



## Pro-environmental tourism: Lessons from adventure, wellness and ecotourism (AWE) in Costa Rica

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### ABSTRACT

Adventure tourism, wellness tourism, and ecotourism (AWE) are growing faster than the global tourism growth rate. There is growing evidence that these forms of travel have disproportionately positive effects on reflection, personal meaning, and pro-environmental outcomes in relation to other forms of tourism. This exploratory case study of an AWE experience is driven by three primary questions: 1) what are the characteristics of the AWE experience that travelers feel are most unique in relation to other travel experiences?; 2) how do visitors describe the influence of AWE on their attitudes, knowledge and behavior?; and 3) are there any characteristics of AWE that can be adapted, adopted, and scaled up to inspire pro-environmental behavior across the tourism industry more broadly? To address these questions, interview data from AWE travelers are inductively analyzed. Findings suggest three principal mechanisms motivating travelers to take up healthy new actions, lifestyle changes, and environmental stewardship pledges: immersive experiences, identity reinforcement, and meaningful reflection opportunities during and after the trip. This study provides an empirical complement to a growing body of conceptual research into the precursors of pro-environmental behavior after nature-based travel. The presented analysis invokes theories that have yet to be fully applied to AWE travel, notably, writings that assess the eudaimonic elements of the tourism experience. Given the indication that AWE inspires pro-environmental action, this research identifies new paths for developing our understanding of how the characteristics of AWE can be adapted, adopted, and scaled up to inspire pro-environmental behavior at other niche tourism operators or across the tourism industry more broadly.

#### Management implication:

- On-site programming and post-trip communications should reinforce desired identity, provide immersive experience, and prompt eudaimonic reflection.
- Reinforcing pro-environmental identity can lead to similar behavioral spillover into social and environmental stewardship actions upon returning home.
- Characteristics of AWE demonstrated here can likely be further adapted, adopted, and scaled up to inspire pro-environmental behavior across the tourism industry more broadly.

### 1. Introduction

Adventure tourism is a growing niche market that is increasingly integrated with other forms of travel, including wellness tourism and ecotourism. Across the globe, the development of these three niche forms of tourism is occurring faster than the average global growth rate for tourism, with the popularity of combined “eco/adventure/nature-focused resorts and yoga retreats now rivaling luxury spa and beach locations” (Spafinder Wellness 365, 2016, p. 4). While there is a tendency to view the motives of those participating in tourism as primarily hedonic in nature, that is, associated with seeking pleasure and

avoiding pain, these forms of tourism may in fact be motivated by other eudaimonic factors (e.g., intrinsic motivation, self-reflection, and personal growth) and involve experiences that are not entirely pleasure-seeking or pain-avoidant in nature (Filep, 2016; Malone, McCabe, & Smith, 2014).

One thing that these eco/adventure/nature-focused resorts and yoga retreats clearly share is a connection to, and interaction with, nature. An environmental focus to travel is associated with stronger pro-environmental behavioral outcomes for tourists (Ardoin, Wheaton, Bowers, Hunt, & Durham, 2015), as are the opportunities for meaningful reflection (Ballantyne & Packer, 2011) that are provided by

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adventure tourism, wellness tourism, and ecotourism experiences. Despite these known relationships, no research to date has explored these mixed forms of adventure tourism, wellness tourism, and ecotourism (AWE) from the traveler's perspective in order to better understand in their motives for participating in AWE travel, the aspects of the experience that most impact them, and how such experiences influence their post-trip attitudes and behaviors.

In this paper, we explore a case of adventure-wellness-ecotourism (AWE) that has been recognized for its ability to inspire its clients to pursue additional pro-environmental behaviors upon returning home. Specifically, we interview recent guests at Bodhi Surf + Yoga (hereafter Bodhi), a surf and yoga camp located outside of, and operating within, the Bahia Ballena National Marine Park in Costa Rica. Integrating nature, adventure, and wellness travel, this tourism project actively promotes pro-environmental behavior among its guests during the trip as well as through post-trip resources, including an Ocean Guardian stewardship pledge, a social media-based Ocean Guardian contest for showcasing innovative conservation practices at home, and an informative Ocean Guardian action-resource email campaign that suggests pro-environmental actions at home.

This exploratory case study of AWE is based on interview data from individuals who signed an Ocean Guardian stewardship pledge after completing a stay of one week or longer at Bodhi Surf. Our analysis of this interview data identified three primary mechanisms through which this AWE experience inspires travelers to take up personally and environmentally healthy actions such as personal lifestyle changes and environmental stewardship campaigns: *immersive experiences*, *identity reinforcement*, and *meaningful reflection*. In the process of analyzing these themes, we found empirical evidence of AWE facilitating the types of eudaimonic experiences that are known precursors to pro-environmental behavior. This exploratory analysis thus paves the way to quantitative research extending these findings across a broader array of adventure tourism, wellness travel, and ecotourism experiences and will thus be of broad interest to researchers working with these forms of travel.

