Spiritual hosting: An exploration of the interplay between spiritual identities and tourism

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SUMMARY

The facilitation of tourism experiences based on shared ideology is increasingly being seen to contribute to tourism worldwide. However, these studies have not considered informal networks that promote shared religious or spiritual ideology, such as that offered by the New Zealand HIT (Hosting Israeli Travellers) network. Whilst pilgrimage for spiritual goals has been given considerable attention by tourism researchers, these studies have exclusively focused on religion and spirituality as a motivation among travellers, rather than hosts or the effect of hosts' spiritual motivations on the host-tourist encounter. Drawing on exploratory qualitative research applying the Value-Stretch Gap-Analysis Model, this paper analyses the ideological characteristics of the New Zealand HIT network and provides insights into the motivations of HIT hosts. As such, this paper seeks to contribute insights into the interplay between tourism and spiritual identities by exploring the conceptual power of faith and spirituality in potentially shaping tourism production and consumption. The notion of spiritual hosting is introduced as an appropriate conceptualisation of the performance and construction of hosted experiences facilitated by the HIT network in New Zealand.

Key words:
spirituality; tourism networks; religion; Israeli backpackers; New Zealand

INTRODUCTION

Recent discourses in tourism have emphasised the importance of culture and identities on the consumption and production of tourism. Within these discourses, the extent to which hosts and guests gain a shared sense or appreciation of culture and / or ideology from their interaction has attracted increasing attention (see for example, McIntosh and Bonnemann 2006; McIntosh and Campbell 2001). Previous studies have not considered the sharing of religious or spiritual ideology however. Conversely, the relationship between religion and tourism has received considerable attention in the tourism literature, especially their spatial, sociological and economic interrelationship (Nolan and Nolan 1992; Rinschede 1992; Vukonić 1996) and the impact of tourism on sites of religious significance (Henderson 2003; Robichaud 1999; Sizer 1999). Much attention has also been focused on the theological, anthropological and cultural aspects of pilgrimage (Coleman 2001;

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Morinis 1983). Conceptually, modern tourism is seen as a contemporary manifestation of the traditional religious experience of pilgrimage (Cohen 1992; Graburn 1989). Prior research has thus sought to unveil the travel motivations behind religious tourism and explore the nature of pilgrimage experiences, or, other tourism experiences that may be considered 'semi-religious' (Collins-Kriener, Klio and Mansfeld 2004; Noy 2004), but it has not sought to examine this in the context of the host-guest encounter, especially from the perspective of the host.

In addition to an increased focus on religion, pilgrimage and tourism, there has been increasing interest in the notion of spirituality within the published literature, especially in the field of management psychology (for example, Ashmos and Duchon 2000; Burack 1999; Tischler, Biberman and McKeage 2002). Whilst the boundary between religion and spirituality is blurred, 'spirituality' can be differentiated from 'religion' as it is seen to be related to life's deeper motivations and an emotional connection to one's complete self, with God, or with a Beyond, rather than having any institutional connotation (Lips-Wiersma 2002; McCormick 1994). Whilst the notion of spirituality is generally viewed as multi-dimensional, and can involve religious motivations, Mitroff and Denton (1999) have argued that it can be summed up by the word 'inter-connectedness'. Neal and Biberman (2003) have argued that the increased emphasis on spirituality has arisen after several hundred years of Westerners having created a distinct separation between the outer world of global activities and the inner world of spirituality and religion. The authors argue that we are seeing a major reintegration of outer and inner life. Conversely, some argue that spirituality is a new form of consumerism (Lane 2001). Indeed, some previous studies allude to the nature of what tourists consume or experience through travel as quasi-spiritual in nature. One such example is the study by Noy (2004) with reference to Israeli backpackers. However, spirituality in tourism remains a somewhat neglected focus of investigation.

In sum, previous studies have focused exclusively on religion, pilgrimage and spirituality as a motivation among travellers, rather than hosts or the effect of the hosts' spiritual motivations on the host-guest encounter. The phenomenon of hosting networks that promote the sharing of religious or spiritual ideology is even more unusual. This paper aims to contribute insights into the interplay between tourism and spiritual identities in shaping tourism production and consump-

tion of the host-guest encounter. Specifically, the paper analyses the ideological characteristics of the New Zealand Hosting Israeli Travellers (HIT) network and provides insights into the motivations of HIT hosts.

