

Unplugged holidays tipped to increase

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James Cook University researchers in Australia say the phenomenon of the 'digital-detox' is on the rise and could be an important part of the tourism industry in the future.

Philip Pearce, Professor of Tourism at JCU, working with a team

including doctoral student Li Jing, studied how the portrayal of digital-free tourism—where internet and mobile signals are either absent or digital technology use is controlled—is changing.

Professor Pearce said digital 'black hole' resorts have become popular luxury vacation choices in the United Kingdom and North America, and 'digital detoxing' holidays are new selling points for many isolated island destinations.

"There is recognition in the industry of the 'new escapism', where people not only want to stay away from the physical home environment, but also to disconnect from the digital world of routine work and social life," he said.

The researchers analysed media references over the past decade.

"The first references we found on the topic of digital-detox holidays were a single article from 2009 and another the next year. Serious [media coverage](#) of digital-free holidays started in 2011."

Professor Pearce said the experience was first offered as an up-market product targeting the high-end travel market.

"By 2016 and in 2017 though, there was a change of emphasis, with digital-free holidays going from a niche product to one appealing to a broader consumer base," said Professor Pearce.

He said it was still a small market.

"It's not yet clear if this kind of tourism will be profitable for many commercial operators. We only know there has been a rise in media coverage which may indicate a growing industry phenomenon."

Professor Pearce said services offered would likely expand to include temporary disconnection, alternative activities, personalised digital-free experiences and special programs for certain groups such as a family with children or a group of work colleagues.

He said the study was limited by focusing on English language media.

"We know from previous studies that Asian countries have high levels of mobile phone use and strong expectations of connectivity. So studies within these groups and their attitude to being disconnected may show us a different picture," he said.

Professor Pearce said there is an opportunity in remote and regional Australia to explore the feasibility of partial disconnection, where the combination of isolation and disconnection could appeal to a special market, particularly if blended with interests such as astronomy [tourism](#) and outback photography.

More information: Jing Li et al, Media representation of digital-free tourism: A critical discourse analysis, *Tourism Management* (2018). [DOI: 10.1016/j.tourman.2018.06.027](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2018.06.027)

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