

December 2016

Bursting the Backpacker Bubble: Exploring Backpacking Ideology, Practices, and Contradictions

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BURSTING THE BACKPACKER BUBBLE:
EXPLORING BACKPACKING IDEOLOGY, PRACTICES, AND CONTRADICTIONS

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December 2016

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September 9, 2016

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I discuss the growing development of international backpacking in Central America. I focus on backpackers because they are a significant, yet understudied and undertheorized, part of the newly mobile world. Drawing from more than 12 months of ethnographic data collected in Central America, I explore backpacking as a youth subculture. I used a subcultural framework to explain backpacking ideology, practices, and contradictions. Understanding backpacking as a youth subculture tells us a lot about the myths and realities of 21st century adventure in the context of global mobility, globalization, and economic changes in international tourism that shape what backpackers experience and how they experience it. I find that backpackers' ideology emphasizes a 1) desire to escape, 2) find a level of independence or freedom, which defines their 3) sense of adventure, and enables them to 4) self-reflect on their life and identity. Broadly, backpackers' key travel practices emphasize the use of 1) the solitary backpack, 2) transportation modes, and 3) information sources. While backpackers have their own unique travel experiences in Central America, they also share and maintain these ideological beliefs and travel practices in common. I also find the backpacker hostel as the socio-cultural space to understand backpackers' travel ideology in relation to their practices. As a home base, backpackers use the hostel to connect with one another and express their ideas about backpacking. They reflect their backpacking ideology through their real world traveling practices, as they venture outside of the hostel to explore new lands. Yet, backpackers also spend a significant amount of time using the inside of the hostel, which reflects many of the social and cultural vestiges that they hoped to leave behind. Backpackers share travel stories to critique, negotiate, and reconcile tensions in their 21st century backpacking experience.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation developed with the guidance and support from a number of people. First, I would like to thank Dr. Robert Futrell, my mentor and chair, in the Department of Sociology. His patience, encouragement, and suggestions throughout the entire dissertation process were invaluable to the final product. As this dissertation was about backpacking, I am happy that we were able to backpack together in Kazakhstan, a trip I will never forget. I would also like to thank each of my committee members: Dr. Barb Brents, Dr. Simon Gottschalk, and Dr. David Dickens in the Department of Sociology, and Dr. Andy Kirk in the Department of History. Each of your voices and insights are to be found throughout this dissertation. I want to express my gratitude to my cohort: Andi Dassopoulos, Sarah St. John, and Allison Sahl. I will never forget those nights studying theory together and discussing it during FDC gatherings. My parents also provided me with unconditional support, in too many ways to list here. Finally, I would not have completed this dissertation without the loving support from my partner-in-crime, Heather, and our adorable little fig, Apolline.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Today's generation of young people are more informed, more mobile and more adventurous than ever before.

—Taleb Rifai, Secretary-General of the United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2011

The social and cultural benefits for the young traveller and the communities that host them are far reaching, long-term and measurably more sustainable than other forms of tourism.

—Ulises Ortega, Executive Committee Chair of World Youth Student and Educational Travel Confederation, 2011

Contemporary social life is increasingly “on the move” (Creswell 2006). In today's mobile social world, people, cultures, goods, money, energy, images, and information flow faster and further across time and space than ever before (Harvey 1992; Urry 2000). Moving people around the world for business and leisure is a huge economic feature of late-capitalism. International tourism is now a major part of global mobility, with wide ranging social and economic effects flowing from human travel and transport by land, sea, and air across national borders for both recreation and commerce.¹

In 1992, the travel & tourism industry² became the world's largest economic sector, surpassing the business volume of oil exports, food products, and automobiles (Theobald 2005). According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) (2013), international tourist arrivals topped the 1 billion mark in 2012, generating more than US \$1 trillion in travel receipts, both milestones for the travel & tourism industry. In 2015, international tourist arrivals reached a new record with 1.2 billion overnight

¹ Along with leisure/recreation/holiday travel, the International Labor Organization's (ILO) (ILO 2013) definition of international tourism includes business and professional travel, visiting friends and relatives, religious travel, and health treatments of travelers crossing borders and spending one or more nights in the host country.

² According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) (2012), the travel & tourism industry comprises several subsector industries including hotels, travel agents, airports, airlines, other passenger transportation services (excluding commuter services), and also includes activities of the restaurant and leisure industries directly supported by tourists. Tourism activities include shopping, dining in restaurants, sightseeing, visiting historical places, amusement/theme parks, art galleries/museums, nightclubs/dancing, visiting national parks, and cultural heritage sites.

stays (UNWTO 2016). The World Tourism & Travel Council (WTTC) (2012) forecasts that the travel and tourism industry's direct contribution to world Gross Domestic Product is expected to exceed US \$3 trillion by 2022.³ Also, 1.8 billion international tourists are expected to travel in the year 2030 (UNWTO 2013).

The extraordinary growth in international tourism raises questions about the extent and pace of travel throughout the world and the economic, political, cultural, and ecological effects of that travel. A particularly important dimension of international tourism is youth travel.⁴ According to the UNWTO World Youth Student and Educational (WYSE) Travel Confederation (2011), the rapidly expanding youth travel segment includes study abroad education, cross-cultural volunteer and work exchange programs, language immersion programs, and independent backpacking. The UNWTO WYSE Travel Confederation (2016) estimate that the international youth travel segment comprises about 23 percent of today's international tourists. In 2014, youth travelers contributed US \$286 billion towards international tourism receipts (UNWTO WYSE 2016).⁵ The UNWTO WYSE Travel Confederation (2011) estimate that by 2020 international youth trips will rise to almost 300 million per year.

In this dissertation, I discuss the growing development of international youth travel in the form of *international backpacking*. International backpacking involves youth travelers from economically advanced countries in the West, traveling abroad with a solitary backpack, on a budget, for an extended period of time. Commonly referred to as *backpackers*, these travelers are found "in every corner of the globe, from remote villages in the Hindu Kush to the centres of London and Paris" (Richards and Wilson 2004:3). As more young travelers increasingly choose to backpack throughout the world, they bring with

³ The WTTC (2012) calculates the travel & tourism industry's *direct contribution* to GDP according to economic activities generated by all of its subsector industries. *Total contribution* (including wider effects from investment, the supply chain, and induced income impacts) to GDP is expected to grow to US \$10 trillion by 2022 (9.8% of GDP).

⁴ The traditional age of the youth (and student) travel segment is 18-24, but has shifted to 15-30+ (UNWTO WYSE Travel Confederation 2011).

⁵ The average youth traveler spends US \$1,000 to US \$6,000 per trip (with trips lasting over 50 days) compared to the average tourist who spends US \$1,450 (UNWTO WYSE Travel Confederation 2011).

them curiosities about travel far off the beaten tourist path into authentic cultures and pristine natural environments.

I focus on backpackers because they are a significant, yet understudied and undertheorized, part of the new world order of mobility (Clifford 1997). Backpackers, and the backpack itself, symbolize mobility and escape from the constraints of modern society and the “tourist caught in the iron cage of the modern tourist industry” (Richards and Wilson 2004:5). In search of adventures, backpackers imagine their travel as a trail of discovery of places unspoiled by mass tourism. Backpacking as an independent travel form may have important economic, cultural, and ecological effects on communities that have little to no access to tourism opportunities (Scheyvens 2002). Understanding backpacking travel patterns may tell us a lot about the myths and realities of 21st century adventure in the context of global mobility, globalization, and economic changes in international tourism that shape what backpackers and other travelers experience and how they experience it.

In the increasingly mobile 21st century in which international tourism and economic profit go hand in hand, backpackers’ experiences and the host countries and people they visit have taken on new forms. Backpacking is a growing economic market where enormous profits are being made by entrepreneurial interests commodifying virtually all parts of the nascent backpacking tourism segment (Hannam and Ateljevic 2008; Hannam and Diekmann 2010). Today’s backpackers or *flashpackers*⁶ as some are now calling them, can plan trips by reading detailed accounts of a destination in a *Lonely Planet* travel guidebook, review and reserve a bed with a credit card at a chain hostel advertised on *hostelworld.com*, book adventure tours, and plan step-by-step moves by land, sea, and air travel all via the Internet, which they access on their laptop computers, tablets, or mobile phones. Backpackers can also

⁶ The term flashpacker is a recent term that has been used in popular travel blogs and scholarly literature on backpacking defined as: “the older twenty to thirty-something backpacker, who travels with an expensive backpack or a trolley-type case, stays in a variety of accommodation depending on location, has greater disposable income, visits more ‘off the beaten track’ locations, carries a laptop, or at least a ‘flashdrive’ and mobile phone, but who engages with the mainstream backpacker culture” (Hannam and Diekmann 2010:2).

purchase all their adventure travel gear at a surfeit of travel supply stores, and even enroll in mountaineering, survivalist, scuba, or surfing courses at home in preparation for their travel activities.

In this dissertation, I explain backpackers as a subcultural phenomenon in which backpackers embrace a core ideology manifested in the practice of backpacking, involving uncertainty and adventure within the global tourism industry that shapes and profits from this backpacker adventure ethos. My explanation refines and elaborates the work of Israeli sociologist Erik Cohen (2003), pioneer of backpacker studies,⁷ as well as other scholarly approaches in understanding backpackers' socio-cultural identities and motives (see for example, Hartmann 1991; Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995; Desforges 2000; Elsrud 2001; Sørensen 2003; Noy 2004; O'Reilly 2006). Cohen (2003) claims:

...that the actual practice of most backpackers is at considerable variance with the predominant image of the young traveler who roams alone the far-off places of the continents...This does not appear to be a matter of concern to ordinary tourists. But backpacking, as a travelling practice studiously contrasted to mass tourism, is more ideologically 'loaded', and hence necessitates some express mechanisms which may help to maintain the identity of the backpackers in face of the discrepancy between their ideology and their practice (P. 99-100).

Accordingly, my goal in this dissertation was to explore backpacking ideology and practice to identify these discrepancies, or contradictions, that may exist within the backpacking travel form. I was also interested to understand why and how backpackers deal with these contradictions to maintain their backpacking identity in the face of modernity society and the modern tourism industry they are said to oppose.

EXPLORING BACKPACKING AS YOUTH SUBCULTURE

I extend Cohen's (2003) claims conceptually and empirically by addressing the following sociological questions as the basis of my study:

⁷ In 1973, Cohen published a foundational backpacker studies article titled, "Nomads from Affluence: Notes on the Phenomenon of Drifter-Tourism." In this article, he provides a classic typology of tourists, bringing to light the *drifter*, "the archetypal backpacker, travelling to new destinations with no set itinerary" (Richards and Wilson 2004:6).

1) What is the character of contemporary backpacking subculture?

To answer this question, I describe the subcultural aspect of backpacking in Central America. I focus on the ground-level experiences of backpackers to understand why and how they express their shared (1) ideology (or belief systems, ideals, and interests) and (2) practices (or behaviors and styles). In describing backpacking ideology and practices, I also point to important material tools that enable backpackers to travel the way they do. By understanding backpackers as a youth subculture, I allude to contradictions between their ideology and practice, which led me to ask the following questions.

2) Are there contradictions between backpacking ideology and backpacking in practice? If so, what are the contradictions and how do backpackers resolve them?

To answer these questions, I explain the backpacking travel form as integral to global tourism. I situate backpackers in this global context to explain why and how the profit-driven international tourism industry shapes how backpackers express their ideology and practices and the contradictions that emerge from this industry influence. I also explain why and how backpackers resolve such contradictions between their ideology and practices.

I conceptualized backpackers as a *youth subculture* who arise out of the institutional demands of modern society and the constraints of mainstream tourism. Subculture scholars see youth subcultures in terms of their relationship to, and function within, the dominant culture of mainstream society. In *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, a pioneering cultural studies⁸ edited volume about youth subculture, Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson ([1976] 1993) refer the word *culture*:

...to that level at which social groups develop distinct patterns of life, and give *expressive form* to their social and material life-experience. Culture is the way, the forms, in which groups 'handle' the raw material of their social and material existence...A culture includes the 'maps of meaning'

⁸In the field of sociology, cultural studies combine symbolic interactionism (Denzin 1992) and critical theory (Agger 1992) to understand the relationships between cultural forms and the political economic spheres of the culture industry. For an overview of cultural studies that draws from these two sociological frameworks, see David R. Dickens's (1994) "Cultural Studies in Sociology."

which make things intelligible to its members. These ‘maps of meaning’ are not simply carried around in the head: they are objectivated on the patterns of social organization and relationship through which the individual becomes a ‘social individual.’ Culture is the way the social relations of a group are structured and shaped: but it is also the way those shapes are experienced, understood and interpreted (P. 10-11).

The dominant culture of mainstream society emerges when these maps of meaning (the combination of norms, values, beliefs, behaviors, styles, and material forms of that particular culture) are accepted widely among its societal members. While youth subcultures adopt some of these maps of meaning—as they inevitably function within the dominant culture of mainstream society—they also attempt to develop their own distinct ways of life.

Youth subcultures are in constant negotiation with the institutional mandates and informal codes of everyday life and their members are inclined to express themselves by contesting and resisting the dominant culture of mainstream society (Hebdige [1979] 1981). Youth subcultures tend to develop in some degree of opposition to mainstream society as “groups of people that are in some way represented as non-normative and/or marginal through their particular interests and practices, through what they are, what they do and where they do it” (Gelder [1997] 2005:1). They are seen as “disorderly” by members of the dominant culture of mainstream society while “organized” by members of that particular subculture. Youth subcultures often recognize their differences to the dominant culture of mainstream society, both lamenting and celebrating them, and even at times taking advantage of them (Gelder [1997] 2005). As these subcultures attempt to contest and resist the informal codes of everyday life, the dominant culture of mainstream society continues to regulate the interests and practices of youth subcultures and sometimes marginalizes them to the fringe of society.