THE STUDY

Hosting Israeli Travellers (HIT) is a network of hosts located throughout New Zealand that, through paid membership of the HIT organisation, provides Israeli travellers, mainly young backpackers, the opportunity, for a small nominal charge per night, "to visit local people in their homes, experience the way they live, learn more about their faith and explore their culture first-hand" (http://www.hit-nz.com). Most HIT hosts are Bible believing Christians who trust that the Jewish people are God's covenant people and want to meet and bless Israeli travellers who come to New Zealand. In this way, the HIT network creates a distinctive product or experience for Israeli travellers visiting New Zealand, potentially centred on religious and spiritual motivations and intentions. Almost 2,000 Israeli travellers join the HIT network each year. Further characteristics of the HIT network and hosts will be described below, as emerged from the research.

In order to understand the HIT network and the motivations of HIT hosts, exploratory qualitative research was undertaken applying the 'Value-Stretch Gap Analysis Model' (Mansfeld 1992, 1995, 2002). The Value-Stretch Gap-Analysis Model allows a structured qualitative or quantitative detection of an individual's attitudes and perceptions of a given socio-cultural situation or phenomenon. It is based on the assumption that individuals approach socio-cultural situations and phenomena in three levels of perception; a *tolerance level*, a *current situation level* and an *expectation level* (See Figure 1). The attitudes detected in each level and the gaps or differences between these levels expose individual/ group multi-dimensional attitudes towards the phenomenon. The Value-Stretch Gap-Analysis Model was used in the present study to design the questions posed in the in-depth interviews with HIT hosts. Thus, in order to detect HIT hosts' minimal benefits from hosting, respondents were asked on the *tolerance level,* "What are the minimum benefits that will keep you hosting Israeli travellers through HIT? Likewise, in order to obtain their perceived *current benefits* they were asked, "How do you currently benefit from your encounter with Israeli guests?" In order to gauge their *future expectations* from HIT hosting, respondents were

asked, "What benefits would you expect to gain from this encounter in the future?" Answers received for each level of the Model enabled the detection and analysis of motivations, experiences and expectations from HIT hosting and the differences (gaps) between them.

Between October 2004 and March 2005, thirty in-depth interviews were conducted with HIT hosts and agents. Roughly equal numbers of males and females were interviewed, approximately half of the total sample were located in the North and South Islands of New Zealand respectively, the majority of hosts (two thirds) were aged over 51 years of age and one third were retired. Thirty in-depth interviews were also conducted with Israeli travellers who were using the HIT network and staying with a HIT host at the time of the interview. As the objective of the current paper is to contribute a first evaluation of the nature of HIT hosting and the motivations of HIT hosts, the findings of the interviews conducted with HIT hosts only is reported here. The notion of *'spiritual hosting'* is offered as an appropriate conceptualisation of the performance and construction of hosted experiences facilitated by the HIT network in New Zealand. This will now be described using findings that emerged from the interviews with HIT hosts.

STUDY FINDINGS

The HIT network - some background characteristics

HIT was established as a hosting network in 1999 by an Israeli backpacker visiting New Zealand who later took up residency in New Zealand and became a born-again (Messianic) Jew. His idea was to evangelise his new faith by creating a meeting place between local Messianic Christians and Israeli travellers. He explained, "I wanted to show that there are people around the world that because they believe that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, they will do anything to help the Jewish people." Having been a former backpacker in New Zealand, and being aware of the Israeli travellers' trend for budget accommodation and travel, he assumed that they could be an appropriate 'captive market' for such an evangelistic encounter. The premise of this enco-unter was to expose travellers to the principles and ideology of believers in the covenant of the Jewish people and the role of Jesus (Yeshua[1]) in preserving the identity, continuity and centrality of Jews in the history of mankind. The exposure had to happen without them thinking that the network was attempting to 'convert' them to Christianity by 'disguising' the real intentions

