

Self, wonder and God! The spiritual dimensions of travel experiences

Donna E. Little

Christopher Schmidt

SUMMARY

There is a long tradition within travel and tourism research to focus on the commoditized aspects of functional exchange, consumer satisfaction, market share, and the tourist product. This has meant that economic, social, cultural and environmental elements have predominated, with tourism being seen as a mass phenomenon, and less focus being placed on the personal or experiential components that are part of the promise of travel itself. While diverse approaches and foci to the study of travel are necessary to understand the breadth of possibilities within the industry, the nature of the experience itself remains core to interpreting the scope and potential of travel and tourism and how it may impact on individuals beyond the immediate response to a location, an attraction, a product or a service. This paper focuses on revealing the subjective spiritual experiences that emerged for 10 leisure travelers who were on various independent journeys. Using a phenomenological approach that examined the meaning and nature of experience as it is lived, the findings revealed that leisure travel was a complex experience that could have spiritual meaning and impact on the participants. Specifically, analysis revealed the respondents: gained an enhanced awareness of self, God or 'other'; felt a greater sense of connection with something beyond the self; and experienced their spiritual leisure travel intensely, recognizing a range of sensations including wonder, awe, fear and release.

Key words:

spirituality; leisure travel; phenomenology; awareness; connection; sensation

INTRODUCTION

The tourist experience has been variously described. At times it is viewed as an economic enterprise, an exploration of self, a cultural phenomenon, a product or a consumer good. One's propensity to travel is seen to be impacted by individual characteristics that influence demand, access to destinations and resources of supply (e.g. Morley 1990), and the experience itself

involves a journey or sojourn to another place. While various efforts have been made to define and objectify the tourist and the traveler it is also acknowledged that the majority of emphasis has been placed on understanding the situational determinants of tourism, rather than the nature of the subjective experience itself (e.g. Ross 1994; Wearing and Wearing 2001; Wilson

Donna E. Little, PhD, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Sport and Leisure Studies at the University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand.
E-mail: dlittle@waikato.ac.nz

Christopher Schmidt, PhD, Lecturer in the Department of Sport and Leisure Studies at the University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand.
E-mail: cschmidt@waikato.ac.nz

and Little 2005). However, if it is accepted that tourism involves a complex and multi-dimensional experience (Prentice 2001), is understood and lived based on personal meanings and values (Suvantola 2002), and entails a complex relational interaction of individual, social group, the travel experience, site and activity (Wearing and Wearing 2001), then understanding personal meanings, structural frameworks and the inner worlds of participating individuals, is core to further unpacking the experience itself.

One aspect of the subjective experience of travel that has been recently receiving attention is the spiritual aspect of the experience. In the main this tends to focus on a particular experiential mode of the tourist experience where one is looking for meaning (Cohen 1979), and predominantly refers to the experiences of the pilgrim and/or the individual searching for spiritual enlightenment (Swarbrooke, Beard, Leckie and Pomfret 2003). Including visits to sacred sites, treks following the paths of religious symbolism, and visitations to retreats embedded in spiritual traditions, tourism and travel that is spiritual tends to be described based on the intentionally sacred or religious journey of the participant as they seek a site or experience that is revered either within one's own, or another's belief system (Digance 2003). While this represents a certain form of consumer travel, the spiritual experience of travel can be found beyond the intentional or the packaged. Indeed, the purpose of this paper is to report on the spiritual experiences of travel that emerged for leisure travelers who found in their varied experiences, personal spiritual dimensions that were neither collectively expected nor sought. Rather than being motivated by the spiritual, these individuals found a serendipitous, but intensely powerful holistic experience that they viewed as spiritual, reminding us of the complex potential of travel and tourism as a subjective experience that impacts on the whole of who we are.