Youth subcultures contain a variety of features that exist along a continuum of resistance to the dominant culture of mainstream society (Hebdige [1979] 1981). Their members’ degree of resistance is manifested in the subjective *life-world* in which they perceive and express themselves individually and collectively vis-à-vis the dominant culture of mainstream society. Introduced by the German

phenomenologist Edmund Husserl ([1936] 1970), the life-world concept is used to explain the human-environment relationship: how individuals immediately and directly experience the given world through the subjectivities of everyday life. The life-world is an embodied (or individual) experience, “necessarily subjective, necessarily relative to our own position or place in the midst of things, to our particular desires, tastes, and concerns” (Abram 1997:32). The life-world is also intersubjective (or collective) because while one’s own body is experienced within the given world, it is also experienced by a multiplicity of sensing subjects, so that the “embodied subject comes to recognize these other bodies as other centers of experience, other subjects” (Abram 1997:37). Through the use of language and communication with one another, members of these subcultures rely on ideology to negotiate how they act out their individual and social lives, undergoing a process of conforming to or changing the dominant culture of mainstream society (Habermas 1981).

The life-world is dynamic, involving social layers that may be quite different for different people (Abram 1997). Social institutions shape the world that people live in, their culture, their way of life. Yet, “the world that a people experiences and comes to count on is deeply influenced by the ways they live and engage that world” (Abram 1997:41). People always develop new ideas and practices that create new forms of cultural life. Accordingly, members of youth subcultures have the capacity to continuously act independently of those external forces, to resist and sometimes even change institutional demands placed upon them. However, while members of these subcultures attempt to resist the dominant culture of mainstream society, they may actually become part of new institutions they help establish.

I used a subcultural framework to make sense of the backpacking phenomenon. I understand backpackers as a youth subculture inasmuch as they maintain a core ideology and common practices that in some ways contrast with institutional and industry demands that shape their travel form. The backpacking travel form represents escape from both their mundane lives and the cooptation by powerful international tourism institutions. But, I argue that backpackers are neither totally constrained by the structure of international tourism in which they operate, nor are they completely autonomous agents acting freely and with full creative awareness and outside cultural and institutional constraints. The truth

about backpacking subculture lies somewhere in between these two possibilities. My goal was to understand how the backpackers that I studied accepted, negotiated, and confronted the institutional and industry demands that hindered their ability to travel independently.

Youth subcultures also have historical underpinnings. As part of archival research, I describe ideological roots of backpacking subculture that have shaped why and how backpackers travel today. Today's backpackers are direct descendants of 18th century Grand Tour youth travelers, the early 20th century Youth Hostel Movement, and the 1960s and 1970s drifting counterculture. The 18th century Grand Tour developed for the well-educated young male aristocrat to extend his education by traveling to important European sites. The Youth Hostel Movement drew German school children into the countryside to experience *Wanderlust*. The 1960s and 1970s hippies sparked the drifting counterculture as a way to protest conventional living standards in their home countries in favor of a simpler, pre-modern lifestyle abroad. Each of these historical antecedents to the backpacking travel form valued travel as a rite of passage for individuals to temporarily abandon home, family, education, and work life to explore the world to find their "truer" selves.

I draw upon theoretical approaches to the study of tourism to guide my dissertation and help me clarify why and how contemporary backpacking emerged from this historical tradition and how the backpacking travel form inevitably developed in relation to broad tourism patterns. Turner and Ash (1975) note the historical shift from the "individual traveler" to the "mass society tourist." Both the traveler and the tourist temporarily abandon their everyday lives to, in a sense, "get away from it all" (Rojek and Urry 1997:1). They also search for meaning in their own familiar lives by traveling outside of it, to sites of differentiation, and exploring what they deem as "exotic," something foreign and unfamiliar to their mundane lives (Richards and Wilson 2004). The shift from the individual traveler to the mass society tourist in the West occurred as the tourism industry gradually rationalized and controlled travel activities to make it more profitable. Urry ([1990] 2002) argues that, in contrast to the traveler, the tourist is now placed at the center of a very circumscribed world, situated in a "tourist bubble" that resembles the

familiar society one had previously imagined escaping. Paradoxically, now the mass tourist becomes insulated from the “strangeness” of the unfamiliar world they seek.

Two foundational, competing theories about tourist motives help to explain this paradox and the development of mass tourism. Boorstin ([1961] 1992) argues that “the mass tourist travels in guided groups and finds pleasure in inauthentic contrived attractions, gullibly enjoying ‘pseudo-events’ and disregarding the ‘real’ outside world” (Urry [1990] 2002:7). However, MacCannell ([1976] 1999) argues that all tourists embody a quest for authenticity, which is a modern version of the universal human concerned with experiencing the sacred. In the case of authentic travel, “the tourist is the kind of contemporary pilgrim, seeking authenticity in other ‘times’ and other ‘places’ away from that person’s everyday life” and “show particular fascination in the ‘real lives’ of others that somehow possess a reality hard to discover in their own experiences” (Urry [1990] 2002:9). Both theories suggest that tourist entrepreneurs and indigenous locals are incentivized to produce ever more extravagant displays, or what MacCannell ([1976] 1999) calls “staged authenticity,” in an artificial manner simply to please the tourist and, by extension, to make money.

Backpackers have most affinity toward the individual traveler, or that of the *drifter*, attracted to the most “foreign type” of travel to the most “foreign sites” differentiated and disassociated with a world increasingly packaged and marketed by tourist entrepreneurs (Cohen 1973; 1974; 2003; Richards and Wilson 2004). Although, Richards and Wilson (2004) explain that the presence of mass tourism around the globe is inevitable and integral to the globalization process and, as a result, becomes difficult to fully ever escape. International tourism’s spread ties more and more people and places into the global economy and modern communication networks. While mass tourists attempt to escape their everyday lives, their presence makes the places they visit more like home. Backpackers hope to separate themselves from mass tourists by traveling far off the beaten tourist path, celebrating ideas of freedom and rebellion against their routine home lives and mass tourist modes.

My study combined a subcultural framework and theoretical approaches to the study of tourism, which allowed me to draw conclusions about backpacking as a youth subculture and offer new insights

about global mobility, globalization, and the economic changes in international tourism. In the next chapter, I more thoroughly map the literature I used to anchor the conceptual basis of this dissertation. I begin with a discussion about the study of leisure as it provided a foundation for both tourism studies and backpacker studies. I then bring my discussion back to backpackers as framed as a youth subculture. My goal for this chapter is to explain prior research and set up this dissertation's methodological, historical, descriptive, and analytic chapters.

DISSERTATION ORGANIZATION

In this concluding section, I provide an overview of the study organization with chapter descriptions. My overall goal in these chapters is to extend and refine the theoretical, methodological, historical, and empirical contributions to research on international backpacking.

In Chapter 2, I review the primary research literature review for this dissertation. I discuss the historical development in the rationalization and commercialization of leisure activities, which led to an interest among scholars to study various leisure forms, including tourism. I then discuss the theoretical approaches to the study of tourism, which contribute to the conceptual basis of this dissertation about the backpacking travel form. I link the development of tourism studies to recent studies about international backpacking and highlight key areas for future research. Finally, I refer to youth subculture and other subcultural studies to develop a subcultural framework for the analysis of this dissertation about backpacking as a youth subculture, which is understudied and undertheorized from a sociological point of view. I conclude with my research questions that informed my research methodology.

In Chapter 3, I lay out my methodological approach to understand and explain the subcultural aspects of backpacking in Central America. I begin by describing the importance of ethnographic methods for understanding the ground-level experiences of a culture-sharing group. I also highlight the importance of *mobility* in my research about travelers, by explaining the mobile methods I used to develop a mobile, multi-sited ethnography to study the subcultural patterns among backpackers traveling throughout multiple sites in the Central American region. I describe the fieldwork region, data collection

procedures, primary places for observations, backpacker informants, and data analysis, and the interpretive style.

In chapter 4, I provide the historical context to understanding contemporary backpacking ideology. Specifically, I describe the historical antecedents to international backpacking, including the 18th century *Grand Tour*, early 20th century Youth Hostel Movement, and 1960s drifting counterculture. I describe these three traditions because international backpackers are oftentimes university students or recent graduates like the Grand Tour youth travelers, utilize the backpacker hostel as a primary accommodation mode like the early hostellers, and maintain ideas about “drifting” away from the beaten tourist path like the 1960’s drifters. In this chapter, I make the case for understanding the backpacking travel form as a rite of passage for international travelers to temporarily abandon home, family, education, and work life and explore their “truer” selves through travel.

In Chapter 5, I describe the common ideology among backpackers traveling Central America. Through insight gained from backpackers traveling throughout the region, I explain their ideology that forms the basis to their reasons to travel off the beaten path and explore “the unknown.” Contained within this ideology involves travel ideas and ideals about: (1) escape, (2) independence, (3) adventure, and (4) self-reflection during their travels. While backpackers may experience travel in Central America differently from one another, they share and maintain this ideology in collective.

In Chapter 6, I describe backpacking practices as expressed by backpackers traveling Central America. I pay careful attention to the ways in which backpackers put important tools into practice as they travel. I emphasize backpacking in practice by focusing on: (1) the solitary backpack, (2) backpacker hostel (3) travel guidebook (4), and overland transportation. While backpackers may experience travel in Central America differently from one another, they share and maintain these practices in collective.

In Chapter 7, I provide an analytic discussion about the contradictions that emerge between backpacking ideology and practice in Central America. I describe the backpacker hostel as the socio-cultural space to understand backpackers’ travel ideology in relation to their practices. As a home base, backpackers use the hostel to connect with one another and express their ideas about backpacking, which

suggest contradictions between their ideology and practice. Finally, I discuss the ways in which backpackers in Central America accepted, negotiated, and confronted these contradictions in the face of mass tourism constraints.

In Chapter 8, I offer a discussion about contemporary backpacking as a youth subculture in the context of global mobility, globalization, and global tourism. I also provide concluding thoughts to the central arguments of this dissertation and its contribution to the discipline of sociology and the growing field of backpacker studies. I make important connections between my findings and the existing scholarly literature. I elaborate and refine prior research findings and offer new insights about Central American backpackers compared to backpackers in other regions. I conclude with a discussion highlighting key areas for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This idea of a journey or an escape from everyday life is of course preserved in the contemporary attitude of leisure and travel.

—Chris Rojek, 2000

It is now clear that people tour cultures; and that cultures and objects themselves travel.

—Chris Rojek and John Urry, 1997

My purpose in this chapter is to discuss the scholarly literature on leisure, tourism, and backpacker studies. I begin by describing the expansion of the leisure industry in the United States and mass tourism in Great Britain. I then discuss recent studies about contemporary backpacking that emerged from scholars' interest in understanding youth tourism culture, motives, and experiences. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of youth subculture and other subcultural studies, which provides a framework for understanding backpacking as a youth subculture within the broad spectrum of tourist types.

THE LEISURE INDUSTRY

According to British sociologist Chris Rojek (2010), leisure ideology in Western culture, predominantly in the United States, is tied to the concept of freedom. People tend to believe that their free time is considered their *leisure time*—the time rewarded after meeting essential human maintenance, such as sleeping, personal hygiene, and eating, as well as family and work commitments (Vickerman 1980). People value leisure time to maintain a sense of well-being with their everyday obligations, also noted as their *work-life balance*. Rojek (2010) explains:

Leisure is the reward for work; it is the key component in what we now call the work-life balance; it is an asset for the community; it reduces crime; it broadens mutual understanding; it is the secret of a healthy mind and body; it is all this and many other things that ordinary and most educated people automatically connect with the good life (P. 1).

People spend their leisure time participating in activities such as sports, shopping, art, and travel, which are culturally and economically conditioned and reflect distinctions of class, gender, ethnicity, education, and bodily health.

Leisure studies in the United States began with American sociologist Thorstein Veblen who wrote *The Theory of the Leisure Class* in 1899. Veblen ([1899] 1994) claims that in modern American society, the *leisure class* first developed among members of the upper class who earned social prestige through conspicuous displays of wealth. Yet, he argued that social prestige is earned not solely from what a person does or gains financially, although financial earnings and status often go hand in hand, but through the display of leisurely activities. Accordingly, members of the leisure class demonstrated their wealth through the non-productive use of time, which they believed was signified through their participation in leisure. As members from the middle and working classes gained a greater access to leisure time, they too engaged in leisure activities. The leisure class became synonymous with mass society.

This mass access to leisure in the United States began in the first decades of the 20th century. During this time, the American work week was reduced as a result of new production methods and advanced technology in the industrial workplace (Wilensky 1971).⁹ Industrialists used these new workplace innovations and greater productivity to reward workers with more leisure time outside the workplace. Employers became concerned, however, that the increase in their worker's leisure time would end up reducing productivity altogether. They saw the increase in leisure time as both a threat to work values and a greater social problem to society. As Goldman and Wilson (1977:158) explain: "The essence of play, its lack of regulation, its disdain for material outcomes, its exaltation in uncertainty, is the antithesis of the work values of a technological world." To deal with this concern, employers created rationalized leisure activities, or *industrial recreation*, to manage their workers' free time outside the workplace (Goldman and Wilson 1977).

⁹Vickerman (1980) also highlighted similar patterns that occurred in the United Kingdom between 1950 and 1980.

According to German sociologist Max Weber ([1930] 2003), modern society involves the process of rationalization in all aspects of social life. While the American industrial workplace was increasingly rationalized through technological innovation and attempts to take control of workers' every move to improve production efficiency and output, so too was free time outside the workplace. The first industrial recreation programs were public outdoor facilities and club rooms, created to instill in workers the idea that cooperation and teamwork during organized leisure activities would enhance their productivity in the workplace. Goldman and Wilson (1977) further explain:

...the introduction of industrial recreation programs was a strategy designed to regulate employees' labor time in the interests of higher productivity. Its purpose was to reintegrate the new world of leisure for productive ends. To the extent that this was effective, it helped mold the meaning of leisure for millions of workers, presenting it as recreation rather than free time, a period of renewal for further work rather than a time of freedom, spontaneity, and autonomy from the cash nexus (P. 158).

In other words, industrialists developed these recreation programs to “re-create” and increase worker's morale and improve greater efficiency in the workplace. Free time was meant to be oriented with work, supporting ideas about “work as sport” and “play pays” (Goldman and Wilson 1977).