Figure 1
THE VALUE-STRETCH GAP-ANALYSIS MODEL
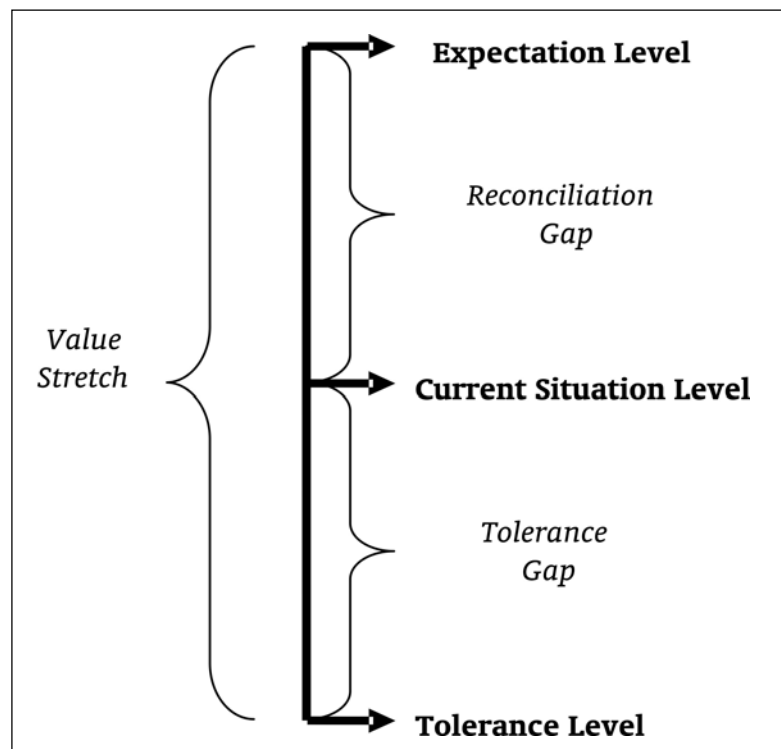
Source: Based on Mansfeld (1992).

through establishing a hosting system. Establishing this system involved constructing a network of New Zealand Messianic hosts who were willing to open their homes to the Israeli backpackers offering them a very low cost tour of the country. The network also therefore offers a cultural experience for Israeli travellers, although its prime aim is still spiritual. "The problem with backpackers is that they stay at hostels and get to meet travellers but they don't get to know the locals; that is why HIT is so attractive; they get to see how the people live here; they learn about the kiwi culture." The idea of being hosted all over New Zealand free, or almost free, of charge appeals to the psyche of the Israeli backpackers (Noy 2004), and thus, prospects of a 'win-win' situation jump started the full operation of this hosting network.

The network started off with 166 hosts in the first year and quickly expanded to include 238 hosts in 2004/5, spread both in the North and South Islands of New Zealand. However, the number of hosts is not static; it is dependent on yearly recruitment efforts and the 'drop out' rate of hosts due to their changing circumstances. Hosts are recruited predominantly through church meetings by the founder of the network, joined by an Israeli born-again Jew who is also an active preacher of Messianic belief. Both appeared in churches all over the country and managed to convince local believers that, by hosting Israeli travellers, they will be both blessing and blessed to God's chosen people. In order to avoid accusations about the network potentially discriminating between Israeli and non-Israeli travellers, the manager of this network decided to operate it as a 'travel club' for Israeli travellers. One year after the establishment of the network, the manager decided to encourage all hosts to start charging a minimal fee of NZ$5 per person per night to cover the expenses involved in hosting the Israeli backpackers. This decision initiated a discussion amongst hosts in the network as to whether the imposed NZ$5 fee violates the essence of the ideology upon which the network was founded. This marked a turning point in the development of the network transforming it from 'purely spiritual' to 'semi-spiritual' and involving various 'commercial' components, including hosts that operate regular hosting facilities and charge common market fees for backpackers.

In addition to offering hosting services, HIT also offers its members other services on a commercial basis. These include the opportunity to book various attractions and adventure tourist activities at a discounted price.

These discounted services, together with the low cost accommodation, offer HIT members a substantial low cost package that makes HIT an attractive network from the travellers' perspective.

Of the thirty hosts interviewed, twenty eight of them are Messianic believers who do not consider themselves 'religious'; rather, they are believers in God and Yeshua (Jesus) the Messiah. In fact, two thirds of respondents said that they are not, or are no longer, associated with a particular Church. They base their spiritual practicing mostly on individual discourse with God and with the Messiah and tend to disregard the institutionalised side of religious life. As such, the term "spiritual" rather than "religious" was preferred by the majority of the hosts in describing their hosting practice. The other two are Jewish New Zealanders. The majority of hosts have been involved with the HIT network for the last 3 years. Most of them act as hosts only and others also function as regional agents and distributors of HIT membership cards. The majority of hosts are committed to hosting all year round. However, some hosts prefer to be partially committed by hosting only occasionally and according to changing circumstances in their lives.

