



# Pursuing Adventure in Lockdown

Adventure aficionado Sarah Williams and mountaineer Alyssa Azar on how to inject adventure in lockdown and the importance of being female role models for young girls.

By Izzie Hensby

Before the pandemic, adventure tourism was on a rapid rise in popularity becoming one of the fastest-growing sectors in the travel industry. Within Europe, European tourists were accountable for almost 60% of the adventure travellers. However, since the pandemic, the number of Europeans travelling outside of Europe decreased by 98% in June 2020 compared to June 2019 and adventure travel outside Europe had almost completely vanished.

Now that the world is opening up again and border restrictions are relaxing, adventure tourism may be the solution to inject income back into the travel industry. Adventure tourism contributes greatly to local economies: approximately two-thirds of the money spent on adventure travel stays on location. For those who are unfamiliar with the concept, adventure tourism is a trip that includes a combination of the following elements - physical activity, natural environment, and cultural immersion.

In 2013, Sarah Williams gave up her career as a banker to pursue gruelling challenges from running, skydiving, bungee jumping, climbing and cycling all over the world. Her toughest challenges include hiking The Appalachian Trail, climbing Kilimanjaro and running six back-to-back marathons across the Sahara. She has since added more strings to her bow by becoming a life coach, as well as hosting the successful Tough Girl Podcast. Each podcast episode seeks out a new inspiring story from women who've overcome physical or mental challenges that have pushed them to their limits.

Alyssa Azar is the youngest Australian to summit Mt Everest at 19 years old in 2016. In 2018, she returned to summit Mt Everest from the north side making her the youngest woman to summit Mt Everest from both sides at 21 years old. Alyssa started trekking at just eight and quickly completed treks to Everest Base Camp, Mt Kosciuszko in Australia and Mt Kilimanjaro. She now balances her time between conducting motivational talks and studying for a degree in Psychology.

**Have you always had a desire to travel and pursue adventure?**

SW: I went backpacking around the world when I was eighteen and I had the most amaz-

ing time, ever since then I've wanted to do more of it. However, I didn't know that it was possible to do it full-time. I never saw female adventurers on TV, their stories were not shared on mainstream media and social media wasn't around when I was growing up in the 90s.

AA: I always had the desire to travel from an early age. Even before I got into trekking and adventure, I used to dream about all the things I would do one day and the places I would travel. I loved reading about exciting places and the World's Highest Mountains. The desire was there, and I was fortunate to start at an early age, but I knew I'd always get into adventure activities at some point.

**How have you been injecting adventure during lockdown and how can we do the same?**

SW: To be honest, I haven't really. I've been focusing on my health and fixing some underlying issues so I've been doing glute activation workouts daily, foam rolling and Yin Yoga. I've been thinking about and planning future adventures that I could potentially do which are closer to home.

Everyone and everyone's circumstances are very different, I don't think there is one size fits all with regards to adventuring during this time. I think the most important thing you can do is be kind to yourself. For me I don't get a buzz camping in the back garden or doing the 'Everesting' Challenge - such as walking up the stairs, that's not my thing. But if that excites you and you enjoy it - go for it. I think it's very important for you to decide what it is you need to do and to not compare that with what other people are doing.

AA: It certainly isn't easy but if you have some hiking areas near you that are isolated that's a great way to start. I've found during this time I occasionally get out for a pack walk or trail run on the local hiking trails where I live

and even a short walk or run in nature makes me feel better and gives me a dose of adventure but there are also other ways to do that while at home. The type of adventures I undertake in mountain climbing requires lots of planning, goal setting, dreaming, and creating a vision for what you want to do. I've found the forced step back and slow down has allowed me to rest more than usual and take the time to think about what's important to me and what I want to do when the opportunity to travel and adventure opens back up again.

**What does adventure mean to you?**

SW: Freedom to travel, freedom to explore, freedom to get out of my comfort zone and to live life on my terms.

AA: Adventure to me means being outdoors, being in unpredictable environments where you will be faced with a physical and mental challenge to overcome.

**Why do you think it's important for young girls to have female adventurers as role models?**

SW: It's so important that girls and women growing up know that it's ok to travel and explore, to go on adventures and to take on challenges and for them to get outside of their comfort zone. For them to see other women living these lives and that it's possible. Adventurers show others that it's ok to have big goals and dreams, they show them how to deal with failure, how to be resilient, how to train the body and the mind, and how to overcome setbacks. All of these are essential skills that are needed in everyday life. If you can see it, you can be it. It will empower them, encourage them and give them self-confidence in what they are doing.

AA: It's important because it shows them that it's possible and because seeing women in adventure gives them someone to relate to and shows them what they can become.