SPIRITUALITY AND TRAVEL

Spirituality is a difficult concept to define and as a result our capacity to identify the spiritual benefits or understand the spiritual nature of experience has been hampered. The reasons for this are diverse but include the personal nature of the word spirituality. Looking across a range of disciplines including work, leisure, theology and counseling for example, spirituality is

generally seen to stem from the realm of individual human consciousness (Tassi 2000), is variously considered to originate with the individual, be tied to one's religious affiliation or represent an existential search for meaning of life and what we are doing (Krishnakumar and Neck 2002), and has been seen to foster a "sense of meaning, inner wholeness, harmony and connection with others, a unity with all nature and the universe" (Walsh 1999: 6). Often tied to religion and religiosity, spirituality can be viewed as a subscription of institutionalized beliefs or doctrines (e.g. Vaughn 1991), or more generally as the human response to God's call to a relationship with himself (Benner 1989). More commonly and inclusively, while it may incorporate religious structures with prescribed theology and rituals (Hinterkopf 1998), it is regarded as an individual phenomenon, identified with such things as personal transcendence, super-conscious sensitivity, and meaningfulness (Spilka and McIntosh 1996).

Evident in these definitions is the realization that, as with tourism, spirituality is not a singularly measurable or tangible phenomenon. Indeed Cornett (1998), who overviewed spirituality as the soul of psychotherapy, asserted that spirituality was authentic and affirming and may include a search for meaning, values, an understanding of morality, and a conceptualization of how the universe is organized and guided. When it is considered that tourism has variously been viewed as a search for existential authenticity "in which one is true to oneself" (Wang 1999), can include an existential mode as tourists seek enlightenment in another place or culture than their own (Cohen 1979), and can broaden or change individual's understandings of the world, oneself, another culture or people (Leed 1991), the relationship between tourism and spirituality becomes more evident and embedded.

While it is not the intention nor within the scope of this paper to review the various ways that spirituality is acknowledged within the tourism literature, it is pertinent to highlight that religion has been identified as a motive for travel (Vukonić 1996), that a spiritual search within the context of a physical journey is recognized as growing in popularity (Digance 2003), and that more generally, pilgrimages, religious tourism, spiritual enlightenment and sacred journeys have all recently received increased interdisciplinary recognition across the wider academic literature base. Cumulatively there is an increased awareness of pilgrims expressing their religious identity (Rountree 2002),

modern pilgrims voyaging to religious sites (Bar and Cohen-Hattab 2003), secular pilgrimages that evoke a quasi-spiritual experience (Peat 2003) and the problematic impacts these journeys can impose on the sacred sites involved (e.g. Barbour 2005; Digance 2003). Embedded within these observances is a realization that pilgrims are on a quest for the authentic (Culler 1988), intentionally aiming to find some form of spiritual enlightenment (Swarbrooke *et al.* 2003), potentially grasping for a sense of religious intensification (Barbour 2005), are engaged in an act of religious devotion (Peat 2003), and/or are desiring to be personally enriched through new experiences (Bar and Cohen-Hattab 2003). With such a foundation, it is realistic to propose that the goal of these journeys are often religiously focused or embedded in the sacred, and the outcome of spiritual enlightenment or regeneration (Bar and Cohen-Hattab 2003; Merton 1975) an expected bonus.

While such realizations are valuable, they continue to represent a particular approach to spirituality in tourism, grounded in interpreting the motivations of the pilgrim or the outcomes of a pilgrimage. To extend on this pool of empirical and conceptual literature this paper explores more general experiences of spirituality within leisure travel. Based on phenomenological interviews with ten respondents asked to describe a spiritual experience of leisure, these individuals described various personal travel which sparked in themselves an enhanced awareness of self, 'other' and a spiritual awareness of their place in the world. Directly supportive of James' (1902/ 1958) well-regarded understanding of religious and spiritual experience as being noetic, ineffable, transcendent and an epiphany, these descriptions demonstrate the deeply personal and meaningful impacts that travel can hold in the broader experience of tourism, and indicate the potential that personal, programmed and/or independent travel has in satisfying the whole person.