Becoming a HIT member involves purchasing a NZ$70 membership card allowing each backpacker to stay with HIT hosts either for free or for a minimal charge of NZ$5-10 per night. It also offers members discounts when booking various tourist services or attractions and when booking other accommodation. Apart from the official role of HIT as a hosting network, members are often assisted by hosts in all sorts of ways such as in car purchasing, care maintenance, route planning, or solving health problems. Although the prime motivation of guests in joining the network is saving money, and that of the hosts is spiritual in essence, both seem to gain much more out of this encounter. For example, both hosts and guests reported other benefits, mainly in the way of cultural and social experiences, and the opportunity to partake in additional tourist activities. The average length of stay of HIT members is 2-3 nights with each HIT host. The length of stay is determined both by the expressed wishes of hosts and the travel plans of each Israeli backpacker. Hosting conditions vary from very basic accommodation such as a tent outside, a mattress on the floor and shared facilities, to high standard self-contained units. Guests are expected to mingle with their hosts and to allocate time for discussion and exchange of ideas, beliefs and experiences.

Hosts' involvement with the HIT network

The most common and certainly the most prominent reason for becoming a HIT host is the spiritual motivation to evangelise and bless the Israeli backpackers. The majority of the hosts expressed this need in various ways indicating that it is not only the *wish* to do it, but it is the *Lord's commandment,* and thus every believer is expected to follow the Lord's wish. As hosts reported,

"As a child, I always read about Jews and Judaism; all my friends thought that I was crazy but now I know that God directed me to do so. HIT gives me the opportunity to speak and hear about the Jewish people and to strengthen my love to them."

"God's given us the desire."

"I believe that those who bless Israel will be blessed and those cursing Israel will be cursed."

"My mum was a dedicated believer but could not host because my dad was against it. Before she passed away, she left me a sum of money to be spent on hosting Israelis. I am lucky that my husband is a believer too and we can both enjoy doing it."

Moreover, some of them justified their decision to host as an act of 'compensating' the Jewish people for the long history of Christian denial or accusation against Jews, Judaism and the centrality of God's covenant people. As one of the HIT hosts openly said, "We not only host Israelis because they are Jews and God's covenant people, we also do it to compensate them for years of Christians' false accusations, and prejudice against Jews that stems from replacement theology." This was similarly expressed in a letter published in a Messianic newsletter by a HIT host who stated,

"You, the Jewish people, are the brothers and sisters of Yeshua and we have done exactly the opposite. We have persecuted you, killed and murdered you, we have rejected you, robbed you and raped your women, we pushed you out of one country to another, causing you a great deal of suffering throughout history! Please forgive us!" (Damkani 2005: 4).

However, hosts also expressed various personal reasons for becoming a host, for example, relating to their own life experience or interests. For example, one of the hosts expressed his wish to compensate the Israelis for his involvement in the late 1940's with the British Navy blockade, obstructing Jewish holocaust refugees from emigrating to Palestine and taking part in the formation of Israel as their new homeland. That host recounts,

"I was serving in the British Navy during the British blockade of Palestine in an effort to obstruct Jewish holocaust survivors from emigrating and starting a new decent life in their own land. Since I was actually serving on one of the blockading gun ships I have been living with a very bad feeling ever since. Now it is my time to compensate for my past unacceptable behaviour."

Other examples include the expressed personal interest to come to know Israelis and, through them, improve their knowledge of Israel as a state and society. Hosts also expressed their personal interest in hearing about peoples' travel experiences which sometimes stimulate their own travel motivations. As one of the hosts said, "I am fascinated by travel stories and experiences – they stimulate my appetite to travel."

Although the prime motivation to become involved in HIT was spiritual, it was important for people to get involved also for other reasons, either institutional or personal. Since spirituality is the major driving force, it is expected that people will persevere in their hosting commitment and will not be 'put off' by the potential day-to-day difficulties involved, for example, the intrusion of their personal and family privacy. As such, the network is supposedly offering its guests not simply accommodation, in the narrow sense of the word, but a comprehensive highly committed and highly hospitable experience.