During the development of the U.S. welfare state in the 1930s, the American government supported industry motives to establish public recreation opportunities throughout the country. This partnership led to the idea that recreation was meant for all people to enjoy. At this time, the government also instituted vacation hours for workers, which increased the amount of time that people could spend participating in recreation activities. While leisure involved the productive use (or participation) in a recreation activity, such as a game or sport, it now encouraged people to consume that activity.¹⁰ People who participated in recreation, by default, purchased, or consumed, the material products and services

¹⁰Goldman and Wilson (1977) note that the consumption of leisure in this sense was not just the idea of “conspicuous consumption” in the form of conspicuous displays of leisure activities as Thorstein Veblen ([1899] 1994) discussed in the *Theory of the Leisure Class*. Rather, participating in leisure activities meant that workers must also consume goods and services associated with particular leisure activities.

associated with a particular recreation activity.¹¹ In turn, this practice of consuming leisure generated new industries and markets needed to support such recreation activities.

After World War II, the rapid growth in American consumerism advanced leisure's commercial aspects. While local city governments established public recreational facilities to both support local industry motives and manage civic pride and community solidarity, private entrepreneurs capitalized on a booming leisure industry. They developed leisure into a major subsector of the U.S. economy, fueled by mass consumerism. The management of recreation by industry and government shifted to the hands of private entrepreneurs whose commercial interests promoted recreation for individual relaxation, entertainment, and personal development (Parker 1983). The connection between leisure and commerce was apparent as dance halls, saloons, pool rooms, and amusement parks proliferated as part of mass consumer culture (Goldman and Wilson 1977).

LEISURE STUDIES

By the 1950s, the growth in the leisure industry (along with mass consumer culture) provided individual opportunities to consume leisure at will in the United States, as well as Great Britain and other European nations that moved towards a post-industrial form. American sociologist Max Kaplan (1960), who surveyed the recreation explosion in the United States during the 1950s, claimed that in a "post-industrial society" people experienced even more free time devoted to leisure. Kaplan argued that post-industrial society was tantamount to a new leisure society in which an increase in progressive science, technology, automation, communication, ethical government, and the private service sector would result in the availability of leisure for all people to consume (Rojek 2010). Kaplan's study on recreation raised the profile of leisure as an important research topic in academia and guided the development of leisure studies.

¹¹Similarly, in the United Kingdom, Martin and Mason (1982) reported that in 1981, one-third of all UK consumer spending was on leisure-related goods and services.

Following Kaplan's lead, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, scholars began studying leisure more seriously and were interested to make leisure central to the topic of the work-life balance dichotomy. These scholars began to identify, describe, and analyze people's leisure activities. However, in the next couple of decades, scholars questioned Kaplan's leisure society thesis, particularly the notion that post-industrial society produced more free time for people to consume leisure. American sociologist Juliet Schor (1993) notes that contrary to popular belief, working hours in the United States increased after World War II, suggesting that the leisure society thesis was flawed in its attempt to explain how post-industrial American society had transitioned to a new leisure society. Schor reveals that Americans are working longer hours than ever before because of the incentive structures built into capitalism, rising standards and expectations in domestic life, and the consumer cycle of earn and spend, which all require longer working hours. Schor explains that in their pursuit for greater consumption and leisure, Americans are "wage slaves" and have made leisure time (outside of work) more difficult to obtain.

Rojek (2000) also claims that contemporary Western society is more aligned with a "post-work society." In a post-work society, leisure time is no longer distinct from work, as assumed in the work-life balance dichotomy. Leisure does not exist solely as free-time outside the workplace, as of the result in technological advancements made in the workplace. Rather, technology (and the economy) has reinterpreted the work ethic to integrate leisure into all aspects of social life. People can now consume leisure during working hours, during domestic life hours, and during community service hours (Rojek 2000). Western culture maintains the idea that hard work results in leisure time, but now freedom is pursued in one's work, family, and community.

More recently, scholars working in the field of leisure studies have focused on explaining various leisure types. As noted by Rojek (2000), leisure types run along a spectrum, with one end involving morally regulated leisure types and the other end deviant leisure types. Stebbins (1992) distinguishes between *serious leisure* (towards the morally-regulated end) and *casual leisure* (towards the deviant end). Serious leisure consists of voluntary leisure activities in which the participant develops a sense of career, self-worth, and progress. Serious leisure tends to involve leisure activities that are organized, cooperative,

and community-based, such as sporting events and concerts. Casual leisure consists of opportunistic, circumstantial leisure activities motivated by a desire for instant gratification. Casual leisure may include deviant acts of hedonism and gluttony. Rojek (2000) also suggests that leisure includes a strong progressive element, as individuals raise questions about inequality and injustice. For example, leisurely pursuits via coffeehouses and pubs, concerts, recreational education, and reading groups, can inspire political strategies and movements for transforming society (Rojek 2000).

Since the invention of the World Wide Web and an increase in computer-aided communication, leisure studies have also analyzed people's experiences in the time-space intensity of leisure relationships (Rojek 2000). Virilio ([1977] 2006) argues that the speed of technological, social, and cultural change in contemporary society is accelerating, suggesting that the pace of leisure is altered substantially. As Rojek (2000) notes: *fast leisure* refers to a mobile, fragmentary, varied leisure relation oriented to a technological network society and *slow leisure* refers to a stable, sustained, and regular leisure relationship that maintains traditional forms of social gatherings. The increase in computer technology, especially in Western culture, has also produced "techno-cultures" that rely on the Internet to gain a sense of interdependence and accessibility of information and entertainment at all times, supporting the post-work society claim (Rojek 2000).

Rojek (2010) calls for future leisure studies to explore the role of mass communication, transportation, and tourism in altering leisure relationships. Rojek (2010) also suggests the need for scholars to analyze leisure in relation to globalization, as some scholars suggest that leisure blurs the boundaries of the nation-state and how leisure in economically advanced countries in the West is dependent upon labor markets in resource deprived nations throughout the world. Rojek (2010) proposes "flow" as a crucial aspect for explaining how people actually behave in their leisure time. Travel, for example, is commonly associated with the "escape experience" of getting away from work, family, and community life (Rojek 2000). In the pursuit of getting away from it all, Rojek (2000) claims that leisure is expressed as a cultural "performance activity" and produces status statements about ourselves to others.

As such, there is also a need for future research to examine the performance-related aspects of travel, which are undertheorized and glossed over in leisure studies.

What better way to understand leisure in relation to globalization, flow, ideas of escape, and performance-related aspects of travel, than by analyzing various tourist forms? Tourism has long been recognized as a modern leisure form and offers important insights in understanding the technological, cultural, and economic changes that alter the character of tourism. I begin to address this call for research in the next section by theoretically and contextualizing mass tourism development.

MASS TOURISM

The first appearance of the term *tourist* in the English language was in the late 18th century and it was used synonymously with the idea of the *individual traveler* (Rojek 1993). By the middle of the 19th century, the term had acquired a negative connotation as it became associated with mass travel and low culture. Yet the meaning of traveler maintained a positive connotation because it involved ideas of independent, authentic travel. As such, it was associated with high culture, experienced by only a minority of people (Rojek 1993).

British sociologist John Urry ([1990] 2002) describes the shift from elite travel to mass society travel. According to Urry ([1990] 2002), travel was initially socially selective, available for a relatively limited elite social class, and used for a purpose. European expansionism and the British Industrialization of the 18th century marked an important era for leisure travel, which initiated a gradual democratization of travel dominated by the middle classes (Adler 1985). From the late 18th century to the early 19th century there was a shift in cultural values connected with Romanticism, an intellectual movement whose adherents placed an emphasis on the intensity of emotion and sensation, the poetic art form, hedonistic expression, and experiencing nature (Feifer 1985). The effects of Romanticism suggested that one should feel emotional about the natural world and its scenery (Urry [1990] 2002). Romanticism changed one's view of experiencing *travel as purpose to travel as pleasure*.

The British elite traveled to the seaside for the purpose to experience its therapeutic and medicinal properties (Urry [1990] 2002). They interpreted the seaside as a place to cure one's ills, rather

than a place to experience pleasure. Medical practitioners prescribed sea bathing to do one good and heal serious medical conditions. Only the elite could afford a very limited number of seaside accommodations. The motivation to experience the seaside for its therapeutic and medicinal properties began to change, however, as sea bathing became more favored for pleasure among the British working class. The harsh realities of life in overcrowded industrial towns and an increase in economic welfare inspired and allowed the working class to also participate in sea bathing, but for different reasons compared to their elite counterparts. Traveling to the seaside was a way for them to escape the industrial towns and experience pleasure in nature, more so than for its therapeutic and medicinal properties.

According to Urry ([1990] 2002), the seaside became a social phenomenon where the working class collectively gathered to visually consume, or, “gaze” upon, an unfamiliar environment outside their home and work lives (Urry [1990] 2002). Eventually, seaside resorts were established to serve the working class and their rapidly new form of mass leisure activity. As a result, the British elite no longer valued the sea for its therapeutic and medicinal properties reserved for only a few, as it became more of a place for the masses to engage in their *tourist gaze* (Urry [1990] 2002). Urry ([1990] 2002) points out that the social construction of the seaside as a place as pleasure was reinforced through this mass gaze, as it helped reify the visual imagery that the masses placed on the seaside as being beautiful, fun, and relaxing compared to their mundane world. The British elite came to despise how the masses saw and used the seaside and so they reinterpreted it as representing everything they held to be tasteless, common, and vulgar (Urry [1990] 2002).

Another important precursor to the development of mass tourism involved the extensive development of mass travel by rail. In the 1830s, the early railway companies did not foresee the economic opportunities of the emergent mass low-income market (Urry [1990] 2002). By 1841, however, Englishman Thomas Cook capitalized on railroad development, as well as the Gladstone Railway Act of 1844, which obliged the railway companies to make provisions for the working class. By the second half of the 19th century, Cook opened the first travel agency. Cooks Tours, as they came to be known, offered the working class packaged railroad excursions to historical places, first in Great Britain followed by

Europe and into the Middle East. With the development of mass seaside resorts and railroad excursions, more people began traveling in “a world discovered (or created by entrepreneurs), packaged and then marketed” (Crick 1989:308). By the 20th century, further innovations in transportation contributed to mass tourism development, such as boat cruises, car touring, and plane travel. Geographical movement was democratized on a mass scale never experienced before (Urry [1990] 2002).

With the massive growth in tourism, scholars working in leisure studies began paying particular attention to the cultural, economic, and environmental implications of tourism. In the following section, I discuss the theoretical approaches to the study of tourism. This discussion helps to clarify current issues in theorizing tourism and provides the conceptual basis for understanding backpacking travel patterns.

THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF TOURISM

Ideas about freedom and escape from home and work life reveal themselves particularly well as people dream about touring places and then actually go and tour those places (Rojek and Urry 1997).

Tourism, or the act of touring for *sightseeing* throughout the world (often for more than four nights, but less than one year), provides people a sense of freedom from their routine lives (Adler 1989). As people travel to *tourist sites*, “the spatial location which is distinguished from everyday life by virtue of its natural, historical or cultural extraordinariness,” they engage in touristic experiences in hopes of re-creating themselves prior to returning home (Rojek and Urry 1997:52).

As people tour, they vary in their cultural ways of touring, since culture and tourism hugely overlap (Rojek and Urry 1997). Understanding tourism provides a look at how tourists’ culture influences their “performance” as tourists in a foreign place: how they abide by certain cultural norms, values, and behaviors when touring (Adler 1989; Apostopoulos, Leivadi, and Yiannakis 1996). Moreover, understanding tourism reveals the peculiarities of the “culture on tour” (Bruner 2005). That is, tourism is significant in its ability to reveal aspects of tourists’ mundane cultural practices, which might otherwise seem vague unless expressed through touring. So while tourism is intended to provide escape from one’s own culture, tourists are seen practicing their culture on tour. As a result, tourists might be “increasingly

freighted with worries that the impetus of tourism is itself destroying the possibility of tourism” (Rojek and Urry 1997:1).

A sociological approach to the study of tourism theorizes and analyzes tourists’ cultural performances while on tour, but also tourism’s economic implications and contradictions that constrain ideas about freedom and escape from home and work life. Sociologists study why and how for short periods of time people leave their normal place of residence and work for pleasure, holidays, and travel. They study the cultural and economic structure of the tourism system, tourist motivations, attitudes, reactions, and roles, relations and perceptions of hosts and guests, and the socioeconomic and sociocultural impact of the tourism industry (Apostopoulos et al. 1996:5). In an increasingly globalized world, tourism accelerates cultural, economic, and environmental connections that become ever more important to understand the local dynamics of the global tourism industry.

Tourism emerged as a sociological topic of inquiry in the 1970s with Israeli sociologist Erik Cohen’s (1972) tourist typology and American sociologist Dean MacCannell’s ([1976] 1999) theoretical synthesis about the tourist as the “new leisure class.” In Cohen’s (1984) classical essay “The Sociology of Tourism: Approaches, Issues, and Findings,” he draws from previous literature about tourism to develop eight conceptual approaches to the study of tourism. These conceptual approaches include understanding tourism as (1) commercialized hospitality (see Cohen 1974; Hiller 1976, 1977; Leiper 1979), (2) democratized travel (see Knebel 1960; Boorstin [1961] 2002; Cohen 1974; Turner and Ash 1975; P.L. Pearce 1982), (3) a modern leisure activity (see Dumazdier 1967; Nash 1981; Scheuch 1981; P.L. Pearce 1982), (4) a modern variety of the traditional pilgrimage (see MacCannell [1976] 1999; Graburn 1983), (5) an expression of basic cultural themes, (6) an acculturative process, (7) a type of ethnic relationship, and (8) a form of neocolonialism. Making sense of tourism using Cohen’s tourist typology has become both an interest and a challenge to sociologists and other scholars of the social sciences.