Methods

A phenomenologically-inspired interpretive approach was used in this study. Based on the idea of empathetic understanding (Weber 1958), unstructured in-depth interviews were conducted with ten individuals who self-identified as having experienced leisure travel that was spiritual. The focus of the study was embedded in understanding the lived experience of the participants,

collecting data from the perspective of the participants, and exploring what their actions or situations meant to them (Denzin 2001; Neuman 1997). Thus, all the interviews evolved from a single guided question asking the participants to explain their response when told the research was focused on spiritual experiences in leisure. From this foundation, explicit, interpersonal dialogues were elicited where the participants shared details of travel experiences they deemed to be spiritual and each was encouraged to explore the nature of their own experiencing. For example, follow up prompts included questions such as 'What was happening within you during the experience?'; 'How did the experience affect you?'; and 'What else was happening in the experience that is memorable for you?'. In practice this meant that the interviews were not so much on *why* an experience emerged as it did, but on seeking rich description of specific instances of travel they found spiritual, and the actions and contexts *in which* these emerged.

All the interviews were audio-tape recorded with the consent of the participants and each was reminded that they were free to turn off the recorder at any time throughout the interview. While this capacity was frontloaded, no participant made the request to cease or hold the recording, choosing instead to openly share their experiences and personal stories in an uncensored manner. Each interview subsequently lasted from one to two hours although informal conversations were also held both prior to and following the recorded interview. This was a valuable process as it enabled the development of a sense of rapport and helped to deconstruct some doubt regarding the interviews themselves. This was important as the conversations were reliant on the participants feeling free to discuss the personal and intimate nature of the spiritual experiences of travel, topics they did not always feel were socially welcomed to be discussed. As Ann¹ pointed out, "this is not something that you talk about in the tea room, but it's lovely to be able to talk about it so freely".

The ten individuals who contributed to the study were accessed through a range of means. Initially, a convenience sample (Patton 1990) was used as the researchers spoke with people they knew who were interested in the topic of investigation and self-identified as having experienced leisure that was spiritual. To expand the sample, a snowball technique was introduced whereby participants recommended

other individuals they knew who they felt might be willing and knowledgeable before a more purposive sampling technique (Patton 1990) was implemented in an effort to gain some diversity in the types of spiritual, leisure experiences that were described, the location and intentions of the experiences, and/or to access individuals who could provide a number of different experiences that they were willing to talk about that were spiritual (Becker 1992).

These techniques led to a sample group that consisted of seven women and three men who spoke about leisure travel that was spiritual and who ranged in age from 32 to 68. The spiritual beliefs of the group varied and included those who were practicing Christians, spiritual searchers, and individuals with no current religious affiliation. In addition the leisure travel they described included a range of domestic and international destinations, including travels to Nepal, Tibet and India, journeys to Hawaii, travels within Australia and New Zealand, an annual trip to Italy, a journey to Brazil and a surfing trip to Indonesia. In the main these travels were independent journeys, although the trips to Nepal, Tibet and India each included some aspect of pre-arranged cultural tour.

The data from the interviews was transcribed verbatim and analysed using the phenomenological processes of epoche, phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation (Karlsson 1995; Moustakas 1994; Polkinghorne 1989). Though it is not the purpose of this paper to unpack the analytical intricacies of these processes, it is relevant to note that phenomenological analysis is embedded in striving to describe the meaning of experience and not the causes of it. Thus, epoche encourages the researcher to lay aside expectations and presumed meanings and actively acknowledge the participants' personal meanings of experience; phenomenological reduction requires the whole of a phenomenon to be looked at in order to raise awareness of *what* makes the experience what it is; and imaginative variation provides access to *how* the experience is possible.

