My mind and soul suspended on a ticket to self-discovery. Now boarding, Koh Phi Phi!

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Abstract

Who am I? What’s the purpose of my life? What is the reason for my existence? These philosophical questions intensify the push-factors that are the foundation for young adult travellers currently dominating various popular destinations that scatter across South-East Asia today. This growing genre of tourists’ are educated, experienced, financially average and are at the crucial point whereby the only missing element at this point in their life is their ‘identity’. Backpackers embark on personalized self-seeking journeys to find their purpose to breathe, belief in religion and other elements, just too simply define themselves from a different vantage point towards self-conception. These tourists strive to be different from the usual mass market by choosing destinations that are remote to enhance the experience of culture and social exchange whilst encompassing identity formation. Backpacker enclaves are then discussed on how these spaces of pockets provide visitors the small familiarity of home whilst embarking on a cultural exploration. It is pure irony that people travel far and wide solely, to discover about themselves through various activities and rituals to push the personal boundaries within their comfort zone that are not available in the norm of their lives back home. Push factors may include escapism and social reasons; the pull factors are the last and most crucial to attract travelers to decide on particular destination that will in return, contribute more to one’s self than just a status elevation in the perception of society. This study is an ethnographic research based on 18 European backpackers that travelled to Koh Phi Phi Island in Thailand for various recreational and post-journey persona expectations. It was conducted with in-depth interviews to determine if these travelers have gained personal growth at the ending of their journey.

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1. Introduction

Our world is full of restrictions, structure and full of duty. So full of commitments, packed schedules, traffic jams, lost time, and the endless vicious cycle of balancing work, family and ourselves. Yet, life’s pace quickens with every heart beat and become more complex at its core, we strive to experience something deeper, more meaningful, reflective, enlightening and transformative to our souls, our being; ourselves. People turn to holidays, time-off to travel and find the enrichment to repair our bodies and minds from the mundane and common of everyday life. Travel is a cure to allow people to breathe, exert stress and enjoy the in-between stolen moments from the norm. People travel to escape people, and leave the world behind for a small or bigger timeline. At some point, our essential spirit drives us to get in touch with the sacred – spirituality; forces, beliefs, practices, transcendences and self-nurturing that have touch and guided us, humankind for centuries. For many young travellers, the ultimate goal is inner peace and self-identity – a safety belt or talisman against the faced-paced complexity of the modern world. Everyone’s perception of religion and spirituality is personal. Therefore, each journey taken is purely about those places that may possibly to channel wisdom, distinct cultures, and unique perspectives. Magnetic destinations appeal to new tourists because they have the power to change and move them. Travel has evolved from being just journeys of spaces and paces. It would also alter a person permanently (Breakwell, 1986).

Backpackers, in this era of place and time are young tourist; majority from European based countries and Australia, of ages between 18 to 35 years old. This generation, also known as a sub-set of Gen Y, that is, born between 1977 and 1994 (Kotler et al., 2006), has been identified as the one typography travellers marketers find hardest to attract (Dorman, 2009; Jones, 2009). In spite of the rapidly ever-changing pattern shifts taking place in the structure and roles backpackers in the SEA scene, there are indeed a market that proves ever thriving and a popular term for every young traveller to want to be associated with. Being mostly adolescent, backpackers tend to strive to dive against the growing tides of tourism trends in order to preserve the image of a drifter which are common in backpacking literature as well as present in academic studies of backpacking (Richard and Wilson, 2004b).