When asked about the importance of HIT as a network, hosts described how the network provides a platform for them to collectively reach the Israeli travellers in order to fulfil their spiritual motivations. All claimed that without the HIT book which specifies names, addresses, telephone numbers and other important details about them, their wish to host and evangelise the Israeli travellers would not have been fulfilled. In this sense, the HIT network is a facilitator, without which, fulfilment of their spiritual and other motivations could not have been accomplished. Another perceived importance of the network was the guarantee

that HIT hosts will only be exposed to Jewish or Israeli guests, not any other nationalities, in relation to fulfilling their spiritual motivations. This was also seen, to a lesser extent, in relation to the personal safety of hosts. As one host explained, "Being a single parent living with my daughter, it is important to me know that I am not at any risk by hosting. By asking for a HIT membership card, I can take details of these kids and thus I feel protected."

Obviously, Messianic believers have various alternative ways to express their support and to fulfil their motivation to bless the Israeli people. The question though is why the HIT hosts chose 'hosting' as a preferred means of doing so? The interviews disclosed the benefits of hosting in this regard. These were the ability to obtain recognition from their fellow believers through making them aware of their active evangelism through hosting, the opportunity for close encounters with Israelis, the opportunity to expose their faith first-hand to the young Israeli generation, to better understand the way of thinking of young Israelis vis-ŕ-vis Jewish religion and society, and through hosting, establish close friendships which will hopefully assure that their exposure to the Israeli people will not be temporal but ongoing. However, also of benefit is the opportunity to offer not just hospitality and goodwill but a safe shelter for the Israeli backpackers. Interestingly, the concept of shelter was mentioned at two levels; a national one and a personal one. 'National' in the sense that these backpackers come from a very unsafe environment to New Zealand, perceived one of the safest countries in the world, and 'personal' in the sense of offering all sorts of help and protection, way beyond simple accommodation. One host, for example, described how, "I have two daughters their age and I know the feeling of a mother when her kids are wandering thousands of miles from home; so my home is a safe shelter for them."

HIT hosting – A Value-Stretch Gap-Analysis

The *tolerance level* in the Value-Stretch Gap Analysis Model refers to the most fundamental requirements of participating as a host in the HIT network. Being a network founded on the ideology of faith and spirituality, one would have expected the predominant *required minimal benefits* to be spiritual in nature. Thus, it was expected that the minimal requirements would

centre on the ability to evangelise and to help Israelis in any possible way as part of their commitment to God and to Yeshua the Messiah. One host explained, "My most important benefit is being able to tell my guests about my faith, God, Yeshua and my love of Israel." Evangelising in the mindset of HIT hosts does not mean an effort to 'convert' the Jewish / Israeli hosts to Christianity. On the contrary, as expressed in an intervi-ew by a prominent spiritual leader, the wish and theological command of Messianic Christians is to convince Jews to remain Jewish. This is because Messi-anic Christians believe that Jews are God's covenant people and that salvation will only come if Christians bless and help Jews, thereby preserving the Jewish faith. In other words, evangelising is an act of teaching and conveying information about how important it is to undertake this task (McLeod 02/02/05, interview). The end result should be awareness of how important the Jewish people are, and on the centrality of Yeshua as the Messiah who will actually bring salvation to the Jewish people, and to those Christians who follow God's commandment to bless and protect the Jewish people. It is important to note that evangelising, according to Messianic beliefs, is not an option but a commandment. Thus, HIT hosting enables them to perform God's wish. Since it is a commandment and the essence of their theological practice, one would have expected that evangelising and gaining spiritual experiences out of hosting would form the *tolerance level* in this case.

Although spiritual requirements were observed as the dominant prerequisite benefits from hosting, intere-stingly, findings revealed that hosts in fact share a wi-der array of prerequisite benefits that they seek through their participation in the HIT network. These include spiritual but also social, cultural and economic benefits. The social requirements included the ability of hosts to socialise with their guests, make friends with them and to understand the socio-political ideologies of Israeli society.

One host explained, "Meeting the chosen people is im-portant for me. I want to have an opportunity to make friends with them." Quite surprisingly, cultural expec-tations as prerequisite requirements were elaborated only in terms of learning about Israeli culture and not about cross-cultural exchange. Being a spiritual net-work, economic requirements were hardly expres-sed at this level, except for two cases where hosts admitted that, for them, the prerequisite for hosting is both spiri-tual and economic.