Combined, these three methods of analysis allow insight to emerge from the experience, and ultimately led to a description of the phenomenon of the spiritual experience of travel through an identification of the constituent components of the experience. While such a process led to a much wider range of results, understandings, and essences that describe the phenomenon itself, three core aspects of the spiritual experience of

travel are presented here, namely the participants' enhanced sense of awareness regarding self and other; a sense of connection beyond the individual; and an intensity of sensation within the experience itself.

Evident in even these three results however is the subjective nature of the research. Phenomenology is premised on the relevance of understanding the mind/body relationship and is based on understanding personal meanings. This means that not only are the outer structural frameworks of experience important to gauge, but the emotional and inner worlds of participants are also being sought. Such intent leads to two key problems from a research perspective. One, the techniques for recognizing the subjective are not embedded in any rigid method, nor do they propose to seek verifiability (Ihde 1977). Instead, the exploration of subjectivity aims to add understanding, colour and insight to a phenomenon rather than offer a measurable account of fact. Two, the reporting of phenomenological results is limited by both the capacity of the writer to describe the at times ineffable, and to present subjective understanding in a positivistic dominant world (Suvantola 2002). As such, the results presented must be viewed within the context of their intent to bring to the conscious the nature of individual's spiritual experience of travel where feelings, sensations and understandings are illuminated as description of the lived meaning of this aspect of the life-world (van Manen 1990).

RESULTS

Three core aspects of the spiritual experience of travel were identified, namely enhanced awareness of self and other; sense of connection; and intense sensation. These aspects of the experience were acknowledged as spiritual based on the perceptions of the participants themselves, and while they align with dominant interpretations of spirituality as found in the interdisciplinary literature, the meanings emerge from the group and were not imposed. To explicate the lived spiritual experience of leisure travel, snapshots of each of the three themes can be found in the words of the participants in the following discussion. While each is dealt with independently, it must be pointed out that the themes are strongly inter-related as the participants' sense of awareness was experienced through intense sensation and informed by the feelings of connection that were evoked.

Awareness

Across the range of travel experiences described by the respondents each discussed becoming more aware of the world around them or their place in the world; as well as an awareness of a power greater than themselves, variously referred to as the unexplainable, the universe, energy and/or God. Though the reasons for this emerging awareness were not sought, it was apparent that their travels were spiritual as they became more aware of who they were, their spiritual selves, and how they related in the wider world.

At a specifically religious level, some of the participants commented on their sense of awareness of God as part of their travel. Fran for example found she became “more in one with my faith” while traveling to local areas of interest, and Mary reflected that she felt closer to God and more aware of His everyday presence. For her the beauty and complexity of nature she found on an around Australia journey provided “evidence that God is all around us. He’s everywhere”. While Fran and Mary spoke of their awareness of God, others used different labels to reflect their understandings of a presence beyond the seen and tangible. John spoke of an enhanced awareness of his “spirit guides”, Rachel felt a “spiritual connection” while traveling in Brazil, and Mark felt a sense of “universality” on his surfing tour of Indonesia. For each, the experience of place, people or action highlighted a realization that served to help them “realize who I am” (John), “get in touch with my place in the world” (Pam), “enhance the spirit” (Phillip), or to be aware of “your spirit, your soul and yourself” (Penny).

In their experiences of travel individuals could become aware of the potentials of their own lives. For example, when traveling in Tibet, Penny reflected on the value of the simple Tibetan life, realizing gaps in her own living: “I tapped into my emotions and ... have come back more aware ... I recognize more what I should value rather than taking life for granted”. Similarly, after watching the sun rise over Haleakula in Hawaii, Ann became more aware of the blessings she had in life and found her appreciation was enhanced. As she noted, previous to this experience she tended “to treat life very cavalierly almost like I don’t realize how good it is, how good I have it”. Her spiritual experience in Hawaii led her to “reframe my perspective at that moment and bottle the experience and memories to use at a later stage”. For each of these women, these

experiences represented more than an opportunity or description of personal development, they were spiritual as they each developed insight not only into who they were, but an appreciation and gratitude of their connected place in the world. As Ann described, she “experienced a richness and diversity” that reminded her of the “sacredness of life” and her place in it.

