

Ordinary Lifestyles: Popular Media, Consumption And Taste

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LIFESTYLE TRAVELLERS:

Backpacking as a way of life

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ABSTRACT

Scholarship on backpackers speculates some individuals may extend backpacking to a way of life. This article empirically explores this proposition using lifestyle consumption as its framing concept and conceptualises individuals who style their lives around the enduring practice of backpacking as 'lifestyle travellers'. Ethnographic interviews with lifestyle travellers in India and Thailand offer an emic account of the practices, ideologies and social identity that characterise lifestyle travel as a distinctive subtype within backpacking. Departing from the drifter construct, which (re)constitutes this identity as socially deviant, the concept of lifestyle allows for a contemporary appraisal of these individuals' patterns of meaningful consumption and wider insights into how ongoing mobility can lead to different ways of understanding identities and relating to place.

Keywords: lifestyle consumption; backpacker; mobility; drifter; identity

INTRODUCTION

Within the social world of backpacking, there exist a small proportion of tourists who travel as a lifestyle for years on end. Reminiscent of Cohen's (1972) seminal 'drifter tourists', but subverting connotations of aimlessness implicit in this term, these extreme tourists, who I reconceptualise as 'lifestyle travellers', move beyond an episodic consumption of backpacking. Backpacking is instead extended to an ongoing lifestyle practice that on a micro level provides both a unique sense of self to its practitioners and on a macro level comprises a distinct and recognisable social identity. Lifestyle travel in a broader sense can take on

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