The term “Backpacker” introduced by Pearce (1990), whom he distinguished from other tourists using five criteria: independently organized, travels allocated on a budget yet they perceive this element as a core experience, an emphasis on meeting other similar travellers, flexible non-scheduled itinerary and partake willingly in various activities that involve risk, adrenaline and post-values that will add to their current perceptive social-economic status. For this research, an updated element is added to the criteria commonly consumed by a backpacker. Today, growing numbers of this genre of tourist seeks to engage in local traditions along with emphasis on social interactions from the local people to pursue an authentic backstage experience. These young adult travellers want to not only gain access to be considered a participant, yet, the main result of this form of engagement is to discover more personal values that can be added to self-consumption of one’s identity. These priceless entities that contribute to self-discovery are the main priceless souvenir perceived possible in return for a journey.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Koh Phi Phi, Thailand

In 2001, Tourist’s authority of Thailand (TAT) aired a commercial to enforce the attraction of its ‘‘Amazing Thailand’’ year. The first scene of the commercial shows a robot siting with his back against a tree in a tropical lush forest with the icon on the bottom of the screen displaying “Amazing Thailand”. The storyline carries on with the robot in the market, nightlife – dancing in a club, practicing at a local Buddhist temple and finally the last scene shows the robot in the back of a traditional Thai fishing boat travelling down a misty serene river with the sounds of nature of the dense forest on both sides (Johnson, 2007). The robot then waves at a group of by standing Thai villagers that have crowded on the dock and it then puts its hands together in a traditional Thai greeting and farewell which is called waï and bows his head as he goes. The final scene shows the transition from the robot is changed into a young Caucasian man, somewhere between the ages of eighteen and late twenties. He looks up with a newly profound expression of self-discovery and realization and fixes his gaze and smiles back at the villagers with eyes of expression (Johnson, 2007).
The robot, the alienation, the white Caucasian, and the various places of ‘Amazing Thailand’ featured in the video have a very obvious message to the world. This young white Caucasian man escapes his other automatons back home to discover a moment of genuine interaction between that Thai locals in the misty faraway Thai village and discovers a humanity that makes him more human himself in a different light. He is adopted into Thai culture and society and rather through interaction with the people, he has re-enforced, re-enacted and re-asserts his identity. Tourists can be described as “one who travels for pleasure and culture… yet nobody wants to be called a tourist” (Feifer 1985). In the popular decades that travel equalled luxury, people travelled for ‘pleasure’, then it became ‘culture’, now people travel for self-identify. Through submersion into the other, tourists of the era seek authentic self-image. On vacation, tourists seek constrictions of everyday structure and societal boundaries life places upon him. The tourist when touring is searching for an alternate identity that will define him somehow, upon return to his home in his country, be incorporated unto the self, therefore, offering transcendence (Ruschmann, 2011).

Located in Southern Thailand in Krabi province, lies one of the World’s most beautiful islands is the small archipelago of Koh Phi Phi. ‘Phi Phi Don’ as Thais call it, lives up to its reputation of ‘Paradise’. This area is perfect for almost every holiday ‘go-er’ as the islands have something to offer for everyone, right from the common sunbathers to the compulsive young adult adrenaline pumping seekers. The entire region, Had Nopparattara Ko Phi Phi National Marine Park is protected by the Thai tourism authorities as it is home to an abundance of corals and marine life. Travellers find this the ideal location to do some soul-searching at the same time, being rest assured that basic amenities will make their journey comfortable whilst delivering the purpose of a holiday (Richardson, 2001).

2.2. Backpackers in Southeast Asia

In academic terms, backpacker research has been explored majorly in anthropological-base and often divided between market-based (Richard & Wilson, 2004a). Anthropological studies focuses mainly on ethnography and qualitative research (e.g. Binder, 2004; Cederholm, 1999; Sorensen, 2003; Welk, 2004) to understand the perceptions of an authentic backpacker. The researchers themselves are dominantly are or were at one point, backpackers themselves. Many studies have been conducted to state the reliability and value of research regarding backpackers. Current day popular enclaves’ destinations are geographically located in exotic destinations in Southeast Asia and India (e.g. Hottola, 1999; Johnsen, 1998; Maoz, 2004). Over the last thirty years, backpacking emerged as a mainstream global phenomenon, and backpackers have been considered the image of postmodern traveler (Richards & Wilson, 2004a).

