

Travel Entrepreneurs to Ensure Your Exploring is Not Boring

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Travel is back and in a big way.

According to a new U.S. Travel Association report, for the first time since the start of the pandemic, travel spending (\$100 billion) was 3% above 2019 levels in April 2022 and more than one-quarter (28%) of travelers plan to spend significantly more this summer over their 2019 travel budgets for marquee trips. The World Travel & Tourism further projects that United

States travel and tourism is expected to exceed pre-pandemic levels in 2022, with sector contributions nearing \$2 trillion to the U.S. economy—a 6.2% increase from 2019.

So optimistic is the outlook, tourism industry purveyors are rolling out new and exciting offers

and options intended to entice travelers to traverse their way. Adding to the excitement are innovations being ushered in to amplify our enjoyment while exploring the world and to foster Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI). In researching new and emerging travel trends, I happened upon an inspiring set of entrepreneurs—Tosh Swain and Kaysie Nielson—who are hell-bent on ensuring your time spent on Earth is not boring. They're in the process of launching a startup venture called [The Experience Shoppe](#), which is intended to help would-be wanderers galvanize as

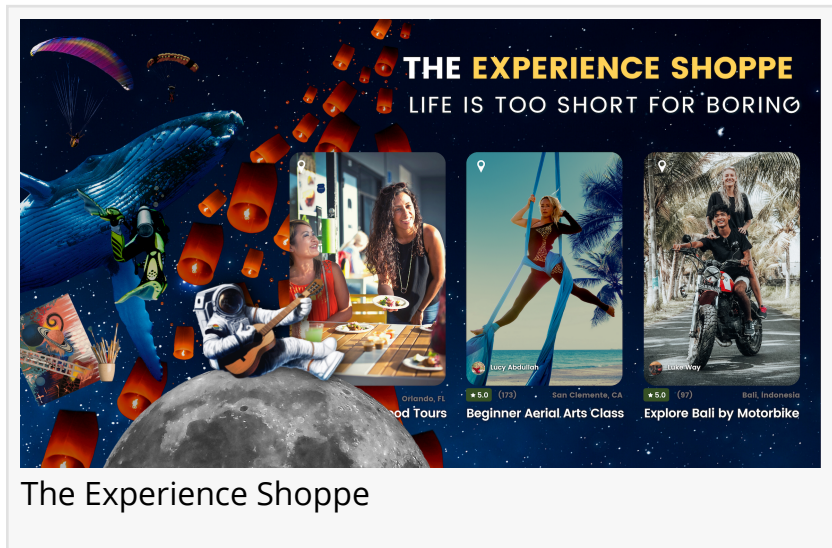
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Merilee Kern, MBA

a community, easily connect with experts (guides, instructors, mentors and creators) for tried-and-true “things to do”, and enjoy new experiences in their own cities and around the world.

The Experience Shoppe is notable in particular as it has a strong focus on helping folks enjoy their own home towns in fresh ways. Want to switch up your coffee dates for something more memorable? Take the family out for an unforgettable experience? Try something off the beaten path for your birthday? Start a new hobby? Learn something new? Explore a new place? That's



their specialty!

Swain and Nielson's enthusiasm and irreverence for the status quo is evident in this interview.

MK: First, please describe what The Experience Shoppe is and who it's intended for?

TES: The Experience Shoppe is designed as a "things to do" hub for locals of any age and interest. One that is more grassroots-oriented advice that avoids tourist traps and outrageously priced adventure tours. It's a one-stop platform where travelers and other fun-seekers can connect with local experts and others to discover unique things to do with friends, the whole family, for date nights, self-growth and to explore new cultures and places with the locals who live there. Users just access the platform from a computer or phone and tailor a search—or let us suggest ideas—to receive great ideas for getting out and about.

It's a particularly well-suited solution for those seeking a deeper connection to their own community; more ways to experience their own home towns or wherever they happen to be; culturally immersive and authentic experiences to genuinely understand and feel part of the places they visit; to develop new hobbies; and to meet new people.

MK: Who contributes to the platform?

TES: We believe in passion over profit and carefully curate what is on our platform. We search out and vet like-minded locals across the globe who are eager to share their knowledge and offer unique, original and personalized ideas that create a comprehensive and authentic community marketplace—an engaging space where your world grows bigger with new horizons. Unlike most travel websites, we're all about the experiences and social connections users create on our platform. Over the past year, we've handpicked enthusiastic local creators who offer free or fee online or in-person experiences helping users travel to new places and generally enjoy novel experiences—even from the comfort of their own home. The Experience Shoppe is focused on unique, hand-picked, spontaneous and hard-to-find local offerings to elevate and enrich our life experiences.

Whether it's trying an astronomy tour, a beginner's aerial arts classes, breath training, drum lessons, night paddleboarding, authentic Mexican salsa cooking classes, laughter yoga or other non-traditional activities, we cut through the noise to provide vetted activities that are distinctive and offered by passionate local-area experts.

MK: Describe a bit about your personal and prior career journeys that led you to developing The Experience Shoppe.

TES: We've dedicated the last two years of our lives to this project. We left the security of our salaries working for one of the fastest-growing tech companies in the nation, sold all our belongings and took on odd, random jobs in order to live life on our own terms while we

bootstrap this meaningful platform. Not just for us, but for all who believe life is worth cultivating every day you get on this side of the soil. As a gay, interracial, women-owned Benefit Limited Liability Company, we also see the world without restrictions—an inclusive world where we support the perpetual growth of each other, ourselves and our environment. This is what we've set out to build and we currently have a [Kickstarter](#) campaign underway to bring this vision to life. Those that back us will enjoy some tremendous benefits.

Scientific studies reveal that new and diverse experiences are linked to enhanced happiness, and this relationship is associated with greater correlation of brain activity. "Our results suggest that people feel happier when they have more variety in their daily routines—when they go to novel places and have a wider array of experiences," explains Catherine Hartley, an assistant professor in New York University's Department of Psychology and one of the paper's co-authors.

It is in this spirit that Swain and Nielson created The Experience Shoppe. The venture is founded on the belief that, together, we can lift the world up through shared, meaningful experiences that empower our collective happiness with an inevitable stretching of our individual skills, knowledge and achievements. That, the more we intentionally cultivate enriching experiences, we'll boost overall life satisfaction and well-being. And, according to the research, we'll be that much smarter.

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