## 2. Literature review

This section succinctly reviews scholarly perspectives on the three niche forms of tourism that are brought together in this case study – nature-based adventure tourism, wellness travel, and ecotourism. Given the fact that numerous volumes exist on each of these types of tourism, our review is brief by any standard, yet it nevertheless accounts for the dominant thinking related to each of these types of tourism and directs readers to more comprehensive writings on each niche. Lastly, in light of the findings outlined below, we add an additional section reviewing the relevant writings on eudaimonia in the context of travel. Attention to eudaimonia has also grown dramatically in recent years, as evidenced in several articles and edited volumes on the topic, which we reference. Yet given the focus of the present study, we prioritize writings on eudaimonia that relate in some way to AWE.

### 2.1. Nature-based adventure tourism

Nature-based tourism has grown from a 2% share of the overall tourism market in the 1980s to as much as 20% in recent years (Buckley, 2009; Newsome, Moore, & Dowling, 2012). In 2016, 1.2 billion tourists crossing international borders, and of those, approximately 240 million international tourists visited nature-based destinations (UNWTO, 2016). Estimates of overall visitation to protected areas has grown to eight billion per year (Balmford et al., 2015). Tourism in natural areas is thus a massive industry that remains on a trajectory of further growth in coming years (Newsome et al., 2012).

Adventure tourism is a niche form of tourism strongly associated with visitation to natural areas (Newsome et al., 2012). Buckley (2006) defines adventure tourism as “guided commercial tourism where the

principle attraction is an outdoor activity that relies on features of the natural terrain, generally requires specialized sporting or similar equipment, and is exciting for the tour clients” (Buckley, 2006, p. 1). Adventure tourism is often merged with ecotourism, as in adventure-cultural-ecotourism (Fennell, 2014) or nature-eco-adventure-tourism (Buckley, 2000). These adventure activities often involve the promotion of stewardship of those natural resources upon which the activities depend, for example the Access Fund for rock climbers and both the Surfrider Foundation and Save the Waves for surfers.

Much of the writing specific to surf travel has focused mostly on-site preferences and experiences, particularly from a serious leisure perspective (e.g. Barbieri & Sotomayor, 2013; Sotomayor & Barbieri, 2016), or otherwise explore local resident perspectives on surf tourists (e.g. Usher & Kerstetter, 2014). Yet adventure tourism is not only about the hedonic pursuit of fun. It has also demonstrated the ability to inspire pro-environmental behaviors. For instance, scuba divers (Dearden, Bennett & Rollins, 2007) express greater concern for, and intentions to engage in, coastal and marine conservation efforts as a result of their experiences. While yet to be studied, it is reasonable to expect other types of nature-based adventure tourists, like surfers, to exhibit similar pro-environmental concerns motivated by reflection upon recent experiences in nature (e.g., see chapters in Taylor, Varley, & Johnston, 2013).

### 2.2. Nature & wellness travel

A second niche form of tourism that is increasingly combined with nature-based adventure travel is wellness travel (Spafinder Wellness 365, 2016). Wellness travel is inconsistently addressed in the scholarly literature, often arising in discussions of health tourism, holistic tourism, medical tourism, spa tourism, and so forth (e.g., see Voigt, Brown & Howat, 2011 for an excellent review of the distinctions among these various terms). Here we adopt a broad definition of wellness tourism in practice as “travel associated with the goal of maintaining or enhancing one's personal well-being” (GWI, 2015). This includes travel for which wellness is the sole purpose or motivating factor for the trip and destination choice, as well as travel for which maintaining wellness is a secondary purpose pursued while engaging primarily in other types of travel. Wellness travel is now a major market segment. It involves about 6% (524.4 million) of all domestic and international trips, accounts for about 14% (\$438.6 billion) of all domestic and international tourism expenditures, and has a projected growth rate of more than 9% per year through 2017, nearly 50% faster than overall global tourism growth (GWI, 2015).

While scholars have explored a wide array of wellness travel experiences, including urban day spas featuring beauty treatments and massage therapy (e.g. Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009), health and wellness travel increasingly occurs within the context of nature-based tourism, including but not limited to visits to parks and protected areas (Ferrari & Gilli, 2016; Voigt & Pforr, 2014), Shinrin-yoku therapy in forests (Konu, 2015), health tourism in coastal areas (Kruizinga, 2017), and stays at adventure and ecospas in Latin America (Smith & Puczko, 2014). Mindfulness and reflection, such as that promoted by yoga and wellness tourism destinations, is strongly associated with pro-environmental concern and behavior (Barbaro & Pickett, 2016; Jacob, Jovic, & Brinkerhoff, 2009). When they occur in nature, the evidence is clear that such forms of travel lead to improved health and wellness outcomes, and as a consequence, there is a clear upward trend in the use of natural resources and natural assets in wellness travel (Smith & Puczko, 2016; Voigt & Pforr, 2014). While this suggests that wellness travel in nature may also lead to more pronounced post-trip pro-environmental outcomes, these outcomes have yet to be fully explored in the context of wellness travel, and less so in the context of AWE.