Crompton (1979) stated the two determinants of destination choice revolve: the push factor – ‘when to travel’ and ‘where to travel’, which is the pull factor. Push factors influences the traveler on the desire to travel and the destinations considered. Also, they play majorly on a person’s social psychological motives, the perceived elevated status post-return of journey, such a desire for knowledge and excitement, new discovery, escape, relaxation, family bonding, safety, sight-seeing and achievement (Yoon and Uysal, 2005).

Values can be defined as ‘worth, importance, appeal, price and appreciation or end-of-state existence’ (Rokeach, 1973). Values are the personal standards that every individual uses to guide their behaviour, judgment on themselves and others, to decide ethics; basically what is deemed good as opposed to bad (Rokeach, 1979). Social behaviour, way of life, attitudes, motivation, value of belief or religion can all be influenced deeply into a person’s mentality through a set of values (Rokeach, 1973). It is the major element that influence as the core beliefs that guide travellers activity choice. Recreational activities have been based on personal values (Beatty, Kahle, Homer, & Mirsa, 1985; Boote, 1981; Jackson, 1973) and leisure activities on holiday (Madrigal & Kahle, 1994). According to Reisinger and Movondo (2004) using a path analysis study, found that there was certain causal relationship between values and activities in the major psychographic factors of the young adult travel market. Travelling became a vital role in the lives of young people, for the latter, travelling was perceived by society as hedonistic and even anarchistic, it became a form of escapism (Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995).

For the last decade, Backpackers have been crowding popular sandy white beaches of Thailand, drifting down the Nam Song river of Vang Vieng in central Laos in a tractor tire inner tubes, gazing at the breath-taking sunset over the ancient city of Angkor Wat, Cambodia or meditating at the temples of Bali; these “young tourists” are
indefinitely a new brand of travelers the travel market is eagerly catering to. As Boorstin (1986) explains “foreign travels have ceased as an activity – an experience, an undertaking- and instead become a commodity.”

Destination choice is the process by which a backpacker chooses a destination that will fulfill their current travel-related needs and in this case, where they will gain more insight that will contribute to their personal growth. The journey is then personalized. Hwang et al. (2006) states that travelers generally follow a funnel like concept that consists of:

- Recognition of destination
- Personal objectives
- Similar or general alternative of set destinations
- Choice and judgment of destination

The decision then follows by the act of travel, the post-consumption anticipated results of the journey experience relative to expectations. The three main attributes, which influence destination choice, are: (1) The ability to satisfy traveler needs; (2) The social agreement, which is, the travelers inclination to agree in accordance to their social group’s previous opinions on the destination; and (3) The accessibility of the destination (Um and Crompton, 1990).

2.3. Spaces of suspension

The term “enclave” is the meta-space of in-between has been applied to wide range of tourism phenomena (Lew, 2004). Crossing the range of backpacker destinations to ideal conventional tourism places such as Hawaii to world-renowned cruise ships (Weaver, 2005), to the tourist “bubble” (Judd, 1999). The common entity of how these different concepts of enclaves’ links is the idea of the relative consistency or should we say, uniformity or their main role as homogenous tourism spaces as defined by Edensor (1998). In the case of backpacker enclaves, there is a sort of familiarity that is relatable whilst being culturally diversified.

Enclaves may be located at destination crossroads or intersections; meeting points which ‘permit backpackers to socialize with each other after traversing “alien territory” and also to serve reinforcement of a communal ethos; common philosophy and the creation of temporary special suspension (Westerhausen & Macbeth, 2003: 73). They can be present at the commercial chaos of the streets of Bangkok, rural villages of rice terrace in Ubud, Bali; even at the trance beach parties of Goa, India (Saldanha, 2002). They can also be temporary enclaves – punctuation marks of liminal voids mainly ritualistic events or festivals Thaipusam in Kuala Lumpur, Ramadhan in Saudi Arabia or meditating in monasteries and temples during February’s Nirvana day for Buddhists, where a destination is transformed only for a period of time, creating a liminal void yet, a destination with authentic trademarks. Locals are a big part of the experience. The visitors crave with warm welcome in search of the real contact with locals. Backpacker enclaves are rather regarded as safe havens travellers can retreat back into when the culture confusion from the outside weighs too heavy at any given point (Hottola, 2005). The pressure of host cultures at times forces backpackers to re-congregate back into their social norm of familiarity that provides comfort and support from fellow travellers with similar ethnic backgrounds. Although backpackers claim to be allo-centric tourist (travellers that flock to destinations that are not-yet-marketed in mass by tourism) and demand locations that are less disrupted by familiarity, they often end up with company that are close to home which then becomes a contradiction to the whole idea of isolation. These suspensions in travels can be related to as a ‘cultural home away from home’ (Westerhausen, 2002).