Urry ([1990] 2002; 2010) discusses the historical importance of the *tourist gaze* during the rise of mass tourism to explain its relevance to contemporary touring. The tourist gaze is the set of anticipations that tourists place on the people and places they tour, especially when they search for an authentic

experience. According to Urry and Larsen (2011), when tourists “go away” they use their gaze to look at the environment with interest and curiosity. Their gaze speaks to them in ways they appreciate, or at least anticipate will allow them to appreciate (Urry [1990] 2002). Yet, Urry ([1990] 2002) points out that the tourist gaze is socially organized and systematized by professional experts who help construct, develop, and market the tourist gaze (Urry and Larsen 2011).

Following this notion of the tourist gaze, Urry ([1990] 2002) highlights two dominant positions within the sociology of tourism. The first position claims that tourism involves a search for the inauthentic, or a search for simulations of what is perceived as authentic yet are not accessible at that tourist site (Ritzer and Liska 1997), while the second argues that tourism should be interpreted as a quest for authenticity (Krippendorf 1984; MacCannell [1976] 1999). According to the first position, “the mass tourist travels in guided groups and finds pleasure in inauthentic contrived attractions, gullibly enjoying ‘pseudo-events’ and disregarding the ‘real’ outside world” (Urry [1990] 2002:7). According to the second position, “all tourists embody a quest for authenticity...in other ‘times’ and other ‘places’ away from that person’s everyday life... particular fascination in the ‘real lives’ of others that somehow possess a reality hard to discover in their own experiences” (Urry [1990] 2002:9). According to both theories, tourist entrepreneurs and people in tourist locales are incentivized to produce ever more extravagant displays, or what MacCannell ([1976] 1999) calls *staged authenticity*, in an artificial manner simply to please the tourist and, by extension, to make money.¹²

As described in Turner and Ash’s *The Golden Hordes* (1975), the tourist is placed at the center of a strictly circumscribed world. “Surrogate parents” (travel agents, couriers, and hotel managers) relieve the tourist from the harsh reality of the places they visit (Urry and Larsen 2011). Tourists are restricted to the beach and the resort hotel, in their own familiar “environmental bubble,” or tourist bubble, that insulates them from the strangeness of the host environment. Hence, “the tourists’ sensuality and aesthetic

¹²French sociologist Jean Baudrillard (1981) claims that society no longer uses reality as a referent for its representations. Released from reality, the image (or in this case, the tourist site) becomes central, and the value of material goods lies not in their use but in their symbolic value (or to what they offer culturally to the tourist).

sense are as restricted as they are in their home country” (Urry and Larsen 2011:8). Yet in the search for new places to visit, what is constructed for the tourist is “a set of hotels and tourist sights that are bland and lacking contradiction, ‘a small monotonous world that everywhere shows us our own image...the pursuit of the exotic and diverse ends in uniformity’” (Turner and Ash 1975: 292).

Cohen (1972; 1979; 1988) maintains, however, that there is no single tourist type, but tourist types with varying touristic experiences. Cohen describes these tourist types as either “experiential,” “experimental,” or “existential,” with all three types concerned to avoid the environmental bubble associated with conventional tourist services. To varying degrees, these tourist types differ in their experiences in accepting or rejecting the ways the tourism industry organizes tourist activities. Cohen also argues that these familiar environmental bubbles permit people to visit places they otherwise would not. In effect, tourists have at least some contact with the “strange” places they encounter. And until such places have become fully integrated into the tourism industry, much of this “strangeness” about these places is impossible to hide and package within the complete array of pseudo-events.

For example, MacCannell ([1976] 1999) examines the character of the social relations that emerge from the fascination tourists have in the working lives of others. He notes that such “real lives” can only be found “backstage” and are not immediately evident to tourists. Also, unlike the religious pilgrim who pays homage to a single sacred site, the tourist pays homage to a large array of sites and attractions, regardless whether or not they are established as “tourism sites.” These even include sites of industry and work, as work has become a mere attribute of society and not its central feature. MacCannell ([1976] 1999) characterizes such an interest in work displays as “alienated leisure.” It is a perversion of the aim of leisure since it involves a return to the workplace, but someone else’s workplace.

Hence, tourists always involve an obvious intrusion into people’s lives, which would be generally unacceptable back home where social norms restrict such tourist activities to occur (Urry [1990] 2002). So both the local people gazed upon and tourist entrepreneurs who help establish the gaze, gradually come to construct back-stages that are contrived and artificial in manner (MacCannell [1976] 1999). The development of the constructed tourist attraction results from how those who are subject to the tourist

gaze respond, both to protect themselves from intrusions into their lives and to take advantage of the opportunities it presents for profitable investment. MacCannell ([1976] 1999) argues that pseudo-events actually result from the social relations of tourism and not from an individualistic search for the inauthentic (Urry [1990] 2002).

Pearce and Moscardo (1986) elaborate on the notion of authenticity and suggest distinctions exist between the authenticity of a setting and the authenticity of the persons gazed upon, as well as diverse aspects of the tourist experience. Crick (1989) points out that, in a sense, all cultures are staged and inauthentic. Cultures are invented, remade, reorganized overtime, especially when cultures come into contact with one another. Bruner (1994) also highlights the conflicting sense of what is meant by authentic. People have to learn how, when, and where to gaze. Clear markers are provided and in some cases the object of the gaze is merely the marker that indicates some event or experience previously happened at that spot. Accordingly, it remains unclear why the apparently inauthentic staging for the tourist is so very different from the processes of cultural remaking that happens in all cultures anyways (Rojek and Urry 1997).

Urry and Larsen (2011) suggest that one's eyes are socio-culturally framed and there are various "ways of seeing" people and places. Also, "we never look just at one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves" (Berger 1972:9). The tourist gaze occurs through a particular filter of ideas, skills, desires, and expectations, and structured according to social class, gender, nationality, age, and education. Gazing at particular sights is conditioned by embodied experiences and memories and managed by rules and styles, as well as circulating images and texts of various places. The tourist gaze is socially patterned and tied into, and enabled by, various technologies and tools, such as cameras, camcorders, TV and digital images. And by considering the use of these tools for the tourist gaze, one can make sense of the wider society in which they are contrasted (Urry and Larsen 2011:3).

Urry and Larsen (2011) further suggest the need to understand the social forces that produce tourist gazes and touristic experiences. "Understanding the tourist gaze is not to explain what motivates people to travel and gaze, but to explain the systematic and regularized nature of various gazes, each of

which depends upon social discourses and practices, as well as aspects of building, design, and restoration that foster the necessary ‘look’ of a place or an environment” (Urry and Larsen 2011:17). Accordingly, to understand the tourist gaze in different contexts, places, and situations, there must be certain aspects about a place that distinguish it from what is usually encountered in everyday life. As a form of leisure, then, “tourism results from a basic binary division between the ordinary/every day and the extraordinary” (Urry and Larsen 2011:15). Tourists’ experiences involve some aspect or element that induces pleasurable experiences away from home and work life, which are out of the ordinary, although some tourists encounter experiences that allow them to feel as if they are at home.

Over the past three decades, tourism studies have expanded to include *international backpacking* as a major topic of inquiry. In the following section, I discuss contemporary backpacking, drawing from foundational research on the topic that began in the 1980s and recent backpacker studies since the 1990s. I focus on describing independent youth travel typologies of the 1980s, backpacking identity and its defining features, and the development of the backpacker studies subfield. I discuss the subfield’s major findings, contributions to tourism research, and call for future research. I also clarify the current issues and limitations to these findings, which provided the direction for this dissertation’s research questions.

CONTEMPORARY BACKPACKING

The backpacking travel form offers ideas about travel as a way to experience freedom and flexibility from modern society (Westerhausen 2002). Contemporary backpacking reflects the major themes found in the travel writings of Ernest Hemingway, Bruce Chatwin, Paul Theroux, and Bill Bryson, among others. These themes celebrate “getting away from it all,” along with having “tourist angst, rebelliousness, authenticity, and the rituals of indulgence” (Richards and Wilson 2004:12). Contemporary backpacking can also be traced to youth travel during the 18th century Grand Tour, early 20th century Youth Hostel Movement, and the 1960s drifting counterculture. Additionally, contemporary backpackers resemble outcasts or marginal groups, such as hobos and tramps, as well as religious pilgrims.

From Cohen’s (1973) seminal article “Nomads from Affluence: Notes on the Phenomenon of Drifter Tourism” until 1990, scholars published only 11 academic articles about the backpacking travel

form (Richards and Wilson 2004). Early studies on contemporary backpacking in the 1980s aimed to define backpacking as a new tourist type (Hampton 2013). These studies acknowledged the significance of youth tourism in a post-industrial society (Hartmann 1991) and expanded upon previous studies (although few in number) about the hippie drifters who traveled Asia during the 1960s and 1970s (see, Cohen 1973). Although writers identified backpacking as a significant travel form in the 1980s, most research about backpacking occurred after 1990 when the term *backpacker* was first noted in the academic literature (see, Pearce 1990).

Backpacking research increased during the 1990s when scholars began exploring backpacking's socio-cultural aspects, such as backpacking identity and backpackers' motives to travel (see for example, Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995; Desforges 2000; Elsrud 2001; Sørensen 2003; Noy 2004). The majority of these studies were descriptive rather than analytical. Few studies during the nineties investigated or theorized the impact of backpacker tourism on host societies (although see, Hampton 1998) and the majority of field research was clustered in India, Southeast Asia, Australia, and New Zealand (Hannam and Diekmann 2010).

The backpacking travel form was also positioned within the youth tourism segment (Jones 1992). However, Hartmann (1991) suggests that backpackers' motives to travel differ from those found in youth tourism and more aligned with alternative tourism. According to Jones (1992), *alternative tourism* involves independent travel performed by a small number of people to remote destinations in developing countries. Hartmann (1991) also contends that alternative tourism varies according to degree, with some alternative tourists attracted to extreme tourism forms, such as sky diving, while others only flirt with the idea. Yet no matter the degree in motivation to travel, both backpacking and alternative travel forms are still regarded in opposition, or as an extreme alternative, to mainstream tourism (Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995).

Independent Youth Travel Typologies

Hartmann (1991) offered one of the first independent youth travel typologies according to the varying travel motives among individual traveler types (cited by Loker-Murphy and Pearce in 1995).

Moratorium travelers travel extensively prior to starting a career or family life. They tend to travel more comfortably, avoiding non-calculable adventures. *Ascetic travelers* also travel extensively, but are budget conscious and abstain from “worldly” comforts and pleasures. They would rather test their limits of endurance on solo, unplanned journeys with very few resources. *Adventurers* also test their limits of endurance, but in contrast to budget conscious ascetic travelers, rely on more financial resources, careful planning, and desire to travel to very remote destinations. They also make it a goal to promote their adventures among family and friends. *Goal-directed travelers* also carefully plan their travels, but for educational purposes and to gain material and cultural profit. *Party travelers* make it a goal to both socialize amongst the mainstream independent youth travelers and participate in activities they would otherwise refrain from doing at home. *Alternative travelers* similarly engage in more hedonistic experiences, but are constantly in search of new experiences while trying to avoid mainstream tourism altogether. Finally, *Peter Pan travelers* are older travelers (around 40 years of age) who search for their “second youth” by leaving behind their home life to join the youth traveling scene.

Loker-Murphy and Pearce (1995) associate these youth travel typologies with contemporary backpackers. And recent backpacker studies continue to reclassify backpackers according to similar typologies by understanding contemporary backpacking motives, but in different economic, social, and cultural contexts for a range of destinations (see, Sørensen 2003; Richards and Wilson 2004; Uriely 2005; Ateljevic and Doorne 2004). Loker-Murphy and Pearce (1995) describe backpackers as having core set of defining features, which suggests that backpackers share a distinct identity.

Backpacking Identity and Defining Features

Loker-Murphy and Pearce (1995) explain backpacking identity according to backpackers’ preferences for: (1) budget accommodation, (2) meeting new people, (3) independently organized travel with a flexible travel schedule, (3) extended travel as opposed to brief holidays, and (4) informal participatory recreation activities. Recent backpacking research has refined backpacking identity to include backpackers’ preferences for independence, budget travel, experiential, and personal/social growth (Paris and Teye 2010). Paris and Teye (2010) suggest that backpackers’ preferences are

influenced by previous travel experiences and age, which provide new travel motives, such as to obtain deeper cultural knowledge about a place and experience relaxation while they travel. These backpacking preferences and motives are said to contrast from short-term resort-style vacations that range from having relatively inexpensive to the most lavish accommodation, transport, and dining experiences.

As opposed to mainstream tourist types (predetermined by an established tourism industry), backpacking identity relies on cultural symbols the outside perception of their travel form. They also carry with them the emblematic backpack that gives them their name. The backpack allows backpacking identity to be associated with a “nomadic lifestyle” of traveling light and adventuring “off the beaten path” (Richards and Wilson 2004). Backpackers are said to constantly search for the unexplored, the untouched, the exotic, and the authentic (Cohen 2003). Iyer (1988) suggests that backpacking travels are scattered and that the backpackers leave behind their Western culture in the very places they visit. As Richards and Wilson (2004:3) explain, the backpack not only gives backpackers their name, but also provides “cultural baggage as well.”

Riley (1988) notes that a central backpacking motive involves getting as close as possible to the foreign place and culture visited, or, sharing the “local lifestyle.” Sharing the local lifestyle entails engaging with local people to learn directly from them about their place and culture. Sørensen (2003:856) also suggests that backpackers want to experience the “real nature” that travel offers about a foreign place and culture. Experiencing the real nature of travel involves paying local prices, getting the best deal, traveling off the beaten path, participating in long-term travel, experiencing illnesses or diseases, encountering dangers, or having some combination of these various modes of backpacking experiences. Cohen (2003) theorizes that while backpackers aim to venture off the beaten path for authentic experiences among the local culture, their experiences must differ from one another, because foreign places provide different modes of touristic experiences.