### 2.3. Ecotourism

Finally, the niche form of tourism that is perhaps most associated with nature is ecotourism. Ecotourism, defined as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education” (TIES, 2017). This form of tourism is highly associated with promoting environmental stewardship and is the primary motive for international visitation to Costa Rica. While the vastness of the scholarship on ecotourism precludes an extensive review here, of particular relevance to the present study is the ability that nature-based ecotourism has demonstrated to broadly influence post-trip, pro-environmental behavior (Powell, Kellert & Ham, 2008, 2009; Ballantyne, Packer & Sutherland, 2011; Ardoin et al., 2015; Ardoin, Wheaton, Hunt, Schuh, & Durham, 2016) and to motivate support for conservation (Powell & Ham, 2008; Ardoin et al., 2016), particularly when travel experiences provide opportunities for reflection (Ballantyne & Packer, 2011). Researchers have recently drawn attention to the ways that self-reflection and personal meaning, the two topmost features of eudaimonia, manifest during travel experiences, as there is evidence that these characteristics of a travel experience may serve as important precursors to subsequent pro-environmental behavior (e.g., Lengieza, Hunt, & Swim, 2019). While there is evidence that prompting reflection promotes similar outcomes from ecotourism (Ballantyne & Packer, 2011), eudaimonic experiences and outcomes have yet to be fully explored in the context of ecotourism, and they are heretofore unexplored in the context of AWE.

### 2.4. Eudaimonia & travel

In recent years the concept of eudaimonia has received much attention in field of positive psychology, where it is defined variously as the orientations, behaviors, experiences, or functioning that allow human flourishing and fulfillment of basic, intrinsic motives (Huta & Waterman, 2014). The growing literature on eudaimonia emphasizes two primary features: self-reflection and personal meaning (e.g., see Huta & Waterman, 2014). Attention to eudaimonia among tourism scholars has likewise grown dramatically (e.g. Filep & Pearce, 2013; Voigt, Howat & Brown, 2011; Filep, 2016; Nawijn, 2016, Nawijn & Filep, 2016). Much of this research focuses on how tourism leads to overall psychological wellbeing or quality of life and thus defines eudaimonia as an outcome. However, recent work has suggested that in situ reflection and meaning during travel itself can also serve as catalysts of personal growth and broader pro-social or pro-environmental outcomes (Ballantyne & Packer, 2011; Kirillova, Lehto, & Cai, 2017), thus defining eudaimonia as a characteristic of the travel experience itself (Lengieza et al., 2019). Despite growing interest, much work remains needed to explore the relationships between particular tourist experiences, eudaimonic self-reflection, personal meaning, and the subsequent pro-environmental behaviors that can result from such precursors. This study sheds light on these issues by exploring ideas associated with eudaimonia in a case study of AWE forms of travel.

### 2.5. Study objectives and research questions

Confirmatory research on the influence of nature-based tourism on post-trip behavior is still nascent (Ardoin et al., 2015). Even less writing exists on post-trip outcomes of AWE; therefore, an inductive approach was implemented in this research. The inductive approach is appropriate since we seek to understand how AWE leads to particular behavioral and attitudinal outcomes, that is, information about the meanings for participants and the processes associated with this AWE experience. Specific research questions that guide this exploratory research include the following:

- What are the characteristics of AWE that travelers felt are most unique in relation to other travel experiences?

- How do visitors describe the influence of AWE on their attitudes, knowledge, and behavior?
- Are there any characteristics of AWE that can be adapted, adopted, and scaled up to inspire pro-environmental behavior across the tourism industry more broadly?

## 3. An example of AWE in Costa Rica

Due to its image as a “green republic” (Evans, 2010), ecotourism got an early start in Costa Rica (Honey, 2008). According to the Costa Rican Institute of Tourism (ICT), 2.7 million international tourists visited the country in 2015, and of those, 1.9 million visited a national park or nature preserve (ICT, 2016a). Between 2014 and 2016, ecotourism was the primary motivation for 66.3% of international visitors to the nation during the same timeframe (ICT, 2017). Yet adventure tourism and wellness travel are quickly emerging as complimentary niche forms of tourism for visitors to Costa Rica, with 55.3% and 35% of tourists between 2014 and 2016 citing these motivations, respectively, for their visits to the country (ICT, 2017).

According to tourist surveys collected in Costa Rica's two primary international airports, 16.1% of visitors who arrived via San Jose and 11.3% of visitors who arrived via Liberia engaged in surfing while in Costa Rica (ICT, 2016b, 2016c). The figures for the same points of entry are 8.3% and 10.3% respectively for visitors engaging in spa and/or wellness activities (ICT, 2016b; 2016c). In 2015, ICT launched Wellness Pura Vida, a dedicated strategy to market the country as a wellness destination (ICT, 2017). This strategy promotes wellness activities as occurring in harmony with both ecotourism and adventure activities (e.g. surfing) being pursued in natural environments, positioning Costa Rica as a principle destination for AWE travel. An effort to improve our understanding of this merged form of tourism is thus very timely.