Findings at the *current situation* level of the Value-Stretch Gap Analysis Model show that the basic requirements sought in terms of spiritual benefits are actually met. As one of the hosts said, "God put his love in us like a mother hen, like a lioness." In other words, hosts do believe that they are both blessing and being blessed by hosting Israeli travellers. All of them expressed strong spiritual experiences and fulfilment of their prerequisite minimal benefits. One host described, "I feel that God blessed me with more kids. The second they come into my house, I feel the energy and that these are my kids. Most of them give me much more holy joy than my own real kids do. When I speak to them about God's words, I feel they are protected and safe." The construct of safeguarding the Israeli travellers is an actual manifestation of their blessing of the Jewish people. In this sense, it adds another dimension to the way that hosts manifest their commitment to God and Yeshua – not only by accommodating them but literally protecting them by providing a 'safe shelter'.

Although the main motivation for hosting was spiritual, respondents also currently manage to gain other benefits. For instance, they expressed significant social benefits based on their interaction and communication with guests which often enriched their social life. For example, one host explained, "Since my husband passed away, I am very lonely and my guests fill this gap." The other current experience expressed by hosts is cultural exchange. It is interesting to note that whilst hosts only expected in the *tolerance level* to gain cultural benefits through learning about Israeli culture, they currently also share an *exchange* of cultural experiences. A quote from one host demonstrates this,

> *"I really like the evenings with my guests. They wish to give me a good time by cooking a meal for us all. They are so proud of their Israeli food and also want to taste Kiwi dishes which I happily cook for them too. Our meals look like a feast of smells and cultures."*

In practice, cultural exchange has various dimensions. One example is making cultural comparisons between the Israeli culture and the New Zealand culture. Another example is the preparation of joint meals based on both New Zealand and Israeli cuisine. Cultural exchange takes place also in the form of learning both New Zealand and Israeli slang, etc.

Although being marginal, the current economic benefit was mentioned by two hosts at the current experience level. This was clearly an exception among hosts however. From the in-depth interviews, it became clear that, although most did not openly admit it, some of them do benefit economically from hosting. Somewhat different from the message conveyed by the manager of the HIT network, in practice, it becomes evident that the HIT network does have some non-spiritual gains (Yaakobowich 10/11/04, interview). In fact, the findings revealed three types of hosts according to their *current* benefits from HIT hosting. The first type refers to HIT hosts who were motivated by spiritual reasons only and their actual current experience centres predominantly on spirituality. The second type of hosts still expected to gain only spiritual benefits but they have to charge their guests a minimal fee to cover their hosting expenses. All claimed during the interviews that denying them the ability to charge a minimal fee would restrict them from being able to host because of their personal economic situation.

In such event, it also denies them the ability to evangelise which, as discussed earlier, is crucial to their theological and ideological beliefs. The third type of hosts is those who alongside their spiritual benefits also identify the economic opportunities from hosting. As such, hosting, for them, not only involves charging a minimal cost per person per night, but also they often charge above the recommended per person per night rate (NZ$5) and tend to saturate their homes with more guests than the maximum number advertised in the official HIT membership book. The combination of overcharging and over-accommodating can lead to the conclusion that an economic motivation among some hosts does exist. Although only two out of the thirty hosts interviewed openly admitted that they are motivated also by economic benefits, clearly, all those who over-charge and over-accommodate are doing it for the same reasons.

In relation to the *future expectations* level of the Value-Stretch Gap Analysis Model, HIT hosts seem to be satisfied with what they have already obtained through their hosting experiences. This conclusion stems from the fact that they did not express any new benefits which had not been detected in the *current situation* level. They expect to gain the same spiritual benefits in the future. It is important to realise that many of those hosts cater for hundreds of Israeli travellers for almost six months during the summer season.

This is quite a major undertaking bearing in mind that these guests literally live with their hosts causing a real intrusion on their privacy for an extended period of time. Some of these hosts accommodate five to ten guests every night. One would have expected that some kind of hosting fatigue would cause a certain drop-out rate from the network. While a certain drop-out rate does exist, the majority of hosts interviewed did not report any such fatigue. On the contrary, most of them said that towards the end of the season, they become concerned and fear being left alone until the following season. As one of the interviewed hosts described, "I wish I was able to host more Israelis in my home and bless more of them."

The only complaint some of the hosts made was that occasionally they don't have enough time to share their faith with guests and to evangelise. As one host commented, "They get back from their tracks too tired and what they really want to do is go to bed." This 'drawback' was expressed mainly by those hosts located in close proximity to adventure tourism activities and, mainly in areas specialising in tramping. As such, guests' intense physical activity in such areas requires them to recreate and recharge their physical batteries. However, this need is in obvious conflict with the main evangelising role of their hosts. Consequently, and in order to avoid future role conflict, hosts in such areas expressed their wish to find a way to convince guests to stay longer and in order to allow them to fully fulfil their spiritual needs.