In practice, backpackers tend to share their stories about the “real nature” of travel with one another to help maintain to enhance their own personal status as travelers (Sørensen 2003). Sørensen (2003) claims that backpackers share stories as a way to earn “road status” as part of a “backpacking

community” (also see, Riley 1988; Teas 1988; Hyde and Lawson 2003). Sørensen (2003) describes road status as a backpacking phenomenon that comprises time on the road with hardship, exotic experiences, competence, cheap travel, and the ability to communicate properly with locals. He explains that the appearance of having worn clothing and equipment might seem shabby to the local outsider or the mainstream tourist, but among backpackers, the worn look asserts experience, endurance, and frugality. Yet, many backpackers possess credit cards and are financially better off than their appearance implies. Backpackers intend to pay for items according to local prices, although what matters to them most is paying less than other backpackers, leading many backpackers to lie to each other about what they paid for an item. However, Sørensen (2003) notes that not all backpackers are concerned with perceptions of their road status.

Backpackers who do conform to such status exchange also conform within the constraints of having a shared identity. Within most cultures, statuses are synonymous with hierarchies. According to Sørensen (2003), this appears to hold true among backpackers, not just within a backpacker community, but more so when compared to both the local people and mainstream tourists. Status exchange allows backpackers to express themselves as “us backpackers,” as a community distinct from both the local people and tourists (Sørensen 2003:858). As Sørensen (2003:858) claims, “road status serves as the social glue, in that the status exchange serves as a mutual recognition of someone with worthy norms and values.” This backpacking hierarchy reinforces the backpacking identity.

The scholarly pursuit to understand this shared backpacking identity and its defining features has situated backpacking as an important topic of inquiry in leisure and tourism studies. Since the 1990s when research on backpacking identities, motives, and experiences increased substantially, scholars have continued this scholarly trek to further understand backpacking identity vis-à-vis the changing nature of mainstream tourism, globalization, and global mobility. Recent backpacking research explores backpacking as a “(post)modern phenomenon” adopted mostly by young Western tourists who can now be found “in every corner of the globe” and, as such, provides new insights to backpacking motives and experiences (Richards and Wilson 2004). Accordingly, scholars across the social sciences discipline have

established a field of backpacker studies with scholarly pursuits to continue understanding the backpacking phenomenon in the 21st century.

BACKPACKER STUDIES

The Backpacker Research Group (BRG) of the Association for Tourism and Leisure Education Research (ATLAS) was established in 2001 to both develop a network of researchers and compile a bibliography of studies about the backpacking travel form (Richards and Wilson 2004). They drew from several academic disciplines, mostly from the social sciences and business and economics, in compiling their bibliography. They concluded that the majority of early backpacker literature was descriptive with a lack of analytical and theoretical studies. This descriptive backpacking literature describes historic content and youth travel typologies from the time of drifting during the 1960s and 1970s to the development of backpacker tourism in the 1980s and 1990s. At the time, the BRG called for future studies to understand and explain contemporary backpacking in the 21st century.

Following the formation of the research group, ATLAS members Richards and Wilson (2004) edited the first BRG volume that attempts to carve a backpacker studies field out of the greater tourism and leisure studies. This volume, *The Global Nomad: Backpacker Travel in Theory and Practice* traces the growth of the backpacker tourism industry. They begin with a discussion about the findings from a major global survey about youth travelers, followed by case studies about backpacking destinations and backpackers' behaviors within those spatial contexts. In concluding, they suggest the need for future research to develop theoretically and empirically informed research from a number of disciplines, including sociology, geography, anthropology, economics, management, and marketing perspectives, to contribute to backpacker studies.

Richards and Wilson (2004) conducted the global survey in conjunction with the International Student Travel Confederation (ISTC) to track contemporary backpacking motives and experiences. They surveyed 2,300 independent youth travelers across eight countries and conclude that while youth travelers are still motivated to explore authentic cultures (like early backpacking studies revealed about drifting), backpackers have a wide range of personal travel ambitions. These ambitions include the desire to be part

of an increasingly strong community of youth travelers “on the road.” They also found that while the label “backpacker” is commonly used to refer to these youth travelers, their survey respondents identify more so with the label “independent traveler.”

Although this survey was the first of its kind to understand backpacking motives and experiences on such a large scale, Richards and Wilson (2004) suggest a strong need for qualitative research for an in-depth look at the so-called backpacking community. They assert the need to explore the defining features of this community and find out if such a community actually exists, or if backpackers travel with only the goal to find community. They also hope that future qualitative research explores the assumption that backpackers spend time “hanging out” or even “doing nothing” while they travel and question whether or not this practice may be an important part of the backpacking experience. They also consider the assumption that backpackers who spend time among other backpackers might do so as a way to reflect upon their lives back home in ways different than while immersed in the local cultures.

Central to the claim that backpackers are part of a backpacking community includes acknowledging that backpackers may share distinct cultural traits. Few studies have explored the subcultural aspect that underlies the one’s sense of community. Among those studies, Welk (2004) understands backpacking as a “culture,” or “scene,” increasingly concerned with mainstream tourism development. Welk suggests that backpackers express their concerns along symbolic lines. As mentioned previously, Sørensen (2003) reveals that “road culture” exists among backpackers as they share travel stories about their hardships while traveling. Binder (2004) also demonstrates from her fieldwork in Southeast Asia that backpackers’ “self-representation” is predominant over the actual practice of backpacking. These studies allude to Cohen’s (2003) claim that while backpackers aspire to the drifting ideology, in reality they may indeed resemble “ordinary tourists” in terms of their travel practices. These studies suggest the need for future research to understand backpacking in practice.

Following the trend to explore backpacking identity and its defining features, more recent research offers new insights about backpackers who vary according to their national, racial, ethnic, and gendered experiences (Wilson and Ateljevic 2008). They also provide research in understudied regions of

the world. For example, Wilson and Ateljevic (2008) suggest that backpacking is an “embodied experience.” Over the course of six years, they studied a number of female backpackers in Australia, New Zealand, China, and Fiji, and found that their informants describe their travel experiences in relation to their bodies, in the context of their everyday lived experiences and socio-cultural structures (Wilson and Ateljevic 2008:97). They argue that travel is a subjective experience and, as such, women have different experiences while traveling than men. Myers (2010:138) extends this claim in her study about lesbian travelers in New Zealand and found that lesbians tend to search for a “lesbian space, free from heteronormative pressures; a place to interact with other lesbians, make new contacts, friendships, new networks and a space in which to explore their own identity.” Maoz (2008) explains how Israeli woman, during mid-life, experience their travels as a way to cope with mid-life frustrations, crises, and unwanted traits by creating a new and different identity on the road. Future research about the subjective, embodied, experience should also address how nationality influences how one travels (e.g., the experience of Israeli “group travel”) (Maoz 2004; 2007), as well as travelers of color, and travelers who have distinct racial features and ethnic appearances that allow them to “look local” by blending in with local peoples (see for example, Muzaini 2006).

Recent quantitative studies have explored how backpackers make purchase decisions, including pre-trip planning purchases and purchases made while traveling. Newlands (2004) found in his survey about pre-trip planning, that backpackers plan their trips during pre-departure stages. Also, while backpackers rely on the Internet for pre-trip planning, they prefer informal information sources while traveling. Kain and King (2004) found in their study in Australia that backpackers prefer “word of mouth” information sources while traveling, although guidebooks play a vital source to inform backpackers’ travel experiences. They also examine backpackers’ product purchase decisions, which supports the claim that backpackers are budget-conscious. Vance (2004) looks at transportation modes in New Zealand and found that while backpacker decisions about transport are complex, travel patterns are to a large extent influenced by the development of an identifiable backpacking transport infrastructure.

Building upon these backpacker studies, the BRG suggests research should draw from new theories to inform backpacking experiences in relation to the concept of mobility (Hannam and Diekman 2010). Hannam and Ateljevic (2008) call the need for research to understand the global backpacking phenomenon through the lens of the recent mobilities emphasis.¹³ Mobility is inherent to backpacking, yet much of backpacker studies research has developed without explaining the backpacking travel form in the context of an interconnected, mobile world. Previous studies only allude to the fact that the backpacking travel form is now part of the globalization process.

Backpacking Mobilities

To address the call for more mobility research, Paris (2010) presents a “backpacker mobilities framework,” which illustrates three spaces that backpackers rely on when they travel: the physical, the cultural, and the virtual. Physical spaces are the spaces in which backpackers travel, such as destinations, enclaves, budget accommodations, internet cafes, transportation hubs, transportation modes, as well as specialized travel agencies that promote budget travel (O’Regan 2008). Cultural spaces represent the shared ideology, identity, social status, motivations and attitudes, as well as “outside” representations and perceptions about backpacking (Sørensen 2003). Virtual spaces include e-mail, online communities, blogs, and personal websites, as well as mobile devices (e.g., laptops, mobile phones, tablets) and connections (Internet, Wi-Fi, and broadband) (Mascheroni 2007). Whereas physical and cultural spaces were the first identified spaces from which to understand the backpacking travel form, virtual spaces are increasingly integrated into 21st century backpacking mobility. And sometimes all three of these spaces intersect. As Mascheroni (2007) notes, backpackers now have the ability to be in two places at once: their physical location while traveling (or at home when they return) and virtual locations. Understanding why

¹³The recent mobilities emphasis involves an interdisciplinary approach to understand why and how people, ideas and information, goods, and energy, move in an increasingly globalized world. It incorporates new ways of theorizing and researching various forms of mobility, which involve moving with research subjects to understand their ground-level experiences, but also to understand the forces that drive and constrain their movements (Creswell 2006; Sheller and Urry 2006). From a sociological standpoint, Sheller and Urry (2006), draw from the works of Georg Simmel and his ideas that urban life is defined by mobile social connections and tempo.

and how backpackers use these spaces, as well as the interconnections among them, allows future research to analyze backpackers' mobile experiences.

Hannam and Ateljevic (2008) also suggest that the increasingly mobile backpacker subsequently gives rise to new backpacker types, that utilize all three backpacking spaces and represent other tourism forms. For example, the *flashpacker*, a recent term used in popular travel blogs and a few scholarly studies to describe backpackers who are: "the older twenty to thirty-something backpacker, who travels with an expensive backpack or a trolley-type case, stays in a variety of accommodation depending on location, has greater disposable income, visits more 'off the beaten track' locations, carries a laptop, or at least a 'flashdrive' and mobile phone, but who engages with the mainstream backpacker culture" (Hannam and Diekmann 2010:2). Other backpacker types represent volunteer tourists (see, Laythorpe 2010) and heritage tourists (see, Butler 2010). However, Hannam and Ateljevic (2008) note that very little research has explored why and how an increase in backpacking mobility offers backpackers the ability and resources to merge with these other tourism forms.

Additionally, backpacker studies can benefit from field research that explores the in-depth role of backpacking enclaves as important spaces that backpackers inhabit, utilize, and move through during their travels. As Richards and Wilson (2004) suggest, backpacking enclaves may serve as important arenas or stages for the development of "backpacking subculture." O'Regan (2010) provides a conceptual overview of the backpacker hostel phenomenon, yet lacks any field data to support his claims. He claims that hostels are "historically, discursively, symbolically and materially part of backpackers' lived 'socio-spatial practices'; part of a global system that enables, influences and shapes (and vice-a-versa) backpacker flows" (Hannam and Diekmann 2010:85). Following O'Regan's overview, Hannam and Diekman (2010) suggest that the backpacker hostel is central to the reproduction and development of backpacking. Still, Wilson and Richards (2008) recommend that more attention, especially fieldwork, should be paid to the role of the enclave, "as a social and cross-cultural space in which the gap between the ideology and practice in backpacker travel is not only created, but also reconciled for (and by) the participants of the scene" (Wilson and Richards 2008:9).

Ateljevic and Doorne (2004) review backpacking research that suggests a shift in the backpacking travel form as one interpreted as alternative tourism set on the margins of mainstream tourism, to one that is now an attractive market to the tourism industry. In Australia, New Zealand, and Scotland, backpackers are now identified as an important market segment within their respective tourism industries. Cooper, O'Mahony, and Erfurt (2004) also show that in Australia, backpackers are now an important tourism segment to the entire Australian economy. Backpackers in Australia not only contribute to the economy through tourism consumption, but also, literally, work (i.e., seek short term employment) their way through the country during their travels.

In a global, mobile world, backpacking is now understood as potentially supported by the increasing ease of international travel, a growing network of budget hostels and travel companies, and the increasing flexibility of life path and work patterns (Richards and Wilson 2004:3). Richards and Wilson (2004) argue that the freedom, flexibility, and adventure offered by the backpacking travel form, one that Cohen (2003) claims is ideologically opposed to mainstream tourism, produces a sort of paradox. That is, while backpackers travel to new places, their own travel experiences (even if different from mainstream tourists) may impact the very places and cultures they seek to explore. Backpackers are forced into adopting an even greater nomadic lifestyle as an attempt to avoid other travelers. Richards and Wilson (2004) theorize that this paradoxical travel pattern is bound to fail because of the increased networks developed by budget hostels and guidebooks, which may influence their travel patterns.

As theorized by Richards and Wilson (2004), once backpackers experience a place, their nomadic lifestyle forces them to move on to the next. These patterns of movement eventually develop into "well-trodden routes" increasingly connected by the establishment of new backpacking enclaves. Richards and Wilson (2004) suggest, however, that questions remain about what goes on within these backpacking enclaves that motivates backpackers to maintain their identity in the face of increased travel and tourism mobility. They also suggest that new backpacking types are emerging with the rapid changes in the backpacking tourism market and should be further identified.

Finally, backpacker studies have undertheorized the effects of backpacking in developing nations. Hampton (2013) provides a recent review of the impact of economic development that backpacker tourism brings to developing regions. He suggests that backpacker tourism can play a vital role in the economic development strategies of countries in these developing regions. He draws from case studies about backpacker tourism in Southeast Asia, particularly Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, and India, as well as one case study in Mexico. Hampton's (2013) analysis supports earlier claims made by Scheyvens (2002) that, as backpackers see their travel form as a sustainable tourism mode that occurs away from conventional tourist routes, backpackers inevitably offer support to local economies untouched by mass tourism. Also, since backpackers tend to stress long-term stays, they contribute more so to local economies than conventional tourists through the purchase of more goods and services (including local guided tours) over the entire length of their travels. Empirically understanding backpacking travel patterns in developing regions, provides further clues as to why and how backpackers maintain their identity in the face of global tourism development with growing economic interests in these regions.