Bodhi Surf is an exemplar of AWE. Located in the town of Bahía Uvita, Bodhi offers yoga instruction on the premises and surf instruction inside Bahía Ballena National Marine Park. Since opening in 2010, the owner-operators of Bodhi have initiated the Ocean Guardian pledge, a post-trip action resource that “highlights 10 concrete actions that one can take on a regular basis to help reduce their impact.” Bodhi later initiated the Ocean Guardian contest to promote further “innovation in marine conservation and environmental protection.” Former visitors are asked to post YouTube videos outlining post-trip efforts to act and engage others in more responsible and sustainable practices. In 2015, the Ocean Guardian Newsletter was launched, a monthly informational email outlining “actions that you can easily take in your own household, as well as additional resources on current environmental issues and policy.” More recently, Bodhi's efforts attracted corporate sponsors, and their efforts have led to their 2016 designation as a Certified B Corporation. This recognition is based on their efforts to drive pro-environmental behavior change through nature-based tourism, and they are one of just 24 travel-related businesses in the 2000-business B Corps portfolio. In 2017 and 2018, Bodhi was recognized with the B Corps *Best for the World Award: Community* for exemplary local outreach efforts.

The rationale for selecting Bodhi as the focal case for this study involves its demonstrated ability to inspire pro-environmental behavior. Through the combined efforts of their Ocean Guardian pledge, contest, and newsletter, Bodhi successfully promotes responsible consumption, voluntary simplicity, and pro-environmental awareness and stewardship. Their efforts to address the Sustainable Development Goals were showcased at the 2016 Ecotourism and Sustainable Tourism Conference (Belville, Iarmolenko, & Hunt, 2016). Bodhi thus provides an ideal context in which to explore our research questions that revolve around the ways that AWE in and around natural areas can inspire meaningful reflection leading to pro-environmental behavior change once tourists return home.

#### 4. Methods

This study involves an exploratory case study of an AWE project that seeks to understand the emic, insider perspective of AWE travelers to Bodhi (Beeton, 2005). Given the behavioral outcomes demonstrated through the annual Ocean Guardian Contest, Bodhi is also a critical case of AWE's ability to promote pro-environmental outcomes (Yin, 2017). The inductive approach adopted in this case study seeks patterns through empirical observation, and it then looks for the theories that best accounts for the observed patterns (Bernard, Wutich, & Ryan, 2016), namely the theory associated with eudaimonia.

Our data were gathered from interviews with individuals willing to share feedback about their recent AWE experiences at Bodhi. Recent Bodhi clients – aged 18 and over – who engaged in surfing activities within the Bahía Ballena National Marine Park in Costa Rica were purposively sampled and invited to participate in an interview. The owners of Bodhi agreed to provide a sampling frame of their former patrons who both participated in a six-day experience and who subsequently signed the Ocean Guardian pledge. The recruitment process began with an invitation email explaining the purpose of the study and requesting participation in an interview via telephone, Skype, Apple Facetime, or Google Hangouts. Over the course of three months, the recruitment email was delivered three times.

Inductive research involves the testing of theoretical ideas against new cases until saturation occurs. Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) determined that saturation in qualitative interviews typically occurs within 12 interviews, with basic meta-themes present in as few as six interviews, a determination confirmed in recent tourism research (Koh & King, 2017). In the present study, meta-themes began to coalesce within the first six interviews, though an additional five interviews were conducted. At that point, the authors agreed that little new information was being yielded in the final two interviews and that theoretical saturation on the question of interest was reached (Bernard et al., 2016). These 11 interviews provide the empirical evidence analyzed in the remainder of the paper.

The semi-structured interview data were gathered in a manner consistent with Spradley (2016). Interview questions solicited information about travel preferences and experience, background on the decision to travel to Costa Rica generally and to stay at Bodhi in particular, the details of the experience at Bodhi, and new activities done upon returning home from the trip. Key informants were advised that the interview could last up to 1 h, though the interviews averaged approximately 40 min in length. All internet interviews were conducted via audio-only. Interviews were transcribed verbatim by the second author. Initial analytical memos were also developed at this time. Along with the original audio recordings, these transcriptions and memos were incorporated into a project file in MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software.

The authors then employed qualitative, open-coding to inductively assess the interview data. Thematic coding was conducted in an iterative fashion (Saldaña, 2015). Techniques used for identifying themes included word repetition, linguistic connectors, similarities and differences, metaphors and analogies, 'indigenous' categories of information related to surfing and yoga, and theory-related material in the interviewees' transcripts (Bernard et al., 2016). The second author conducted the first cycle coding pass and developed an initial codebook (MacQueen, McLellan, Kay, & Milstein, 1998). At this point, the text corpus was converted into retrievable, labeled segments based on full sentence coding units. Both authors collaborated in a second cycle coding pass to further organize the data according to the primary themes present in interviewees' responses. This involved collapsing first pass coding labels into broader thematic categories within the MAXQDA software. Given both authors' familiarity with the corpus of text, a formal inter-coder reliability assessment was not conducted. Any coding inconsistencies were discussed and resolved collaboratively.

#### 5. Results & analysis

Our analysis identified three recurring themes among interviewee data that we label *immersive experiences*, *identity reinforcement*, and *meaningful reflection*. Numerous exemplar quotes that led us to these thematic labels are presented in the subsections below. Immersion within Costa Rican culture and environment was cited, though more frequently referenced was the immersion that occurred in the culture, lifestyle, and community created within Bodhi. With respect to identify reinforcement, interviewees sought out Bodhi as a means of reinforcing their own identities and values. This does not mean their identities were not challenged during the on-site experience, particularly through the challenging surf and yoga-related activities, yet the immersive experiences ensured reinforcement of identity. Both immersion and identity reinforcement in turn led to reflection on personal lifestyle as related to the sustainable practices and level of community engagement experienced at Bodhi and, most emphatically, on adopting more voluntarily simplistic practices upon returning home. In the detailed discussion that follows, we provide numerous examples of the evidence provided by interviewees related to these themes, and we then relate this evidence to relevant scholarship perspectives on AWE and its outcomes.