2.4. Self-discovery and Identity

Today’s generation of young adults, particularly those men and women born after year 1980, face difficulty undertaking the search to discover their identity and find meaning for their life in this contemporary setting. Also, in this generation, technology plays a big part in virtual social engagement (e.g. Facebook, Skype, video games). The pretentious self with its illusionary deception is the identity that appears on the surface, which we show to others and purport ourselves to be for the sake of others’ judgments in society boundaries (Carr, 1988)). The “digital self” as made popular in the 21st century, is the identity formed on social media’s such as Facebook, Twitter and avatars
constructed in virtual worlds like “Second Life.” According to Internet world statistics (2013), Facebook reached a total of 1.11 billion users worldwide as of May 2, 2013. Eventually, people yearn for our true selves to emerge and hope that society will accept us. This idea of ‘acceptance’ eventually comes down to our image and how we are perceived. People try to be what others want us to be instead of what is natural and true to ourselves. Human contact has become distant. Although the growth of technology has grown to improve methods of mass communication, it has also negatively made personal engagements less present. The fine line between generalization and unique identity is blurred from the common globalized form of image portrayed by almost everyone out there that owns a computer or a smart phone. Identity has been scarce, almost hard to attain: to forming your own identity, it is easier to define what one not rather than what one is (Richards and Wilson, 2004a).

The whole world is a big glamorous stage. The media airs psychographic messages to influence the public. Every traveller’s journey differs, no matter the similarities (Obenour, 2004). Faith has been taught to us, not felt, neither believed by ourselves, but forced. In the end, all that we are left with is individuality. No one person is or can be, exactly the same. That is exactly what tourists’ of this mind and ages are searching to find; themselves in the reflection of others cultures that contrasts their own image and beliefs (Poria, Butler, & Airey, 2003).

3. Methodology

This qualitative research is based on an ethnographic approach, a method often applied in cultural and social anthropology. The ethnographer assumes the role of a participant and observer as opposed an observer studying a culture from a physical distance; the researcher enters and therefore, becomes a participator in the event of the study. Rationally, this approach provides the researcher to gain intimate personal viewpoint of the current experience, and being a participant, can further relate understanding the meaning behind the actions and responses behind the fellow observed. One of the limitations of this approach as critics have stated, is of which the researcher also known as the “outsider” seeking to enter into an event or culture ritual, inevitably changes it, thus “contaminating” the data. Although many other critics defend this theory by explanation that the act of participant gaining experience cannot be learnt without being “felt” by oneself (Sorenson, 2003).

3.1. Ethnography

Ethnographic approach ideally re-constructs the relative reality formed by the participants of the group under observation whilst being a participant. As Berger & Luckermann (1969) expresses: only pockets of “part-realities” of these individuals can information about reality by society be gathered and measured to a certain standard of understanding that is credible. Ethnography gives the researcher perspective that tries to embrace the emotions as the participants of the investigated are experiencing and therefore, gives a more authentic importance in relation to the investigated and how they perceive the ‘real world’. Although it is with surety regarding the researcher becoming a part of the study through active participation in the field, it is inevitable and scepticism about such data is sometimes questioned on the validity of the research as viewed as a limitation. But, in contradiction, ethnography incorporates both observation and data gathered through participation that makes this form of study rather much more credible; how can one be more accurate than experiencing it one’s self? Denzin (1997) relates this phenomenon and states that the role of the researcher between their part ‘reality’ and that of the relations between the participants under study, allows them to establish a double perspective, without biasedness that is useful for the understanding of cultural studies.