Connection

Closely related to the theme of awareness was the participants’ realization of a sense of connection. As with awareness, this could present as a connection with God, with life, with self or with others but for each there was a feeling that the spiritual dimension of their travels were related to feeling some aspect of belonging, acceptance or place in the world.

Phillip, when explaining his journey through the north of Australia found a “connection with nature that I think we’re all searching for”. For him travels to natural places are “so powerful, a real wanton connection and a real peaceful connection as well”. Asked to describe these feelings more, Phillip explained his connection as “being in contact with the earth and not fussing about usual things. It’s that rawness, it’s that continuum, that you are part of it, just like the Aboriginal people were very much part of it, in touch with it”. In these travels he “felt part of the earth and part of nature ... and that’s what brings out the essence in me that is spiritual”.

Where for Phillip the wilderness provided a connection with nature, for Mary, nature allowed her to feel more connected to God (“I feel as though I’m connecting with God. He’s there”), and for Ann the natural beauty and experience of watching the sun rise provided her with “a sense of connection”. In part this was a “connection back to God”, but it was also a “connection back to the collective harmony” as she experienced this moment in hushed silence, but in a group of other independent and package tourists.

More broadly, Mark found that his surfing tour provided a sense of connection that was tied to nature, but also had greater implications beyond the place. In this experience he achieved a “connection with a bigger sense of identity and place in the world, connection to nature, getting perspective on my life and who I am and letting go of a lot of things that society tries to programme

into me". Moving beyond a singular notion of connection, Mark realized connection with self, with how he lived and with the world around him. Similarly, Rachel's journey to her ancestral homeland of Brazil elicited in her a sense of connection with nature, with her heritage, and with her self. As she described,

It was like I had come home, I'm connected with everything... connect with nature, with people, with self, with myself on a spiritual level, myself on a physical, emotional and psychological level. And I feel fulfilled... Even just walking it was like reliving the past and there was this spiritual connection to something that was part of the place, but part of the journey and being in a place my ancestors called home.

While nature predominated in the descriptions where the participants felt part of the natural world, built environments were also mentioned and connection included the feeling of being part of the wider world. For Elizabeth, the towns, art and history of Italy offered her a "sense of connection to place", for Fran, connection came from feeling closer to God, and for John connection emerged through the interpersonal relationships he developed while participating on his travels. Though different aspects sparked the sensation, the overwhelming perception for this group of individuals revealed that belonging, connection and feeling a part of something was core to the spiritual sense of their travel as they realized they were "part of this world" (Phillip) and not a singular being with no inter-relations.

Sensation

While the participants in the study felt connected and aware, the overall spiritual experiences of travel described also incorporated a level of emotional and physical reaction. For some this was a powerful expression as they struggled to deal with the fear the circumstance created, for others there was a reactive emotional outpouring of feeling. In addition, some participants' senses were engaged through the awe and wonder they felt about the environment and situation they were in. Cumulatively however, each described the experience of spirituality in their travel as being embedded and remembered through the sensations that were engendered and these formed part of the memory and meaning of the whole.

For example John described the fear he felt getting on the plane for his journey to India. Uncertain about what he would find and experience whilst there, he expressed how his spiritual experience was gestated in the very first moments of the journey:

I was sitting on the plane for the first four hours banging away at the in-flight entertainment system trying to suppress the fear because I've got no idea what I've done and I'm scared shitless, yeah, that was very profound and very much part of the experience. And that's what started the whole process, it's like a bit like a forest fire, that's the first little spark that started and everything has flowed from that, the meditation I now do and the awareness of my guides.