##### 5.1. Theme #1: Immersive experiences

In our efforts to explore the distinguishing characteristics of the Bodhi experience, we found that many interviewees had difficulty providing a single, nomothetic explanation for their own experiences. Many interviewees brought attention to the ways that Bodhi engages with its external community of Bahía Uvita. A 32-year-old woman from Cleveland who traveled with her husband explains:

“At Bodhi it's much more of a community...so it was different [from other travel experiences]. Bodhi seems way more invested in their surrounding community. They're invested in their organization, their company, but they were really a part of the community. I know all the things that they do to better the community. And you know one of the things that's just included with your week is like this walking tour of the, of the town. And that was wonderful...we learned so much on that, that we didn't know before already...it was really great...that was the thing I was probably the most struck by, is how invested they are in the community, how much they give back.”

For this traveler, the opportunity to engage with the local community and with the ways that Bodhi contributes to local community development efforts was a critical aspect of the experience.

With respect to community, a 29-year-old male visiting Costa Rica states, “spending time down there at Bodhi, watching them how they interact with their community ... obviously, they run a business but they're also very philanthropic in what they're doing.” This type of inspiration is characteristic of the nascent writing on travel philanthropy (Ardoin et al., 2016; Goodwin, McCombes, & Eckardt, 2009). This scholarship indicates that immersion has an important influence on pro-environmental attitudes and knowledge, and it is the precursor experience most likely to result in new philanthropic actions (Ardoin et al., 2015).

For another 40-year old woman from Minnesota, the experience involved an ideological immersion. Bodhi exhibits a pro-social commitment to local community well-being that directly inspires visitors:

“I just learned about some of their approach, and their investment in their community, and the socially conscious efforts. It just became really apparent that this was not only a really well-run business, but a group of individuals who were really committed to the work they were doing...They are in it because it's something that they really believe in and they want to do good in the world.”

Gratification results from the experience of interacting with authentic and efficacious social entrepreneurs who place emphasis on

socially and environmentally altruistic actions, a form of eudaimonic motivation related to seeking out virtue (Huta & Ryan, 2010). Not only are the Bodhi staff engaging in behaviors that come at a cost to their own time and money (Venhoeven, Bolderdijk, & Steg, 2013), but they are inspiring others to do so in the process.

Still another visitor, a 35-year-old female with little surf or yoga experience, brings attention to immersion that occurs within an internal community created at Bodhi:

“...definitely around that sense of community. The fact that the dinners that they hosted together for everyone who was staying there, that were part of the Bodhi surf package. That was really different. Just that idea of its a really healthy and well-made meal, and, everybody coming together, like it was family dinner...all of the owners, even the staff who worked there, one of their other surf instructors came over. It was just a very welcoming warm family meal. That definitely really stood out.”

Similar sentiments echoed by other Ocean Guardians collectively indicate how Bodhi's visitors experience immersion on multiple levels. At the broadest level, they choose to visit Costa Rica, a well-known AWE destination. Yet they also seek to support particular businesses that contributes to, and that are integrated with, the well-being of the local community. Lastly, the sense of community facilitated by, among other things, the layout of the shared housing in close quarters with the owners, as well as the taking of shared group meals, support and reinforce immersion into a particular set of shared values.

Visitors often found it hard to articulate the most influential aspects of the experience. As one 40-year-old female notes, “it was the whole, I couldn't tell you one thing. But they have a really, really good thing going down there. For sure...The whole thing...it's very cohesive...it all fits together...they kind of take you in.” For some individuals, what brings them in is the sense of connection brought about by the experience at Bodhi. A 40-year-old female traveling with her husband states, “I think connection is a big one, for me anyway...I like seeing new things but I, more than just seeing new things I like learning about things and connecting with people and connecting with places...for me, a quality travel experience involves the connection piece.” Bodhi provides this visitor with an experience that is “self-concordant” with her own goals for connection and meaningfulness, qualities associated with eudaimonic self-realization (Huta & Waterman, 2014; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999).

Contrasting with hedonic goals associated with pleasure attainment and pain avoidance, perhaps the motivations most often associated with tourism (Malone et al., 2014), eudaimonic experiences involve growth, meaning, self-direction, and strong linkages to well-being contexts (Huta & Ryan, 2010; Huta & Waterman, 2014). These experiences are also an important precursor to engagement in pro-environmental behavior (Venhoeven et al., 2013). The addition of wellness travel and ecotourism components to adventure tourism may be providing further opportunities for reflection and sense of meaning. Despite growing emphasis elsewhere in tourism (e.g. Filep, 2012; Filep & Pearce, 2013; Filep & Deery, 2010; Pearce, Filep, & Ross, 2011; Knobloch, Robertson, & Aitken, 2017), eudaimonic relationships have not previously been explored in the context of adventure tourism by itself, or in the collective context of AWE. Our findings suggest such relationships warrant further exploration and application in future research.