The researcher’s duty is to engage in a balanced, active and sometimes, not all, in regards to the situation of the event. Balanced participation means the researcher remains a participant whilst maintaining as an insider. The researcher observes but only participates in not all, only some, activities (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007).
3.2. In-depth Interviews

In-depth interviews are conducted to produce open-ended questions for participants in any research which aims to get a broader view, not a specific predetermined idea of conclusion. The purpose lies to extract the perceptions from the sampling size towards the problem statement; their views to be rendered unbiased. Interviews are conducted conditions and environment of comfort and natural to the topic. This is to ensure the participant feels comfortable, safe and at ease to speak his/her mind of their point of view. ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ questions are to be avoided at best as these questions have finality, which tend to stifle the response and limit freedom of elaboration. Group interviews of 2-3 have proven interesting but at the same time, some participants might be influenced by others opinions and therefore, resulting in changing their views during discussion. Guidance will be the researchers duty as to not stray away from the topic, as discussions sometimes differs in directions not intended by the research topic (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007).

3.3. Transcription and Analysis

Transcript from audio is written and text-based word-for-word of dictated recorded speech. Accents, expression and other considerations based on participant slang are taken into account as well. Descriptive methods are also included such as participants’ actions and emotions as these elements contribute expression to give depth to the meanings of the words spoken in the interviews. Through the coding process themes were created, which reflects on the said words with the same meaning or similar meanings. Afterwards themes of all interviews were compared and combined. Similar or identical themes were combined in a combined theme, which reflects all participants view (Salanda 2009).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Why Koh Phi Phi?

The interview begins with some fundamental questions to dictate and gauge the subjects’ idealism of the destination: Why do you choose Koh Phi Phi as a travel getaway/destination? As results show, most participants have enveloped the destination image of Koh Phi Phi, Krabi in Thailand as the definition of “Paradise”. It is ideal with its sandy beaches and blue water coupled with tropical lush forest and hot weather particularly ‘exotic’ locations (e.g. Hottola, 1999; Johnsen, 1998; Maoz, 2004).

‘Coming from the US, this [*gestures her surrounding]… was a big culture shock. [*Excitedly] It was a big move for us to make the travel because this was my image of paradise.’

(Jordan, New Jersey, USA)

‘I would say Asia is where I would go to discover me… I just think there’s a lot of beliefs, languages and practices to embrace living. Especially when it looks like this… [*points to the beach]’

(Norman, 32, Belfast, Ireland)

Norman speaks about the idea of living does not seem real. He elaborates on the idea of ‘living’ is not real in the state of society and it is merely just breathing and doing what we are supposed to do as dictated by the modern world. Graburn (1977) defines touring as “more ‘real’ than ‘real life’”. When people return from their travels to their everyday structural routine, they step back into their former roles with a sense of culture shock. Holidays are the very purpose of breaking out of norm and into what we personally perceive as paradise.

4.2. Spirituality & Belief

When looking for reasons to travel, exploring other cultures ideally particularly motivated ‘backpackers’, searching for meaning and knowledge (Richards & Wilson 2004a) expectations ofpost-journey reflection. The classic anthropology concept of young adult travel not only strives to be recognized as knowledgeable, it is perceived as a source of identity. During the interviews, participants were asked: “what does life mean to you?” and
“what do you believe in?” followed by the conversation leading into how travels do or do not alter a person’s identity, participants responded as follows:

‘I don’t believe in any specific God. I consider myself an Atheist [*shrugs his shoulders]. I do believe in something… but I don’t know what. I do believe when you give good actions, you get good actions back… like karma… basically.’

(Alex, 23, Sweden)

‘I do not believe in God… but I can understand believing.’

(Albert, 22, Sweden)

‘When it comes to universal belief [*gestures with two hands to her surroundings], there is so much more than we can ever understand! I understand why people need religion… I understand the concept and why people do it but I do not believe in God. I would pray for something just for comfort… [*shakes her head] but not to God.’

