

# experience the new god

For many, adventure travel and other 'reality' experiences fill the need for a sense of the numinous

## Paul Mitchell

**I**SIT DOWN WITH a busy CEO friend in his boardroom. After weeks of planning, I've finally managed to catch up with him for a 15-minute personal/business meeting.

'Steve' is sitting across from me; 31 years old and at the helm of a busy and successful Australian DVD, video and audio distribution company. During a brief catch-up chat, I ask him what he's been up to. He tells me of his business travel destinations: Singapore, Europe, Japan...but he needs a holiday...

'I want to do Everest before I die', he says.

When I notice he's not joking, I ask how he intends to climb Mt Everest given the fact he's not much of a mountaineer. But he's just planning to see it, in the flesh; experience the rush of gazing upon the biggest natural outcrop in the world.

I look across the table at Steve. Dressed in his casual clothes, with unruly hair, he looks anything but the millionaire business man he is. He drives an old car; he doesn't even possess much of the technology nor entertainment art in which his company trades.

But if you could line up behind a window his travel destinations and the things he tells me he wants to experience before he dies, you'd have window shopping comparable to some of the finest London or Milan boutiques.

### 'Whoever dies with the most toys wins'

**D**O YOU REMEMBER the above 'proverb'? In the '80s it was on t-shirts and bumper stickers everywhere. Though it was meant as comic relief, the proverb came to sum up western society's zeitgeist for the decade. The idea that unbridled materialism and commercialism would allow us to buy more and therefore obtain happiness and security.

And upon achieving this we'd have won the game of life.

You might ask, what's changed? Isn't western culture enamoured by the same mindset today? As we debate the pros and cons of free trade, isn't it the case global capitalism is embedding the belief that 'the most toys' will bring the most joy?

My friend Steve was part of the Australian business scene which in the 1990s helped arm the public with an explosion of new toys (DVD and MP3 players; PlayStation 1 and 2; palm pilot; the low-cost mobile phone). These have been, of course, added to the old faithfuls: flashy cars, trendy clothes, boats and palatial houses.

There's no doubt these material items provide for many, as they have for centuries, the 'way, the truth and the life'. They fill today the spiritual void so many religious commentators say exists in contemporary society.

But I'd argue our 1980s proverb is changing. It's now becoming 'whoever dies with the most experiences wins'.

### Experience is the new god

**W**ITH THE SO-CALLED Generation X now in its early to mid 30s (depending on which sociologist you follow) it's members are obtaining large disposable incomes. This generation grew up with gadgets. We were the first generation born post-television. We saw the introduction of the hand-held video game; the microwave oven and the answering machine - even the remote control.

*'To win we must put our options into action. And because we're bored with our toys that means opting for experiences.'*