## 5.2. Theme #2: Identity reinforcement

Bodhi begins to reinforce a desired identity for travelers even before they arrive, while they are still deciding on their travel destination. A 34-year-old French visitor makes her own inferences about the appeal of Bodhi by stating, “There's enough different places where they do yoga and-and surf experience...The reason I picked them is because it was really this kind of environmental attitude that interested me. I would think that is why people pick them in the first place.” Another

woman speaking on behalf of herself and her husband verifies that, “A lot of the things that Bodhi stands for are important to us too.” Another solo female traveler stated, “it was really nice to be with like-minded people down there and just sort of, it always reinforces what you're trying to do when you see others very passionate about that.” While no single “thing” was routinely identified, Bodhi appears to reinforce personal identities related to being a conscientious consumer and traveler, as well as being a person who has adopted a socially and environmentally responsible lifestyle.

Given that travelers may arrive with elements of these identities in place, there might be potential for Bodhi to only “preach to the choir” with further pro-environmental messages. Based on interviewee comments, however, this is not always the case. For instance, a 35-year-old IT consultant says:

“I was inspired to put more effort into knowing more about the decisions I'm making when I'm spending money to go on a vacation, when I'm purchasing a product...It made me think, ‘I know this stuff, I'm educated, I know the impact that certain types of business has on the world. So, am I really doing everything I can?’ I left there with kind of a renewed, ‘I can do better’ [attitude]. I don't have to be perfect, but I can be better. Now I do pay a lot more attention to plastic, and really try not to purchase things that involve plastic. And then I started composting when I got home as well...And just thinking more about the clothing I purchase, and whether or not its being responsibly made. I think that even though I already knew a lot, it just reminded me that the stuff isn't really that hard, and, I can make a little bit of effort to make decisions that align more with what I care about.”

Rather than reinforcing what is already done, AWE in this context leads to an inspiration to contemplate and engage in additional, new behaviors.

For another male traveler also already involved in social enterprises in southern California, Bodhi inspired a renewed commitment to pre-existing efforts. He states:

“I was already really active in public service, so it's always heartening for me to find other people that are doing that. It definitely helps me because it can be a lonely feeling sometimes when you're in the nonprofit world and everyone else just seems to be interested in living a blind life...when you find people that are really awake and aware and they're working hard for their community, it definitely bolsters you... I recommend them highly, and it really meant a lot to me the commitment to the local community...I really believe strongly in that myself, I run my own non-profit, so if I can give my money to people that are doing the same thing that's, that's what I wanna do.”

What's more, this reinforcement extends beyond environmental concerns into socio-cultural realms as well, as one female visitor notes:

“So that's one thing, and then secondly is the, ha- feeling like I have a local experience. So, feeling like I'm actually experiencing a place and learning a little bit something, a little something about it, about its people, about its culture...It felt like it kind of attracted those types of travelers, who, you know even though they may be traveling with somebody else, they're there to experience something new, and learn about other people.”

Tourists are thus finding inspiration through a connection to social (i.e. group) identities as environmentally responsible individuals and conscientious consumers.

As another female visitor indicates, “when you can find a small business, or any business, that has the good of the world at its core, it's something that I want to support and be part of.” She elaborates further:

“I felt like our money was going toward something to better...it wasn't just about us having a vacation. It was about bettering an

organization, or a community, or a country...that makes a difference to me. Like if I have the choice between vacationing somewhere that is just about their profit versus a place like Bodhi, I'm definitely going to pick a place like Bodhi...it's just much more rewarding."

Across different interviewees came a consistent echo of similar, positive evaluations of the Bodhi experience. Despite a difficulty in articulating precisely what it is, there is consensus that something different is going on at Bodhi than at other tourism destinations. It was in the activities that a 34-year-old male from Albuquerque found inspiration: "I really thought the mission was cool...using surf and yoga to bring awareness to some of the environmental pieces." This and the above quotes provide evidence of a "behavioral spillover" effect (Truelove, Carrico, Weber, Raimi, & Vandenberg, 2014), that is, this AWE experience spills over into other socially and environmentally responsible spheres that reinforce both the personal and social identities as well as the motivations of those who have made the Ocean Guardian pledge. The distinct roles of personal and social identities, and their influences on motivation via behavioral spillover, have yet to be explored in the context of tourism and warrant further exploratory and confirmatory analyses.

### 5.3. Theme #3: Meaningful reflection

Interviewees found themselves reflecting on insights acquired during their AWE experience. Those new to surfing reflected on how the experience of learning and being in the water provided an opportunity for greater understanding of environmental concerns. States one female traveling with her husband:

"It was just so much more than just trying to get us to stand up on the surfboard...We just felt like we were learning about the bigger picture of surfing...learning about the ocean, and learning about ocean conservation, and learning about the waves... it just was all so connected. It just, we just felt... like everything that we learned was all connected to this bigger picture...being outside and being in the world and experiencing things from an active standpoint rather than just 'sit on the beach, lay in the sun'...We like to be, be active within those environments."