By comparison, Pam's trek in the Himalayas was experienced intensely in part because of her awe of the magnitude and beauty of the natural world around her. For her, this experience was spiritual,

because it's just so exaggerated and magnificent. It's amazing... You get an overwhelming feeling and it's almost like a power saying, 'this is what I created'... There's a little bit of helplessness like you're insignificant in this world. Everything's a lot bigger than you are.

Traveling through similar areas, in Penny's trip to Tibet she explained that she found her feelings and her sense of her own spirituality stood out as a result of the whole journey. In part this included the awesome beauty of the land, as well as the connection she felt with the history and spiritual nature of the local people. As she explained:

I tapped into emotions again... I think it's part of our society to put a lid on emotions... so just having the time and the opportunity... It's just a sense of awe about seeing and being part of a wonderful landscape or observing indigenous people of that place and how they relate to one another... it was really significant I think at that emotional level.

While the experience itself was not a comfortable one for Penny as she observed the "beggars, poverty and the Tibetan situation... the oppression and loss of their land", she realized not only how "lucky we are and remembering that and trying to live that in your life", but she also rekindled a sense of "warmth and

compassion, a sort of joy and tear to your eyes” that was spiritual in the enlightenment it brought to her sense of place in the world and her humanity.

Describing domestic travels, Phillip, Mary and Fran each explained the sensations they experienced bushwalking and traveling in the Australian outback which they deemed to be spiritual. As Phillip explained, for him being in wilderness or rainforest spaces allowed him to, “feel more comfortable, to know that you’re actually on track with your life or to recognize if there is something that needs addressing”. For him these natural environs represent a space that “is more real and I guess it also provides the time to fill the gaps if you like”. Similarly, Mary and Fran found the space they experienced in the bush helped them to connect with God and their path in life, but so too did the beauty of the spaces they were in. For Mary being in the bush “is peace”, a place where she does not “have to clock watch” and where she can “feel close to God”. As she described:

It's just beautiful, everything around is beautiful ... I just can't see how anyone couldn't believe in God when they are sitting there looking at his handiwork ... I am in this dry area and here, the birds are singing, the thistles are out in flower and I am able to look at it ... it makes me feel all churned up inside, but in a good way ... From the tip of my head down to my toes, it's like a wave of pleasure and peace.

For Fran the experience was at once “exhilarating” and “exhausting” but also a reminder to be “thankful” for the weather and the place, and for “being blessed”. Though she experienced “fear as bees swarmed” around her, she also appreciated the “wonder and awe of what I see” and in the experience realized “this is just so wonderful and so beautiful and it moves me in ways that I feel ‘wow’, this is creation and the creator”.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The outcomes expressed by these ten travelers stemmed from the context of their experiences and were neither consciously sought nor programmed for. Rather than setting out on a purposeful search for religious observance or to visit spiritual sites, this group of people represented leisure travelers who in their experiences realized aspects of their spiritual selves.

While the contexts and nature of their travel differed, each described affective and ‘extraordinary’ experience (Arnould and Price 1993) that entailed individuals knowing more of self, recognising a memorable moment, and describing a capacity to ‘see’ more than the physically evident, to rejoice in the connections they felt. These connections were variously experienced through an enhanced understanding of the self, of others, or of a universal attachment that may be to God, a universal energy, or the touchstone of the inner soul. Regardless of the label that was attached it was evident that across the various experiences noted, the spiritual dimensions of travel were recognized. Within the context of the journey that was personal, seen with fresh eyes, and lived in a variety of contexts of place and culture, individuals were spiritually aware and positively touched.

The combination of factors that combined to incite these travel experiences to be spiritual remains to be further explored. For some, nature played a catalytic role, inspiring spiritual awareness through the magnificence of the vistas that were offered. For others, cultural difference offered the opportunity for individuals to reflect on their own lives, values and to appreciate some core of what was truly worthwhile in life. For yet another, the combination of natural place (ocean), cultural diversity (Indonesia) and leisure action (surfing) united to awaken a feeling of connection with nature, life and others, while also awakening an awareness of the power of some transcendent force in human life. Not singularly inspired by any one component of his travel, it was the combined relationship of the whole that led to the experience being memorable, spiritual, and simultaneously, difficult to explain.

