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Ethnography assignment: write an ethnography on 'travel' in 800 – 1000 words

The need for an escape.

In urban cities such as Mumbai, where the lifestyle and culture is highly stressful throughout the year, I have observed a trend for mini holidays which is not new to human culture. The culture of creating holiday homes had begun early in London during the industrial era where well off families would spend the weekends in order to revitalise and unwind for the next busy week. This practice has been very much existent in Mumbai middle class and upper class cultures where the escapade to closer, less populated and cooler places is sought out (almost like a need for a breath of fresh air). Through this ethnography I wish to explore the motivation, intention and rationale for this need by looking into the perspective of those who create and sustain this need in the market. However my lens will be focusing on a slightly specific occurrence of those who seek and create the environment of a natural and earthy experience which is craved by urban dwellers who relish the one-on-one with nature.

Vagabond is a start-up created by four young graduates who wish to fuel the existence of experiential excursions in and around the city of Mumbai. Their expeditions include adventure sports, music camps and treks and other such events which include experience-rich events for people. They function on a low budget capital and their trips include the atmosphere of experiencing the 'vagabond' way of life. This strong contrast to the regular luxury enhancing livelihoods of the people of Mumbai suddenly becomes highly desirable and attractive as a form of getaway. The willingness to answer nature's call in the open and the lack of a bathing service for a few days is willingly acquiesced as a part of this wild, adventurous experience which in usual circumstances would be considered inappropriate in the routine scheduled days of the city life, where the graduation from the Indian toilet to Western is becoming more frequent.

My discussion with one of the 4 founders of *Vagabond*, uncovered many of their ideas and motivations behind the creation of their service. Their aim is to unite the individual with the natural and create a novel and 'exotic' local experience for the city folks. Commercialising this need for novelty and the craving for travel, feeds and sustains the market for outdoor expeditions. Although *Vagabond* does not consider themselves as a trekking or camping company, their unique selling point, even for their events with private companies and professional groups, include organisation of outdoor events that serve as their forte. This very need for escapade is paired along with the search for meaning and novelty in expedition which creates the base for their company to survive and thrive. Shannon Fernandes, one of the founders of *Vagabond* said that camping was initially referred to as a break or a spot where the night is spent in the outdoors after a hard day's work in the open

or after a day of mountain climbing. Today however, camping is identified merely by the presence of tents and a bon-fire which creates the disguise of an authentic outdoor experience. The rationale behind the fad of such camps started off because the urban working population found it difficult to return to work the next day with a sore body. The unauthentic yet authentic looking camp is acceptable enough as a legitimate camping experience and conveniently excludes the unwanted hassle. This need for authenticity and short cuts to an adventurous experience temporarily quenches the thirst for a meaning seeking experience.

Another vital aspect that is provided by the treks and camps that breaks the tension of a monotonous routine is a ground for socialisation. According to vagabond, they believe that their treks are a better exemplary for a connection through hospitality and shared goals that unite and form a common ground that in a short time can accelerate the process of understanding one another. They say that it is very unlikely for someone to come for a 6 hour long trek and not be intrinsically motivated enough to want to be there. This sense of shared motivation builds a common understanding among the participants who have a deeper meaning through their shared terrain. This creates a strong community among those who work hard towards a single end and are like minded in their passion to complete the task. The commercialising of their service lasts in the experience they instil in the person who participates and takes back a refreshing memory to their normal lives. This memory then translates itself into conversation and spreads the word advocating such adventure rich excursions.

This need to fetishize travel by the population comes from the luxury of discovering newer ways to fulfil the quest of adventure. Adventure does not only include thrilling experiences that are found in the wild. A high speed roller coaster ride can be adventurous enough and yet lack the raw and natural touch that a rocky terrain provides. The irony lies in how the more we get dissolved into civilization, the closer we wish to acquaint ourselves with raw and natural human culture. The commercializing of this need suffices the balance for our short and quick expeditions that are healthy measure for applying leisure and perspective to the busy and frustrating livelihoods of the city dweller.