These comments suggest that active engagement with particular environments can heighten the experience and provide opportunities for inspiring future pro-environmental interests (Ardoin et al., 2015). To the extent that these free-choice experiences yield meaningful insights obtained through "reflective engagement," they are even more likely to engage with content (Falk, 2011; Knobloch et al., 2017; Oliver & Raney, 2011) and support pro-environmental actions (Ballantyne, Packer, & Falk, 2010, 2011).

For other visitors, AWE provoked thought about how their own lifestyles compared to the highly sustainable practices on display amongst the Bodhi team. One visitor states, "the word that comes to mind is transforming. It was such an incredible experience, like all around...We were just so in awe of them, as individuals...I felt like I was doing good just by being there...Its really rare that you go on a vacation, or, a beach vacation and you feel like you're doing good." The influence of the Bodhi team helped highlight what is important in life, as a 40-year-old female who traveled alone to Bodhi notes, "...realizing that wow, you can have that type of travel and tourism...and it can also be done the right way, is very encouraging. It was encouraging to me to see that was existing...I would hope that more people can replicate that." These comments provide further evidence Bodhi inspires visitors through an authentic and meaningful experience, concordant with other research demonstrating visitors' needs are tied to authentic and meaningful eudaimonic experiences (Filep & Deery, 2010; Huta & Ryan, 2010; Knobloch et al., 2017).

Interviewees also reflected on the contrast between the temporary lifestyle adopted at Bodhi and their lifestyle back home. As one 21-year-

old female from the U.S shares, "it's very interesting when you come back from a trip that's so transformative, and you come back...The United States was so different. And people are just not as aware, you know?" Another woman makes a link between immersive aspects of the Bodhi experience and the reflection it provokes, stating, "I think it's a really unique experience to get to go down there for a week and just immerse yourself in what it feels like to exert your body in a way that is challenging, but is how it should be...when I came back, and I'm like 'oh my god I'm back to sedentary,' like having to sit...*this* is not how I should be living...*that* was how I should be living." Such quotes again indicate a degree of behavioral spillover from the Bodhi experience back to home (Truelove et al., 2014). Whereas the challenge of scaffolding such meaningful experiences back into daily life before decay sets in has been noted in the literature (Ardoin et al., 2015), research supports the use of post-trip resources like the Ocean Guardian program that enable continued reflection in support of future action (Ballantyne & Packer, 2011).

Another common topic of reflection among Bodhi visitors relates to consumption patterns. Many visitors were sensitized to new tactics for reducing unnecessary consumption during their stay. For instance, a 32-year-old woman traveling with her husband shares her observations:

"I think about little things at Bodhi that I noticed. They cut their dish soap with water...Which works just great, and you go through it so much slower...Those little things that I saw, especially in the kitchen, how things would get saved, or used...And also water usage...We were actually aware of standing under the shower...not taking luxuriously long showers...My husband and I were both really aware of that...it just makes me more conscious of not being wasteful and being resourceful with what we have."

Visitors are inspired to look outside of their travel preferences to also reflect on their activities and consumption patterns at home.

Invoking ideas of sustainability, one woman traveling with her husband for their 10th wedding anniversary mentions:

"In terms of the sustainability issues, and the environment, and conservation, I think that those issues have been something that have definitely been more of a forefront in my mind [since being at Bodhi]. I would say that we've never been *UN-concerned* about the environment, but I think that by being there through some of those education pieces...upon coming back we thought, 'Ok there's more we can do!' There's more, and we want to be teaching our kids particular lessons. And we want to become better, more conscious consumers...My husband and I have had a lot of thoughts around our behavior...I feel like we need to sit down and map out our consumption...of the way that we consume things, and the types of things that we use, and what do we cut out? And what decisions do we make?"

Another female visitor makes a similar statement:

"I think I already did think about the environment, um, it just, it just made me realize that, there's more I can be doing. And, you know, just staying kind of blind to different things isn't really a good excuse. Or, just, because its hard, or its, you know, a little bit more money. Those types of things, just kinda realizing that, I did wanna do more."

And yet another female visitor describe reflects on lifestyle choices this way:

"I keep reusable bags in my car, but I would say I only bring them into the store 50% of the time. Instead of, you know, then I get like the paper bag or the plastic bag at the store. Um, and like, since I've been back I've been much more aware of bring those bags in. Just that little thing."

Through educational efforts and through direct example, Bodhi staff provoke reflection among visitors, many of whom hail from the United

States, about their culture's lifestyle as the per capita global consumption leader. One male visitor acknowledges, "its kinda neat to sorta get away a little bit and, and I don't know, go, you know live a little bit more simply, but you get a lot more out of it." Living with a lower ecological footprint does not result in a diminished experience; on the contrary, it may in fact yield more psychological reward.

Yet in addition to a clear message about the need to simplify lifestyles and reduce consumption rates, the tone of the message is critical to how visitors receive such information. As a female visitor points out, "never do they feel like it was preachy, which I appreciate. It was just like 'this is what we do.' And they don't pretend to be something that they're not, they just are very true to themselves." Another former visitor echoes these sentiments:

"I felt like I learned a lot, in terms of tourism development in that area. And about making more sustainable choices, as a consumer, just seeing all the little ways they live with as little impact as possible. But they weren't kind of shoving it in your face, or making me feel bad about it. It was there if you wanted to know, but not in any way preachy. So, I just kind of felt like they were really living their values, and making it available to people who were interested."