In addition, *future expectations* were also expressed in the way of future social benefits. In this respect, more quality time to socialise with their guests was observed as a future requirement. Once hosts discovered the social benefits they seemed to require a more holistic hosting experience, one which balances the spiritual benefits with the social ones. These future social benefits include enriching their social encounters by having the opportunity to spend more social time with their guests. Moreover, in this level of the Value Stretch Gap-Analysis Model it was discovered that what they lack, and would like to accomplish in the future, is meeting their guests also in Israel. This finding proves that the act of hosting, in the case of the HIT network, unintentionally, has extended to become a more holistic experience. Thus, the inevitable conclusion is that HIT is no longer a means to better serve God and Yeshua, but has evolved into a short and long-term platform for the attainment of socio-spiritual experiences.

In terms of their future cultural expectations, most of the hosts had both short- and long-term expectations. In the short term they expressed their wish to facilitate cultural experiences and to expose themselves in a more comprehensive manner to Israeli cultural symbols. In the long-term, they expressed their hope to end up visiting the Holy Land to experience Israeli culture first-hand. As one of the HIT hosts said, "the Jewish state fascinates me – I want to learn and hear more and more about it."

Quite interestingly, when looking to the future, some of the hosts also had economic expectations in the way of exchanging their willingness to host for free with some domestic and / or farm help. For example, one host reported that, "I would have loved them to have cut the lawn; this will save me some money which otherwise goes to my gardener." This wish for some sort of in-kind economic help does prove that, for at least some of the hosts, the cost of hosting creates some concern and as a result they want to cover some of it by another form of payment. Apparently, an 'in-kind' form of payment is seen to be more 'correct' since it does not involve money transfer. Thus, hosts cannot be accused of charging or of running a commercial business in disguise.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the Value-Stretch Gap-Analysis prove that the HIT study is a unique case in terms of the 'gaps' generated between minimal requirements, current situation and future expectations. The interviews with HIT hosts showed that there are no substantial gaps between minimal requirements from hosting and those they currently gain. This means that most of their basic expectations are met and that they have a strong feeling of actual fulfilment in relation to their original motivations. Also, no substantial gaps were found between current and expected benefits with regard to their motivations. However, some future benefits differed from those expressed in the current and prerequisite levels. In particular, the expected future benefits revealed the wishes of hosts to evolve the net-work into one based on a more balanced holistic *exchange* of benefits, especially with regard to the spiritual, social and in-kind 'economic' benefits received from guests.

The case of the HIT network reveals an interesting and unique form of hosting motivation; that is, one based predominantly on spirituality. There is no evidence of such hosting practice or ideology in the tourism and hospitality literature to date. As such, whilst the total number of travellers being hosted by the HIT network may be small in comparison to tourist numbers in New Zealand generally, the network provides a unique case study in the scholarly exploration of the relationship between tourism and spirituality. 'Spirituality', as used here, and as defined by the hosts themselves, implies a holistic experience perhaps moderated by religious belief, although distinct from the practice or institutionalised nature of religion (Kinjerski and Skrypnek 2004; Lips-Wiersma 2002; Quatro 2004).

This type of '*spiritual hosting*' offers not simply an accommodation form but a more holistic and unique tourist experience to those using it. Unlike backpackers and other forms of accommodation, it creates a 'win-win' situation for both hosts and guests and provides substantial added value to the overall travel experience. For the hosts, hosting implies predominantly spiritual benefits in the form of pursuing God's wish that they bless the people of Israel and to help them in any way they can, thus fulfilling their deep motivations as followers of God's commandments.

As the results of this study show, spiritual hosting also entails a much more comprehensive experience involving social, cultural and, to a more limited extent, economic benefits in addition to their fundamental spiritual expectations. Thus, the case study presented here also contributes to increasing academic discourse concerning the complex, personal, purposeful and multi-dimensional nature of the tourism experience. As such, 'spiritual hosting' as a concept merits further investigation in terms of its characteristics and implications not just from the hosts' perspectives, but also from the guests' experiences, allowing comparative analysis of this hosting form and, in particular, further exploration of the role and interplay of spiritual motivations and religious ideologies in the host-tourist encounter.

Note:

[1] '*Yeshua' is the Hebrew name of Jesus and means 'salvation'. This is the only term used by Messianic (born-again) believers when they refer to Jesus.*

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