(Emily, 23, Australia)

From the response, it is adamant regarding the revelation that people of this genre (not specifically belonging to specific ethnicity of country) are evidently not religious as compared to the generation before. Nearly every third out of four (both male and female) respondents interviewed speak about their ideology of God as non-existent. Although having religious backgrounds/teachings or some sort in their childhood, the following individuals are still on their personal quest to find meaning in their belief of ‘purpose’. However, a few non-believers highlighted that they would ‘like’ to believe there is a higher being and find solace in the comforting idea of an ‘afterlife’ or eternal bliss of ‘heaven’.

‘I don’t believe in anything. I’d like to believe that people have souls though [*thoughtful]… that we go somewhere after we die. It might not be true, but I’d like to think that.’

(Chris, 29, Switzerland)

‘If I need forgiveness, I would pray… for comfort even though I have no religion… I’d like to think there’s somebody there. But, we feel lonely so often… we are alone.’

(Denise, 31, Ireland)

Whilst many of the samples declared their disbelief in a higher purpose, Isabelle strongly maintains her faith despite the contrast beliefs of her atheist traveller companions. Isabelle is one of the very few interviewees whom continuously attends church every Sunday at home and is interested in attending foreign services by local churches whilst on holiday.

‘I was extremely sheltered [*slightly shy & embarrassed]… My whole family is Christian. I wasn’t allowed to go out or even celebrate Halloween… We weren’t allowed to get more of the world outside our beliefs. I personally believe in God but I do not judge people… After I’ve seen the world, I still need religion [*confidently]’

(Isabelle, 20, Montana, USA)

‘I don’t go to mass on Sundays or church or temples… but… I definitely believe in God. I am not spoilt anymore. I appreciate my life and happiness and while travelling, I grew up… I really grew up… [*nostalgic] No one can understand exactly, my experiences are my own.’

(Carheim, 28, Ireland)

Carheim, from Ireland met his wife on this same island (Koh Phi Phi) 4 years ago. He felt the constrictions of modernity and turned his back on society, resigned from his job, sold his possessions and embarked on an anti-structured, no-timeline itinerary sole for the ideal to find ‘purpose’ to his life. ‘Purpose’ in defined as the reason for
which/why something/someone is created for which something exists; the significance of life or existence in general. Not all believe in a meta-physical element to fulfill their ‘existence’; purpose may come in any form - persons, objects, belief, achievement etc. (Zinnbauer, & Kadar, 1997). ‘Spirituality’ here, as Carheim’s example is experienced as an individual transformative process (Zinnbauer, & Kadar, 1997); a subjective internalized (personal) reality, of which the public or social dimension (career, societal worries) is no more than a part (Santos, 2003).

4.3. Self-Discovery

Comparison can only be made when two phenomena or beliefs are measured in contrast. In this case, most participants come from upbringings of education and mostly, First World countries. During the interview, the following participant, Haley, described her life in California as ‘luxurious, good family and enough money’ to be happy. She then relayed the reason she traveled to the Far East was to gain an ‘adventure’ and novelty as she perceives will account most valuable compared to her societal circle back home.

‘I like to travel to beaches for peace [*smiles]... There is no place I need to be or time I need to keep… the ocean just reminds you how small you are.’

(Haley, 20, California, USA)

‘I chose Thailand for a reason. The contrast was what I wanted for myself’. It is for *me*.

(Hayden, 25, Norway)

From this perspective, the participant expresses the essential need to realize how insignificant ‘we’ as human beings, are, in the world. Falconer’s (2009a, 2009b) theory surrounds the emotions and embodied experiences of female backpackers and/or young female adult travellers to develop ‘strength’ of character to overcome fear and anxiety as women travellers. Through coping and indifference, ‘feeling the unease’ of being ‘out-of-norm’, these travellers try to make sense of the ‘people and place’; these emotions become keys to ‘formative notions of self and identity’. Through ‘dislike’, comes like, and vice-versa.