When considered in the light of previous research, the findings of this study indicate a range of important realizations and paths of further investigation. For instance, it is evident for these participants, that leisure tourism experiences can evoke a range of physical and emotional reactions that include spiritual benefits and impacts. Consistently the participants revealed an emotional response and awareness of sensation. That such findings emerged should be no surprise given other multi-disciplinary findings. For example, when exploring the nature of leisure experiences in general, researchers have often connected leisure with emotion or mood (e.g. Lee and Shafer 2002) and studies of spiritual experience have similarly recognized the affective dimensions involved such as peace, joy, awe

and reverence (e.g. Stringer and McAvoy 1991). Similarly, tourism as experience is recognized as involving complex, at times subtle, interactions that are both embodied and emotional (Suvantola 2002; Wearing and Wearing 2001). Thus, the personal and experiential findings presented here demonstrate that it is not just one's intended motivations that impact on the travel experience (Cohen 1979), but that the subjective and complex experience of travel can have emotional and spiritual outcomes that are unexpected and personally valued.

While a research focus on description and meanings of personal experience is by its very nature individualistic and seeks to explore how an experience is lived, this should not discount that personal experience can provide us with insight into the constituents that lie behind the subjective experience. Phenomenology, in its very purpose, sets out to disclose the elements of experience; to locate the experiencing person as a central focus of research and knowing (Crotty 1996; Moustakas 1994). By so doing, the opportunity arises to understand what it means to experience, to gain insight into the layers of meaning that constitute experience, and to see beyond that which we think we know, to acknowledge and learn from individuals' meaningful actions. In this case, the phenomenological investigation of leisure travel revealed not only that a range of travel experiences could be deemed to be personally spiritual, but that there were some shared constituents of the experiences that enabled these to be spiritual.

Increasingly the spiritual potential of travel and tourism are being identified from a consumer perspective. There are realizations that the 'pilgrimage' is a viable tourist package saleable to those with an eye for the different, an historical mindset or an interest in religious tradition. Sanctuaries and retreats have been established that provide the space and facility for paying clientele to spend time in contemplation, religious devotion, meditation or yoga, or to engage in Eastern or Western traditions of spiritual connection (see for e.g. Taggart 2001), and wilderness is being measured for its potential to offer spiritual insight and benefits that can be utilized in a more touristic manner. While each of these tap into a potential market gap and create opportunities for people to experience 'spiritual' tourism, more socio-psychological values are also being recognized as salient factors in customers' choices and experiences (Williams and Soutar 2000).

As this study indicates, value and desirable outcome comes not only from the service provided or functional capacity of travel, rather it can also emerge from within the nature and context of the experience itself and is informed by the emotional and spiritual connections that can be realized.

While the results suggest that the spiritual dimension of individuals can be impacted through travel, the relationship of causality remains to be investigated. Pilgrimages suggest that individuals intentionally seek connection with the spiritual self by consciously locating themselves in an environment, culture or historical forum to engage in an act of "religious devotion" (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary 2002). Yet, the spiritual experiences described by this group of ten individuals demonstrate that even the more mundane can provide a forum for epiphany. A journey into the bush, travel to foreign shores, trekking in nature, watching the sun rise, seeing something new and different, can all inspire an awareness of who we are, our place in the world and an emotional intensity that is connecting and transcendent of what was before. With such knowledge the potential of travel to engage the whole individual is highlighted and the possibility is raised for extending the value of travel beyond the programmed and intentional, to one of recognizing the significant meanings that may be found in the local and more everyday recreational journeys in which we engage.

Note:

¹ Each respondent was allocated an assumed name to protect their anonymity.

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