As it turns out, this is a largely unique experience for the interviewees, most of whom have considerable international travel experience. One visitor and her husband describe their reflections:

"And I think because of those connections with them, we just reflected a lot on why...we felt that something was very unique about this vacation experience...we were trying to then try to figure out what is it about this vacation experience that is making it feel this way? And how do we find this anywhere else around? And we were contemplating whether we *could* find that anywhere else. And we didn't know!"

Another quote provides evidence of how these experiences carry forward to influence thinking and behavior at home:

"I don't think it was even conscious when we were there but when we came back we have been really reflective on what impacts that trip has had on us, and how we want to continue feeling the way that we felt when we were there...We just felt good by being there, and we want to continue to feel good about the decisions that we make after coming home."

Yet another solo male traveler explains his reflections on consumption this way:

"I've been trying to be a bit more, more aware of kind of my water usage...I kind of have a bottled water addiction. I know I'm not supposed to say that. But I, don't really care for tap water. And its always on my mind to kinda make a change, and I can't say that I've made the change that I want to yet. But it definitely has me thinkin' about it. And, kind of, trying to think of different ways to kind of, you know maybe use a little bit less. I also tried to, and I, these are tiny things, none of these are real major, you know, for me. But really thinkin' about how to reuse stuff a couple times."

Related to these sentiments, various researchers have created quantitative voluntary simplicity scales (e.g. [Iwata, 2006](#)), though such scales have yet to be used to measure changes in voluntary simplicity resulting from a wide range of travel experiences ([Hall, 2011](#)). The qualitative data presented here imply AWE inspires significant quantitative changes in voluntary simplicity, a finding that awaits quantitative confirmation.

## 6. Conclusions

This research sought to answer three research questions. First, regarding the characteristics of AWE that travelers feel are most unique in relation to other travel experiences, these AWE travelers heavily

emphasized the opportunities the travel provided to reinforce desired identities, the extent of immersion provided by this AWE project, and the meaningful reflection that the experience prompted for them. Second, regarding the question of how visitors describe the influence of AWE on their attitudes, knowledge, and subsequent behavior, we found that feelings of achievement, mastering a challenge, and awe all contributed to the deeper emotional experiences characteristic of eudaimonia ([Huta & Waterman, 2014](#)). Given strong support from recent findings that post-trip resources and prompted reflection are the most fruitful places to invest ([Ardoin et al., 2015](#); [Ballantyne & Packer, 2011](#); [Wheaton et al., 2016](#)), moving forward, a particular research interest should be the most effective means of fostering mindful reflection – both through on-site programming and via post-trip communications.

Third, with respect to the question of what characteristics of AWE can be adapted, adopted, and scaled up to inspire pro-environmental behavior across the tourism industry more broadly, the qualitative data and inductive analysis presented here implied important new directions for future research. First, this analysis revealed multiple mechanisms through which AWE leads to identity reinforcement at both the individual and group (i.e., social) levels. This indicates an opportunity to apply psychological and social psychological theories to pro-environmental behavioral outcomes of not just AWE travel but also of outcomes of broader forms of tourism ([Brewer, 1991](#); [Tajfel, 1974](#)). Furthermore, with identity reinforcement being critical to the type of free-choice learning characteristic of nature-based and AWE tourism ([Falk, 2011](#)), opportunities to reinforce identity in other responsible forms of travel may lead to similar behavioral spillover into social and environmental stewardship actions upon returning home ([Truelove et al., 2014](#)). Further research could test these relationships beyond the AWE sector.

Yet perhaps the most valuable contribution of this inductive work is the revelation of eudaimonic elements as central to the AWE experience. While the body of literature relating eudaimonia in tourism is growing (e.g. [Filep, 2012](#); [Pearce et al., 2011](#); [Filep & Pearce, 2013](#); [Matteucci & Filep, 2017](#); [Lengieza et al., 2019](#)), it is only in very recent years that any attention has been given to these ideas in the context of AWE (e.g. [Voigt, Howat, & Brown, 2011](#); [Barbieri & Sotomayor, 2013](#); [Sotomayor & Barbieri, 2016](#)). Our findings confirm that theory related to eudaimonia holds much promise for understanding the outcomes of nature-based AWE as well. While this finding results from a single exploratory case study, it does suggest a great opportunity for new linkages between theory on tourism-related eudaimonia (e.g. [Knobloch et al., 2017](#)) and nature tourism-related pro-environmental behavior change ([Ardoin et al., 2015](#)), lines of research yet to be integrated. Quantitative survey research with larger sample sizes could further establish the role of tourism on engagement, immersion, and reflection via these eudaimonic pathways (e.g., [Lengieza et al., 2019](#)). Such research will be critical for demonstrating more clearly the potential of AWE to lead to pro-environmental outcomes and how the characteristics of AWE can be further adapted, adopted, and scaled up to inspire pro-environmental behavior across the tourism industry more broadly.

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