BACKPACKING SUBCULTURAL FRAMEWORK

Backpacker studies that explain backpacking as a "culture" or "scene" (Welk 2004) include backpackers maintaining their "road status" (Sørensen 2003) through "self-representation" amongst other backpackers (Binder 2004). In this section, I draw from the subcultural studies approach and delineate a subcultural standpoint to analyze the backpacking travel form. Youth subculture studies describe the shared ideologies and practices among particular groups of people in opposition to those set forth by societal institutions. As such, this subcultural studies approach provides a basis in which to explore backpacking as a youth subculture involving shared ideologies and practices within the much larger mass tourism phenomenon.

According to Gelder ([1997] 2005), early scholarly studies about subcultures emerged in The Chicago School during the first part of the 20th century. American sociologist Robert E. Park and his students produced important urban field studies to understand various constituent groups of the city, or

“unassimilated social types,” including recent immigrants, delinquents, gang members, and hobos.¹⁴ Park and his students found that common cultural traits among these social types include shared values, behaviors, styles, and habits, which distinguish their ways of life from that of greater society.

Subcultural studies find their subject matter in these unassimilated groups whose members are marginalized or diverge from the “social order of urban life” (Gelder [1997] 2005). According to Park, Burgess, and McKenzie [1925] (1984), the urban social order contrasts from that of rural communities. As he explains, in traditional rural communities, community members are defined by their “moral places of socialization” (or milieus). That is, they maintain social solidarity through shared rituals regulated by folkways (norms, routines, and traditions) and mores (customs, values, and behaviors). In modern urban society, communal relations breakdown and societal relations emerge through a dominant culture that revolves around the marketplace. People of the city are “civilized” through a “new social order” governed by institutions (the family, media, education, and religion) and societal norms and values that support the economy.

Gelder ([1997] 2005) further explains that subcultures were initially concerned with this new social order, or “urban society,” and diverged from it to establish new moral codes that resembled that of traditional rural communities. The very controls and inhibitions of urban life influence subcultural groups to find their own divergent moral codes in their own milieus. Park et al. ([1925] 1984) claimed that unassimilated groups were just as important to the city as the so-called civilized groups. He argued that both civilized and unassimilated groups are a natural part of the “city’s complex ecology,” that is, they compete and exchange for urban resources (much like how natural ecosystems function according to Darwinian evolution).

By the 1940’s, the term *subculture* was beginning to be used to describe particular kinds of social difference (compared across nationality, ethnicity, and class) in an increasingly “pluralized and fractured”

¹⁴According to Hannerz (1980), five major case studies that defined the early Chicago School include: (1) Nels Anderson’s *The Hobo*, written in 1923, (2) Frederic M. Thrasher’s *The Gang*, written in 1927, (3) Louis Wirth’s *The Ghetto*, written in 1928, (4) Harvey W. Zorbaugh’s *The Gold Coast and the Slum*, written in 1929, and (5) Paul G. Cressey’s *The Taxi-Dance Hall*, written in 1932.

American society (Gelder [1997] 2005). In *Assimilation in American Life* (1964), American sociologist Milton M. Gordon argues that to understand culture, however, one must look beyond a social group's national identity, ethnic background, and class standing. Rather, one should identify more nuanced social arrangements among social groups. Similar to how Park (1937) describes the "marginal man" in society (an individual condemned to a life in two societies, or two cultural realities), Gelder ([1997] 2005:40-43) refers to Gordon's discussion of "marginal sub-cultures." Marginal subcultures are particular groups suspended between mainstream society and their own subcultural ways of life. He explains subcultures as described in relation to institutions rather than deduced to the urban. He also believed that deviant groups do not precisely make up a subculture, but that the idea and location of a subculture remains relatively open (Gelder [1997] 2005).

Though, early subcultural studies emphasized subcultures as deviant groups and studied the internal cultural relations of these groups. These studies were strengthened as the fields of sociology and criminology worked together in assessing subcultures. For example, Albert K. Cohen's study (1955) on the culture of "the gang" provided a foundational understanding to subcultural identity and deviant behavior. His study focused on lower-class delinquent subcultures, particularly boys who experienced alienation from the middle-class goals of society. Cohen argued that through gangs, these "deviant" boys established their own value system, which influenced their deviant behaviors and practices, seen as "hedonistic, autonomous, nonutilitarian, malicious, and negativistic" (Cohen 1955:20).

Cohen's study, as well as other early studies about deviant subcultural groups, were antecedents to subcultural studies. The Cultural Studies discipline, which was founded in 1964 by British academic Richard Hoggart at the University of Birmingham in England, made subculture central to their studies about youth (Milner 1994). Hoggart developed the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS)¹⁵ to develop research about youth subcultures, as well as popular culture, countercultures, and media studies. Pioneering scholars of the field included Stuart Hall, Paul Willis, Dick Hebdige, Tony Jefferson, Michael

¹⁵ Also referred to as The Birmingham School of Cultural Studies or British Cultural Studies.

Green, and Angela McRobie. These scholars expanded the discussion about youth subcultures and deviance to one about their internal cultural patterns as related to the dominant culture of mainstream society. They were also interested to explore the relationships between various cultural forms and the political economic spheres of society.¹⁶

Culture is shaped at two levels. In *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, a pioneering Cultural Studies edited volume about youth subculture, Hall and Jefferson ([1976] 1993) use the word “culture” to refer:

...to that level at which social groups develop distinct patterns of life, and give *expressive form* to their social and material life-experience. Culture is the way, the forms, in which groups ‘handle’ the raw material of their social and material existence...

As this level, culture refers to the ground-level experiences of particular groups of people who form distinct shared characteristics or ways of life, such as norms, values, beliefs, behaviors, skills, and customs. Culture also emerges when these culture-sharing characteristics are widely accepted and meaningful among members of mainstream society. In this sense, dominant culture arises through:

...the ‘maps of meaning’ which make things intelligible to its members. These ‘maps of meaning’ are not simply carried around in the head: they are objectivated on the patterns of social organization and relationship through which the individual becomes a ‘social individual.’ Culture is the way the social relations of a group are structured and shaped: but it is also the way those shapes are experienced, understood and interpreted (Hall and Jefferson [1976] 1993:10-11).

Youth subcultures are in constant negotiation with the maps of meaning accepted by the dominant culture of mainstream society. They attempt to resist the institutional mandates and informal codes of everyday life by developing their own distinct patterns of life.

¹⁶ For an overview of contemporary cultural studies that draws from symbolic interactionism and critical theory, see David R. Dickens’s (1992) “Cultural Studies in Sociology.” In the field of sociology, cultural studies combine symbolic interactionism (Denzin 1992) and critical theory (Agger 1992) to understand the relationships between cultural forms and the political economic spheres of the culture industry.

Youth subcultures tend to develop in some degree of opposition to the dominant culture of mainstream society as: “groups of people that are in some way represented as non-normative and/or marginal through their particular interests and practices, through what they are, what they do and where they do it” (Gelder [1997] 2005:1). Youth subcultures have ranged from the 1950s beatniks, 1960s skinheads, 1980s hardcore punk scene, to 21st-century new age hippies, all of which in some way established cultural beliefs, ideas, and interests, as well as behaviors, styles, and material tools at variance with those of mainstream society. On one hand, they are seen as being “disorderly” (as seen externally by members of mainstream society) while on the other hand “organized” (seen internally by members of the subculture) (Gelder [1997] 2005). Youth subcultures often recognize their differences to mainstream society, both lamenting and celebrating them, and even at times taking advantage of them. Meanwhile, the dominant culture of mainstream society makes it difficult for youth subcultures to entirely separate themselves and sometimes marginalizes them to society’s fringe.

In some instances, the dominant mainstream culture regulates and attempts to coopt subcultural features. Subcultural studies explore how groups create and disseminate meaning while considering how culture is commodified. Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2007) argues that in a consumer society, all members inhabit the same social space that is customarily described by the market pulls apart and commodifies social relations. In this context, youth subcultures struggle to maintain their oppositional identity, especially as market forces capitalize on their unique qualities. One classic example includes countercultures that support the so-called revolution against global capitalism, sporting Che Guevara t-shirts in their attempts to maintain a revolutionary identity, while profiting through sales of Guevara’s image. According to Bauman (2007), individuals are “simultaneously the promoters of commodities and the commodities they promote.” They are both the products and the sellers, the goods and the “traveling salespeople.” However, youth subcultures also maintain the capacity to continuously act independently of those institutions and market forces to resist and sometimes even change institutional demands placed on them.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I reviewed the research literature I draw from in this dissertation. I discussed the historical development in the rationalization and commercialization of leisure activities, which led to an interest among scholars to study various leisure forms, including tourism. I then discussed the theoretical approaches to the study of tourism, which contribute to the conceptual basis of this dissertation about the backpacking travel form. I link the development of tourism studies to recent studies about independent backpacking and highlight key areas for future research. Finally, I referred to subcultural studies to develop a subcultural framework for the analysis of this dissertation about backpacking as a youth subculture,

According to my review, youth subculture components involve core ideologies, practices, and material forms that anchor members' identity vis-à-vis mainstream society, its dominant culture, and societal institutions. Understanding these subcultural components provides the basis of my research questions and analysis. Subcultural studies provide a framework to understand backpacking as a youth subculture. My goal is to understand the ideas that undergird the backpacking subculture, their practices and places, and the tools they use.

While scholars contend that backpacking is a travel form distinct from mainstream tourism, they fail to fully explain those distinctions in ideology and practice. I refine and elaborate Erik Cohen's (2003) claim that backpackers aspire to a drifting ideology, yet in reality may share practices with "ordinary tourists." By conducting field research to uncover the ground-level experiences of backpackers, I bring some insight to this assumption and identify whether or not there exists a gap or contradictions between backpacking ideology and backpacking practice.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I explain the methodology I used to understand and explain the subcultural aspects of backpacking in Central America. I begin by describing the ethnographic approach to social science research and its strengths for uncovering the ground-level experiences of a culture-sharing group. I extend this approach to highlight the importance of mobility in my research about travelers. Accordingly, I refer to mobile methods and develop a mobile, multi-sited ethnography to study the subcultural patterns among backpackers traveling throughout multiple sites in the Central American region. I describe the fieldwork region, data collection procedures, primary places for observations, backpacker informants, and data analysis procedures and interpretive style.

THE ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH

The ethnographic approach to social science research is a method to both understand and explain the cultural patterns of a particular group of people. The method involves the ethnographer performing inductive analytic reasoning, moving from specific observations of the ground-level social relations among group of people to produce insights about them as a culture-sharing group. The ethnographer's role involves a rigorous participant-observation among members of a culture-sharing group to record, organize, analyze, and interpret their cultural patterns.

The ethnographic approach involves two major phases carried out by the ethnographer: (1) to *understand* by conducting fieldwork and (2) to *explain* by writing a detailed record about that fieldwork (Lofland et al. 2006). The actual *ethnography* is the result of both phases (Van Maanen 1988). The ethnographer begins the first major phase by entering into the *field*, a common space or setting shared by potential members of a culture-sharing group. While in the field, the ethnographer relies on participant-observation, which involves temporarily participating in and observing the ground-level social relations among the culture-sharing group of people. The ethnographer develops extensive field notes while in the field to document and make sense of those relations as they occur and, more relatively, to understand

those relations from the standpoint of its members (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2010). The ethnographer also documents casual conversations as they develop naturally over the course of social interactions. These casual conversations sometimes lead to recorded, semi-structured interviews that involve the use of an interview guide containing a list of questions to direct conversations with informants (Lofland et al. 2006).

During the second major phase, the ethnographer accumulates a detailed written record of all the field data (e.g., experiences, observations, conversations, and interviews) (Lofland et al. 2006). In developing the written record, the ethnographer organizes, analyzes, and interprets the field data. Organizing field data requires the analytic process of sorting, coding, and categorizing the information and “rendering it meaningful from the vantage point of one or more frameworks or sets of ideas” (Lofland et al. 2006:200). The ethnographer also memos, or writes down ideas about the sorting and coding processes, to help make connections between categories. The ethnographer further analyzes these categories, identifying interpretive patterns and general themes, and developing typologies, taxonomies, diagrams, or charts to produce generalizations or theories about the culture-sharing group (Lofland et al. 2006).

While I referred to the ethnographic approach as a general method to my research, I acknowledged that to study backpackers means to study a *mobile* group of travelers. To better understand and explain the backpacking travel form, I also used mobile methods as I traveled alongside backpackers as they moved within and between multiple sites throughout the Central American region.

Mobile Methods

Researchers across the social sciences have recently developed mobile methods in response to the inability of existing research methods to capture the importance of mobility to a variety of social relations (see for example, Jenks and Neves 2000; Kusenbach 2003; Ingold 2004; Wylie 2005; Pink 2008; Vannini and Vannini 2008; Vannini, Waskul, and Gottschalk 2012). As Büscher and Urry (2009) suggest, researchers benefit from mobile methods in at least two ways:

First, researchers will benefit if they track in various ways, including physically travelling with their research subjects—the many and interdependent forms of intermittent movement of people, images, information and objects...Second, as a consequence of allowing themselves to be moved by, and to move with, their subjects researchers are tuned into the social organization of ‘moves’ (P. 103-104).

Researchers gain a greater understanding to the cultural aspect of movement by immersing themselves in the fleeting, multi-sensory, distributed, mobile and multiple (Büscher and Urry 2009).

According to Creswell (2006), *mobile ethnography* particularly “makes more sense” than traditional ethnography. While traditional ethnography has a sedentary and cognitive bias in understanding social relations, mobile ethnography seeks to produce multilayered knowledge generated by people’s mobile experiences within mobile systems. After all, mobility is “a fundamental geographical facet of existence and, as such, provides a rich terrain from which narratives—and, indeed, ideologies—can be, and have been, constructed” (Creswell 2006:1). Büscher and Urry (2009:102) also explain: “Bodies sense and make sense of the world as they move bodily in and through it, creating discursively mediated sensescapes that signify social taste and distinction, ideology and meaning.” As such, mobile ethnography captures the cultural aspect of movement that other traditional research methods lack in their understanding of culture.

