confidence post-expedition, having overcome fears and personal barriers throughout the trip.



"I think about what I learned there every day"



KEY FINDINGS

FUTURE TRAVEL & RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

Half of the respondents had been on solo travelling trips since expedition with five of the six having been on **self-led road trips and/or backpacking adventures** in the years that followed their Outlook experience.

Half of the respondents continued volunteering after their first experience on expedition, while all commented on the desire to “live like a local” when on holiday, seeking out those **authentic, unique adventures**



It was found that when the participants discussed the concept of responsible travel, they felt **the onus was on them as individuals to be aware and make small changes**. Conversely, most of the control group believed it is down to travel companies to act more responsibly on behalf of tourists and it's not something they as individuals consider personally, when booking or during a holiday.

On the other hand, all of the control group commented on how their travel plans involve seeking out beach breaks with the aim of relaxing and enjoying a change of scenery.

There was a marked difference between the two groups – **only those that had travelled on expedition at young age went on to travel for a purpose in future**, looking for opportunities to gain new insights on the world and for self-transformation.



TRANSFORMATIONAL POTENTIAL

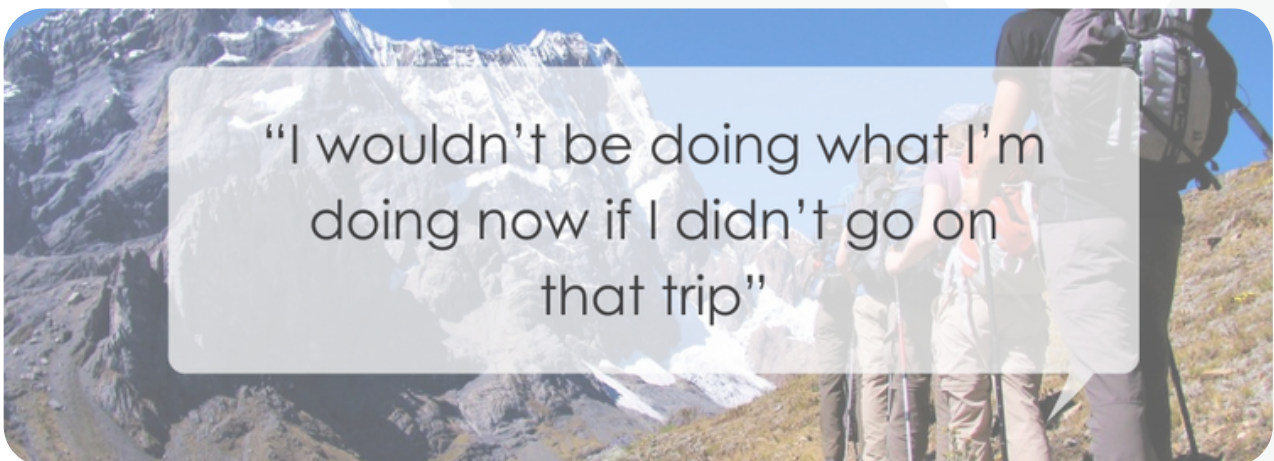
The research found that an Outlook Expedition has the potential to **influence fundamental life decisions a young person makes** in the years that follow an expedition – decisions that would have been different had they not had the experience. It was further found that through comparison with the control group, an expedition experience encourages people to be self-reflective and responsible with a greater sense of community.

RESULTS SUMMARY

The research conducted supported the notion that expeditions have the potential to transform lives, providing long-lasting positive changes that influence the making of future key decisions, both personally and professionally.

Most respondents cited their expedition as having a direct influence on their future academic and/or career endeavours, while all those interviewed claimed to have greater levels of confidence since travelling with Outlook, and felt the experience provided them with a toolkit to tackle life's challenges.

This contrasts with the control group who felt they struggled to overcome challenges in their youth, with the feeling for some that they simply weren't equipped with the resources at a young age.



The study also found a correlation between this transformation and responsible travelling behaviour, and a marked difference between the two groups.

Where the study group had desires to "live like a local" taking on a personal responsibility and appreciation of the importance of respecting local cultures, environments and people, the control group believed the task of ensuring travel is responsible, should fall to the travel provider.



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The full academic paper is available to download [here](#).

If you have any questions or would like to discuss this research with the author, please email francesca.gallone@outlookexpeditions.com