

New Zealand Volcano eruption is a wakeup call for thrill-seeking tourists

Adventure tourism has never been more popular, but tragedies like White Island must sound the alarm to travellers putting their trust in unknown companies offering the experience of a lifetime, writes Mark Carter.

Mark Carter



December 13, 2019

As the death and injury toll climbs from the volcanic eruption at White Island in New Zealand, the hearts of the world have gone to all who have been impacted.

Those haunting images of tourists walking across the face of the volcano in the moments before the eruption, no doubt taking in an experience of a lifetime, will live with me forever.

They also raise another question which is being asked the world over, what on earth were they doing there?

Make no mistake, active volcanoes are killers. Over the past 19 years 2000 people have perished as the result of eruptions. 152 of these have been tourists, scientists and members of the media.

[RELATED: White Island volcano eruption: Why the volcano blew up](#)

In the world today there are over 1500 volcanoes of which there will be some 60 eruptions every year. Yet such odds have done little to dampen the spirits of tourists who seek out the unique experience of getting close to an active volcano.



Footage taken by Brazilian tourist Alessandro Kauffmann minutes before the White Island volcano erupted. Picture: Youtube

Tourism globally is through the roof, with some 1.4 billion people travelling each year, with adventure tourism the fastest growing section of the industry.

Whether it's trekking Mount Everest or visiting an active volcano, people are willing to take risks for that 'experience of a lifetime.'

[RELATED: New Zealand White Island victims were badly burned in a scene likened to Chernobyl](#)

FROM OUR PARTNERS

Opinions you can't ignore. **[Watch Rita Panahi 9am Sundays, Sky News. For more](#)**

For some, it may be part of celebrating a life milestone. Others are escaping a difficult time or simply looking to break the monotonous routine that day-to-day life can throw at us.

These moments all add to our personal experience economy, with the reward being able to share something unique either personally with friends and family, or across social media.

Part of this will mean putting ourselves in the hands of experts, trusting that if we do as they say, then all will be fine.



Friends, relations, and local supporters gather on the quay side as the boat that carried families for a morning blessing at White Island returns to Whakatane during a recovery operation to retrieve the remaining bodies on White Island. Picture: AAP/David Rowland

I recall such an experience occurring during my time as a trainer and tour leader across Europe for Contiki.

In the late 1990s a third-party company we had dealings with, Adventure Travel, made the decision to place a group of tourists in the white water in Switzerland during a storm. Nobody raised concerns or questioned the decision to proceed in the worsening weather, because when experts are present people are willing to go and do almost anything.

On that day 21 people, including three guides, died after a dam wall broke and brought a wall of dark water into the canyon.

[RELATED: Fatal island's volcano site 'not our responsibility'](#)

In the coming months we will likely see an official investigation into the White Island tragedy where blame will be laid. It always is when tragedy is involved. In the instance of Switzerland, six members of Adventure Travel were convicted of negligence.

Such incidents are the unimaginable stuff of nightmares for those involved in adventure experiences, most of who are reputable operators who will always do all they can to ensure the safety of their clients.



Footage taken by Brazilian tourist Alessandro Kauffmann minutes before the White Island volcano erupted. Picture: Youtube

But strangely, tragedies such as White Island help us make the world a safer place for travellers. As a result of this tragedy, there is now a rethink from tour operators on the number of volcanoes they will visit going on all over the world.

Despite the risks, people will keep on seeking adventure. It is in our nature to seek exhilaration, and when we add an element of real danger, that adrenaline kick is something special.

[RELATED: New Zealand White Island volcano blast: Who is responsible?](#)

Shark attacks won't keep us from the ocean and threats of an avalanche won't stop a skiing adventure.

We take risks all the time, whether it's driving on a freeway, flying in a plane or cycling to work. We know that the bathroom is the most dangerous room in the house, yet we shower without concern.

You can never be insulated from complete risk. It is why people free climb, speed on motorbikes in Bali and even walking across a volcano, all because they believe that the experience is worth the risk.

Mark Carter is an author, speaker and expert in human behaviour.