Moreover, *multi-sited ethnography* highlights mobility as a central component to understand social relations. Yet, this approach also acknowledges mobility within and across multiple sites. As Marcus (1995) explains, the ethnographer:

...moves out from the single sites and local situations of conventional ethnographic research designs to examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identifies in diffuse time-space...This mobile ethnography takes unexpected trajectories in tracing a cultural formation across and within multiple sites of activity that destabilize the distinction, for example between lifeworld and system, by which ethnography has been conceived. Just as this mode investigates and ethnographically constructs the lifeworlds of variously situated subjects, it also

ethnographically constructs aspects of the system itself through the associations and connections it suggests among sites (P. 105).

While multi-sited ethnography focuses on ground-level cultural experiences across multiple nodes and spaces, it also involves a strategy or design of research that links these experiences to macro-theoretical concepts and narratives of the world system.

MOBILE ETHNOGRAPHY IN CENTRAL AMERICA

I conducted a mobile ethnography across multiple sites throughout much of Central America to understand and explain backpacking as a subculture. I traveled alongside backpackers as they moved within and between multiple sites of interests throughout the region and constructed mobile narratives that helped make sense of the backpacking travel form. Accordingly, I acknowledged mobility's centrality to the backpacking travel form. This approach was especially relevant to understanding backpacking as a subculture in a global tourism context because it helped me to link what goes on at the ground level to mobile macro social processes and systems across multiple tourist sites. Developing this mobile ethnography provided a greater understanding to backpacking travel patterns that occur at one site, yet are also reproduced and maintained elsewhere, and simultaneously connected along multiple sites in the Central American region.

Fieldwork Region

My dissertation research is part of a long-term research project I began in 2006 exploring backpacking travel patterns in Central America. I chose to research backpackers in Central America because I am a backpacker myself and, as Hannam and Ateljevic (2008) highlight, very little qualitative research has focused on understanding backpacking trends in Latin America.¹⁷ The majority of my fieldwork occurred throughout Central America, from Mexico City (in the north) to Panama City (in the south) (see Figure 1).

¹⁷ Backpacker research has tended to be clustered in India, Southeast Asia, Australia, and New Zealand (Hannam and Diekmann 2010), and newer studies include research in lesser known backpacker destinations, such as Norway, Tanzania, and Mongolia (Butler 2010; Laythorpe 2010; Bell 2010). Brenner and Fricke (2007) explored backpacker development in Zipolite, Mexico.



Figure 1. Central American backpacking route

The overland backpacking route that I followed took me through major cities, colonial towns, beach towns, rural villages, and a variety of natural environments. I traveled through backpacking enclaves and primarily stayed overnight in backpacker hostels where I gained access to most of my informants. I ventured off common routes on my own, but also to remote locations as I learned about them from other travelers. As such, my fieldwork region was generative to the places I learned that backpackers traveled to. For example, as I heard about some travelers detouring outside of Central America to travel in Cuba, I expanded my fieldwork region to follow suit. In addition to researching backpacking travel patterns in Central America, and Cuba, I traveled to Germany to conduct archival research about the historical development of Western youth travel.

Data Collection

For this dissertation, I refer to the fieldwork data I collected throughout the Central American region during three research phases between 2009 and 2014. I rely on a year's worth of qualitative data collected to understand and explain the subcultural aspect of backpacking in Central America. I used the following ethnographic data collection techniques: (1) participant observation, (2) field notes, (3) photography and videography, (4) casual conversations, and (5) semi-structured interviews.

Participant observation allowed for a greater understanding to backpacking practices, activities, and the material tools backpackers relied upon on as they traveled. I used field notes and reflexive journals to document these observations and experiences. I also used photography and videography to provide visual documentation of my data. Engaging in casual conversations was especially useful when understanding the common ideology, ideas, and motivations among backpackers as they orally express their travel form. Semi-structured interviewing was also important to gain an in-depth understanding of why and how backpackers express their ideas, beliefs, values, and intentions for travel specifically in Central America. I collected field data until I felt the data was saturated through prolonged fieldwork experiences and encounters with several backpackers in the field. Obtaining data saturation allowed me to move from making specific observations about backpackers to generalizations and theoretical connections about their travel form.

It is important to note that, while the traditional ethnographer often interacts with subjects delimited by a bounded location, such as a village or urban enclave, throughout my research I established relationships with my informants while on the move. I learned that my research was situated less by a discrete place and went beyond understanding the spatial practice of an intensive dwelling (Clifford 1997). I was interested more in the mixture of observation, dialogue, apprenticeship, and friendship I built with backpackers as we experienced the backpacking travel form together. Like Sørensen (2003:850), I found that “the un-territorialization of the backpacker community means that, instead of prolonged interaction with the few, fieldwork has had to be structured around impromptu interaction with the many.” Also, by studying this mobile group of travelers, my research was more dependent upon fleeting conversations, semi-structured interviews, and intensive information extraction as I came across a variety of clues about travel that attracted backpackers.

Places for Observations

I found the backpacker hostel as the primary accommodation mode among backpackers traveling Central America. I stayed overnight in or visited more than 60 backpacker hostels or similar budget-style accommodations to gain access to backpackers. These hostels were the primary places for observing

important backpacking practices and the tools backpackers utilized as they traveled. These hostels were also the primary places where I formed relationships with other backpackers, providing opportunities to travel with them outside hostel premises to further observe their travel practices and tools.

While I relied on hostels as places to meet and interact with other backpackers, my research was scattered as I sporadically traveled from one place to the next. I found that taking the overland route by riding local buses and waiting at bus terminals along the way, also brought me into contact with other backpackers. I also came across backpackers in tourist hubs as well as more remote locations throughout the region. I also observed while taking water taxis, hitchhiking in the desert, wandering around towns and cities, walking along remote beaches, hiking up volcanoes, traversing rivers, visiting cathedrals, museums, and ruins, and even while interacting with other travelers in Internet travel forums. Likewise, I used guidebooks as important information sources that were, in a sense, places for content analysis that also provided clues about backpacking travel ideologies and practices. In other words, my field was wherever I was with other backpackers traveling throughout the Central American region. At any moment during my travels, I could come across an unexpected place for the observation of backpackers. Yet, traveling as a solo backpacker also informed my observations about my own travel experiences.

Informants

For this dissertation, I draw from 26 semi-structured interviews each lasting between one to two hours with backpackers (the primary informants) who traveled primarily in Central America between 2009 and 2014.¹⁸ I used an interview guide with open-ended questions, which guided the interviews as well as casual conversations with backpackers (refer to Appendix A). Each backpacker who agreed to a semi-structured interview was provided with a brief description about the research purpose and a copy of the consent form (refer to Appendix B).

¹⁸All interviews were conducted in English and casual conversations were mostly in English (some Spanish). The Backpacker Research group (BRG), an interest group of the Association for Tourism and Leisure Education (ATLAS), found that the majority of international backpackers and hostel staff members speak English (Richards and Wilson 2004).

Appendix C lists the backpackers I interviewed for this dissertation and their backpacking characteristics. These characteristics include their nationality, gender, age, education, occupation, travel duration, and travel form (whether or not they were traveling solo or with a partner). The backpackers I interviewed represented 18 countries, mostly from Western Europe, but also from the United States, Canada, Australia, England, Ireland, Japan, Turkey, Iceland, Brazil, Israel, and New Zealand. I interviewed 14 male backpackers and 12 female backpackers. I did not ask my informants about their sexual orientation, racial identity or ethnicity, or marital associations, although the majority appeared to be racially white and several of them revealed to me that they were single and straight. The youngest backpacker was 21 years of age while the oldest was 58. The average age among the backpackers was approximately 27 years (excluding the age of the 58-year old backpacker). Most backpackers had at least obtained or been studying for the equivalent of a U.S. bachelor's degree. Also, several backpackers had obtained or were studying for a graduate degree.

The majority of these backpackers were traveling solo, although at some point during their travels several of them traveled with other backpackers they met while staying at hostels or other budget accommodations. Also, a few of the backpackers traveling long-term (over three months) had friends from home meet them to travel for a short period of time. The average duration of travel among the backpackers I interviewed was approximately 8 weeks (excluding the backpackers with open-flight tickets). Four backpackers had around-the-world open flight tickets with the Central American region being one of their regional destinations. These backpackers were traveling long-term, around one year.

Additionally, I engaged in over 100 hundred casual conversations with several other backpackers as well as hostel employees that included backpackers taking a break from travel to work and save money. The majority of these backpackers appeared to have similar characteristics as the backpackers whom I interviewed. However, I did speak with a minority of backpackers whose characteristics differed from this majority. For example, I spoke with some racially black backpackers, but they were few in numbers and either from the United States, England, or France. Also, on a couple of occasions, I came across married couples traveling with young children. I also spoke with a few lesbian couples who

voluntarily revealed to me their sexual orientation, but never did I come across any gay men who did. Rarely did I come across any Mexican or Central American backpackers traveling within their own countries. On a few of occasions, however, I came across middle-class Mexican backpackers as well as other middle-class backpackers from more affluent Latin American countries (e.g., Peru, Chile, and Argentina), who were also students or young professionals. I did not come across any Russian, Caribbean, Middle-Eastern, or African backpackers, other than one racially white South African man and one racially black Ghanaian man who was on summer break from university in England. Similarly, I spoke with some Indian and East Asian backpackers who were born or emigrated at a young age to England, Australia, or the United States.

Analysis and Interpretation

I used inductive analytic reasoning to understand and explain the field data I collected through participant-observation, conversations, and interviews with backpackers traveling Central America. This analytic approach allowed me to move from making specific observations about backpacking travel patterns to generalizations or theories about backpacking as a youth subculture. I relied on the inductive process of sorting and coding my field data to then develop central categories that defined backpacking ideology and practice in Central America. While developing these categories, I searched for patterns between them, which allowed me to produce general themes about backpackers.

I write about these categories and themes using an interpretive style that takes the reader on a “journey” to understand what backpacking is like in Central America. To describe my backpacking experiences and observations, I also used a realist approach: an author-proclaimed description and explanation of observed cultural practices (Van Maanen 1988:45). To describe what I learned from backpackers about their ideology, I developed rich descriptions and narratives with the use of direct quotes from casual conversations and semi-structured interviews. These narratives were developed as travel stories “that situate events or lives in a temporal, causal, or thematic sequence in which they are embedded” (Lofland et al. 2006:232). These narratives also “access and elaborate the human experience from different vantage points—for example, the everyday, the autobiographical, the biographical, the

cultural, or the collective” (Richardson 1990:22). To describe my own backpacking experiences, I incorporate vignettes as self-reflections while traveling solo and alongside other backpackers.

On a final note, this dissertation and research developed inherently from a “Western” perspective (and not necessarily by choice)—a perspective that historically cannot dismiss national-, racial-, class-, gender-, sexuality-, age-, and culture- based differences and biases in understanding and explaining the diverse experiences of backpackers who also have diverse backgrounds. My ideas about backpacking are also influenced by my personal, embodied experiences of being privileged to travel as well as being from the United States, male, straight, Latino, middle-class, college-educated, in my mid-30s, and having an athletic bodily appearance. I highlight my particular background and personal, embodied experiences as it relates to being both an ethnographer and a backpacker with these traits, which would induce different embodied experiences than someone who is a research informant and has an entirely different background and bodily appearance than my own. With this in mind, I portray my research findings by relying on my sociological training and theoretical knowledge base, as well as the ethnographic approach to social research.

In the following chapter, I provide historical information to contextualize contemporary backpacking ideology, which I then draw from my data to discuss in Chapter 5. Part of the information that I provide comes from archival research I conducted in Germany about the youth hostel movement. While I do not provide direct quotes from interviews I conducted with scholars of the movement, I do highlight their central points, drawing from the literature and historical understanding of backpacking ideology.

CHAPTER 4

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In this chapter, I describe the historical context to contemporary backpacking's subcultural travel ideology and practices. Specifically, I describe the historical antecedents to today's international backpacking, including the 18th century *Grand Tour*, early 20th century Youth Hostel Movement, and 1960s and 1970s drifting counterculture. I draw upon these three travel traditions because international backpackers are oftentimes university students or recent graduates like the Grand Tourists, who utilize the backpacker hostel as a primary accommodation mode like the early hostellers, and maintain ideas about "drifting" away from the beaten tourist path like the 1960's drifters) (Richards and Wilson 2004). This chapter highlights the idea that travel is a rite of passage for young individuals to temporarily abandon home, family, education, and work life and explore the world to find their "truer" selves.

While I focus on describing these three travel traditions, other travel antecedents have contributed to youth travel ideologies, which include outcasts or marginal groups, such as the American hobos (see, Anderson 1961) and tramps (see, Spradley 1970; London 1979), the working holiday travelers, such as a Jewish youth from around the world who travel to work on a kibbutz in Israel for a summer (Cohen 1973), as well as pilgrimages to religious sites. Also, the establishment of countryside touring organizations promoted ideas about travel as open-air exploration to restore one's health and acquire cultural values in nature (Snape 2004).¹⁹ Youth travel ideology has also come to reflect the major themes found in the travel writings of Ernest Hemingway, Bruce Chatwin, Paul Theroux, and Bill Bryson. Among these themes are "getting away from it all," having "tourist angst, rebelliousness, authenticity, and the rituals of indulgence" (Richards and Wilson 2004:12).

¹⁹During the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Great Britain and Western Europe these organizations attracted men, women, and children alike and included Great Britain's Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), Bicycle Touring Club (now the Cyclists' Touring Club), Co-operative Holidays Association, Camping Club of Great Britain, and School Journey Association. Countryside touring organizations that promoted youth exploration included the Boy and Girl Scouts Associations in England, the bushwalking clubs (or Homeland and Rambling Clubs) in Germany, and the Youth Hostel Associations which started in Germany and eventually spread throughout Western Europe.