‘Travelling makes you appreciate things from places you don’t like. Seeing the other side of ‘paradise’ in *Paradise*… without the negatives, you can’t see the good stuff.’

(Jackie, 20, Boston, USA)

‘I’ve not become a better person [*shakes her head]...no… Not yet… I’m no better than anyone just because of where I am from… I just appreciate the clothes on my back now…’

(Katherina, 35, Belfast, Ireland)

Although most travellers recognize experience as novelty, being ‘humble’ becomes an entity part of the element of that experience. The participants discuss their experiences by comparing to their lifestyle back home and gauge the level of difference in comparison to the life afforded by Thailand’s nomadic islands. Economic backgrounds do affect backpacking although some tourists choose this ‘cheaper’ way of travelling solely to interlink deeply with the desire for personal development, and refers to the ideology of the drifters described by Erik Cohen (Cohen, 1973). As Katherina shows her appreciation for ‘the clothes on her back’, in the lifestyle of backpacking, baggage is ought to be light and travellers tend to be less ‘materialistic’. ‘Normal life’ is often tied to materialism, consumerism and superficiality.

5. Conclusion

In the evidence, it can be confirmed that backpackers do seek a higher meaning to self-reflection during and post-journey. Although most of the interviewees were set to travel Thailand because they ‘perceived’ the destination to be ‘paradise’, ‘exotic’ (Hottola, 1999) and others, for the sole reason that it deems the most cultural and socially
contrasted destination in comparison to their place of origin. The popular ideal image of paradise still lies in the scene of blue sea, white sand beaches and tropical weather (Crompton, 1979), and holds the strongest pull factor for Western travellers.

Secondly, ‘Spiritual’, in terms of spiritual tourism, implies an individual perception even if it takes places within the larger frameworks or setting. In using the term ‘spiritual tourism’, is to deliberately and from the beginning, place the focus of intention upon the experiences and the intentions of the tourists themselves. The studies regarding tourism phenomena of socio-cultural element focus as priority to research, have in fact moved from examinations of ‘external’ to investigations of ‘inner experience’ of the lone travellers (Collins-Kreiner, 2006). 75% percentage of the interviewees proved not religious or belonging to any religion. According to Smith (1992), current usage for the term “pilgrimage” connotes a religious journey and or a journey of a pilgrim, especially one to a temple, shrine, location of secular martyrs or a sacred place. That is where pilgrimage differs from ‘spiritual’ journeys. The reward for ‘spiritual’ journey is during the journey itself, whilst the reward for the pilgrimage lies at the end of the journey.

The motivations of visitors are highly diversified, ranging from curiosity to a search for deeper meaning. The many different experience of backpackers, whether an accidental pilgrimage or tourist, should therefore be represented on a scale based on the effect of the visit: changes on the level of perceptions, beliefs and social behaviour, understanding of other cultures and way of life may begin to emerge as they adopt new concepts from the visited destination into their own lifestyle. Visitors undergo various psychological experiences according to their social status, age, gender, and other sociological factors (Maoz, 2007; Sharpley & Sundaram (2005); Collins-Kreiner & Sagit-Tueta, 2010). All visitors’ expectations of their trips remain different and incomparable (Ebron, 1999). Although many individuals find these attractions constitute a search for a new meaning in life, not all were affected by the sites. Individuals may move along their continuum of journey, mostly Western visitors travelling to the East left their place of origin as secular visitors and returned home considering themselves as spiritual visitors (Sharpley and Sundaram, 2005).

In this context, it appears this typology of tourists (backpackers) are in indeed travellers in touch with their need to find deeper philosophical meaning that will contribute to their travels and is regarded as a pull factor to choosing a destination. Many interpretations of the observed in this research claim to not be ‘religious’ yet, find comfort in the idea of ‘belief’. This does not collapse the existing theories that the younger generation is distancing from traditions but more of traditional religion beliefs as compared to the generation before. In contrast to the quest for a single scientific explanation as to what Cohen (2007) regards as a ‘postmodern’ discourse rests on the premise that there exists no single solution to travellers’ sought after ‘meaning to life’.

References