THE GRAND TOUR

Their roads were appalling and their inns were nasty and they had neither passenger liners nor railway trains. But people in the eighteenth century often seem more travel-minded than those at other times when actual travel was more inviting.

—Paul Fussell, 1987

International youth travel originated with the 18th century European *Grand Tour*.²⁰ After the Seven Years' War from 1756 to 1763 and the rise of Industrialization, Britain's increasing wealth, providing the financial base for the Grand Tour to develop and prosper first among the aristocratic youth and then among the masses (Feifer 1985). The Grand Tour supplied well-educated young male aristocrats of upper-class British families with an extension to their education and an "obligatory finish to a gentleman's upbringing" (Trease 1967:2). The Grand Tour involved youth travel, often with an older chaperone (for those who could afford one), by boat, barge, stagecoach, horseback, sedan chair, and even foot, across the English Channel, into Flanders, Holland, Germany, Italy, and the return trip through France. As defined by British historian Geoffrey Trease (1967):

a Grand Tourist was a young man (or his older companion) who, in the words of the dictionary, made 'a journey through France, Italy, etc. as finishing touch to education'. Voluntary expatriates resident in Florence or Montpellier, Jacobite or Catholic exiles, soldiers of fortune, diplomats, and merchants must not be confused with the tourists. But that is not nearly so easy a distinction as it sounds. The edges get blurred when the young wanderer combines his sightseeing with a little espionage, or comes to rest in one city long enough to pursue a course of study or a girl (P. 2).

Although the Grand Tour was originally intended for the British aristocratic youth to obtain a proper background for a career in politics or diplomacy, it developed first into an event of cultural and

²⁰ Fussell (1987) notes that the Grand Tour flourished between the time of the Restoration in 1660 and the arrival of mass rail travel around 1825; however, its heyday was the 18th century.

educational significance (as well as serving as a ritual for young men to separate themselves from home and family), and later into an important social convention among many others (Trease 1967).²¹

Young tourists drew from their Grand Tour ideas about experiencing travel for sightseeing, education, and adventure (Adler 1985). Trease (1967) notes that although many of the tourists traced and retraced much of the same beaten tracks, they often looked at these same scenes with different eyes and for different reasons. Whereas Englishmen were motivated to attempt a once-for-all and comprehensive exploration of the continent that lasted for several years, Frenchmen and other continental northerners had no sea to cross. They were able to travel these routes on multiple and shorter occasions. Although few in number, Americans crossed the Atlantic also to make the tour that may have lasted for more than a year.

The Grand Tour became of interest to people of all social classes. Trease (1967:3) describes: “Poor men as well as rich made the journey, the middle class as well as the aristocracy, the eccentric individualist and the conforming trend-follower, the scholar, the satyr and the snob.” To some the Grand Tour was meant for career preparation, while for others the Tour was mainly for the sake of curiosity, adventure, and pleasure. It was a way to learn about Roman antiquity, to see High Renaissance artwork and ancient Roman ruins, as well as to adopt the fashionable Parisian trends and undertake lessons in French, dancing, fencing, and horseback riding.

During the first century of the Grand Tour many tourists found the activity daunting. For the first time in their young lives, the Grand Tour exposed the British aristocratic youth with unforeseen hardships and encounters, which they would only learn about by being on the road. This meant they had to obtain a

²¹Towner (1985) points out that for the 151 Grand Tours that were researched from 1547 to 1840, only 16.6 percent of the travelers were actually aristocrats (although these individuals represented 2.3 to 2.5 percent of the population and controlled 14.1 to 15.1 percent of national income). The majority of the Grand Tourists were classified as gentry, clergy, professionals, merchants, or members of the armed forces (referenced from Parsons 2007). Also, Adler (1985) highlights how “tramping,” a form of travel by which members of the working class followed traveling circuits in search of work or to increase their knowledge about a craft through their craft associations and guilds. While trampers were traveling for work, they also by-and-large toured the places they went. Adler (1985) argues that the Grand Tourists may have actually been inspired by the tramping form of travel, which entailed a search for adventure that transpired into a “road culture” of exploration.

passport, and most often several of them,²² and figure out how to travel in an unfamiliar place without having much travel information or the most reliable types of transportation to trust along poor roads. The tourists came to learn that horse and barge transport ate up most of their time. They had to remain on some sort of schedule, which denied them opportunities to follow an attractive detour. They also had to be concerned with arriving to a town before dark, not just from the fear of bandits, but from the uncertainty of having the town gates locked (Trease 1967).

Although the Grand Tour was challenging for all tourists because of both the lack of travel information and few well-laid cobble-stoned routes, the wealthiest tourists had the most opportunities for exploration. Whereas most of the tourists dealt with hardships associated with life on the road, the wealthiest of them traveled at a leisurely, slower pace allowing for more time to actually tour without orderly restraints. As Trease (1967) describes:

The traveller then spent years, not months, let alone weeks. He moved at leisure, an unherded individual, unhampered by schedules, untroubled by bureaucrats, unorganized by agencies. He dawdled, sketched, journalized, entered into social life. Even when transit, perhaps at five miles an hour, he could take in his surroundings, absorb details. Such men, declare the nostalgic, saw the country as no one will ever see a foreign land again (P. 4).

These opportunities for exploration among the wealthiest tourists came by hiring a *Vetturino*, a knowledgeable chaperone who served as a guide and tutor along the way and steered them from experiencing trouble with bandits (Trease 1967). The wealthiest tourists were even accompanied by the *Vetturino*'s servants who would help carry them and their luggage across rugged terrain--at times having to dismantle the carriage and place on mules in order to cross the Alps. The chaperone and servants

²² Trease (1967) notes the misconception of no one ever bothering with passports before 1914. In fact, as he highlights, the tourist usually needed not one passport, but many. By the early 19th century the Foreign Office began to grant general passports, so that one man was tied to one document. The new travel document allowed the adventurous Elizabethan to literally "pass the port" into foreign territories (Trease 1967:7). The passport specified not only the destination of travel, but also the purpose and estimated duration of the journey and the amount of currency allowed.

enables the wealthiest tourists to spend more time exploring at a leisurely pace, though they were also still restrained some ways because they were never completely on their own.

The advent of the travel guidebook did much to popularize the Grand Tour and make it easier to accomplish for many other types of tourists. Travel guidebooks provided useful information about the Grand Tour's spatial and temporal patterns. Parsons (2007) points out that the early Grand Tour guidebooks were simply "road-books" written to provide travelers, especially itinerant traders, with mapped-out routes and information about commercial fairs. It was not until Reichard's *Itinerary of France and Belgium* was published in 1822, when the first fully fledged guidebook was concerned to highlight the practicalities of travel and "largely confined to potted histories and scenic wonders" (Parsons 2007:143). What to pack was always a question the early travel guidebooks of the time addressed, including the basics: a knife, fork, pistol and sheets (Trease 1967). Guidebooks also provided information about inns in which to sleep overnight, some nastier or more extravagant than others, each gaining a reputation based on what was written about in regards to their cleanliness and quality of amenities.

Industrialization and technological gains made over time would considerably alter the Grand Tour and diminish the value tourists placed on independent long-term travel to the most notable European towns and cities they had learned about during university studies. Travel in Europe became easier, safer, and more open to the masses, including women. When steamships made travel crossing large bodies of water easier, such as the Atlantic for Americans, and railways shortened distances for all travelers throughout Europe, the Grand Tour began to fade away as a grandiose once-for-all visit (Trease 1967). The ease of travel benefited the working class most because their journey, which had previously lacked the support of chaperones and servants, became less of a burden with access to modern transportation modes. Traveling with Cook's Tours would also begin to replace the romantic characteristics of travel that had previously been associated with the Grand Tour. Upper-class women were able to travel more widely in Europe. Also, as industrialization drastically changed the built environment, many youth travelers were no longer concerned to tour towns and cities as much as they were during the Grand Tour

heyday. Instead, they responded to urban overcrowding and pollution by exploring more of their countryside.

THE YOUTH HOSTEL MOVEMENT

Just like plants, humans also need sunshine and pure air to make them grow, especially children.

—Richard Schirrmann, early 20th century

Particularly in Germany, the establishment of countryside tours and Rambling Clubs played an important role in developing independent youth travel. Prior to the First World War, the German *Wandervögel* (literally translating in English to “wandering bird”) was a highly romantic and idealistic youth movement that valued touring open spaces by foot in nature as liberation from the social and physical oppression of modern industrial city life (Cohen 1973). Cohen (1973) explains:

It was a rebellion against all the conventions of the time, a breakaway from military regimentation, from the domination of parents, from slavery to the economic machine; a general reaction against the artificiality of life in the big cities (Coburn 1950, P. 9). The *Wandervögel* was a collective-oriented movement, with strong emphasis on the *cameradie* between its members. It sustained a patriotic ideology—wandering through one's *Vaterland* was intended to inculcate the youngsters with love for their country and its natural attractions (P. 91).

Rejecting conventional urban ways of living, the *Wandervögel* instead offered a return to nature where children slept beneath the stars to live only out of a *rucksack* with a guitar in one hand and a frying pan in the other. Although countryside touring was at the heart of the *Wandervögel*, it also socially united German youth so much that during Nazi Germany Hitler instilled in his youth similar values (although more militant) that were developed by the original movement (Biesanz 1941).²³

²³According to Biesanz (1941) the German Youth Movement during the pre-Hitler days was initially viewed as eccentric, undisciplined, irresponsible, and associated to the discredited ideas of Marxism and liberalism, but was later redefined and reinterpreted with national symbols that fit the Nazi objectives. Although Hitler saw the *Wandervögel* as unconventional, he did value the ideological nature of the collective-oriented movement that united children. The result of Hitler's Youth was a hybrid ideology in which *Wandervögel* partisanship was rationalized and nationalism was given a militant character.

The Youth Hostel Movement did not begin, however, with the *Wandervögel*. While the movement shared many ideals with the *Wandervögel*, it was initiated by a Westphalian school-teacher, *Herr* Richard Schirrmann (Coburn 1950). As Schirrmann believed in these same ideals, his primary concern was to alleviate the misery of the children living in big towns by providing them with overnight accommodation in the countryside (Coburn 1950). Schirrmann valued education in the open air, under the free sky, and believed that children should grow in nature. He believed that boys and girls and those from all social classes should have the same opportunities to explore nature and become socially united within the German countryside. But nowhere in the countryside did children have adequate accommodation to sleep.

In 1909, Schirrmann came up with the revolutionary idea: to establish low-cost accommodation in the countryside for his students (Coburn 1950). For years, Schirrmann had been concerned that in large towns thousands of children had nowhere to play except for the courts and backyards of tenement buildings or the crowded street (Coburn 1950). On school trips to the countryside, Schirrmann would guide his students by foot away from the crowded, soot-covered industrial cities of Germany and back into nature. During one of those school trips, Schirrmann and his pupils took shelter from a thunderstorm inside a barn. That night, Schirrmann realized there was a need to establish permanent hiking shelters, providing a network of inexpensive accommodations in the countryside, each within a day's walking distance from the next. The *Jugendherberge* (youth hostel) would be a solution to the difficulty in finding places for his students to sleep while hiking in the countryside (Coburn 1950).

In 1912, with considerable financial support including donations and a grant from the town of Altena, Germany, Schirrmann established the first permanent youth hostel (Coburn 1950). It was established in a renovated area inside the 12th century *Burg Altena* (Altena Castle), which was located in the North Rhine-Westphalia region. The youth hostel was to be used primarily by school children and their chaperons (usually teachers), although the hostel caretakers, referred to as *Hausvaters* (housefathers) and *Hausmutter*s (housemothers), voluntarily worked to help maintain and enforce the rules. The physical layout included gender-segregated dormitories with wooden bunk beds, a kitchen, and common area. The

hostel students were to make sure that these shared premises remained cleaned, organized, and ready for other young travelers passing through. The youth hostel was essentially a place for children to sleep, eat together, and commune and gather at night to sing songs after a day's worth of outdoor exploration. It was also a place for the teachers and students to contribute to an on-going knowledge base about hiking routes to other nearby youth hostels.

The Altena youth hostel was the first of many other ones established throughout the German countryside as part of the German Youth Hostel Association (DJH), which Schirrmann founded in 1919. The DJH provided youth hostellers with a hostel network that linked each hostel to another and with each providing access points of interests, including towns, historical sites, scenic wonders, and outdoor recreational centers (Biesanz 1941). The DJH initially promoted a nationalistic bias (eventually appropriated by the Nazis), but later encouraged the development of cosmopolitan attitudes among its members across country borders as other European, American, and Canadian hostel networks were established (Biesanz 1941). The DJH would eventually become part of the International Youth Hostel Association (IYHA) (now Hostelling International), which Schirrmann also led as president from 1933-36. Through an international youth hostel network, youth hostellers generally acquired some degree of international sympathy and cross-cultural understanding among its members (Biesanz 1941).

Schirrmann probably had not anticipated that youth hostels in their young non-profit form would influence the growth of youth travel as part of today's growing backpacker tourism industry. When the German Youth Hostel Association was established, overnight stays in Germany soared from 60,000 in 1919 to 186,000 in 1920 (Loker-Murphy Pearce 1995). By 1932, 2,124 youth hostels and 4.5 million overnight stays were recorded in Germany alone. The first youth hostel in the United States was opened in 1934 and in Australia in 1939. Today, Hostelling International (HI) is the largest hostel organization in the world, and the brand name of the non-profit International Youth Hostel Federation (IYHF). According to the HI website (2013), there are now more than 4,000 HI-affiliated hostels in over 90 countries with over 4 million members worldwide. These figures do not include the many for-profit, independently-owned hostels and chain hostels opening up all over the world. Today, HI hostellers contribute up to 1.4

billion U.S. dollars in over 80 countries. The growth of HI, and other independent hostels and chain hostels, has spurred the development of backpacking considerably since the hostel's humble beginnings just over a century ago.

As the first half of the 20th century was impacted by wars, the motivations for youth travel had diminished among both independent and institutionalized travel forms. Youth travel was almost entirely non-existent because of the period's hostile war environment and unstable travel conditions. By the second half of the 20th century, youth travel increased substantially through the reestablishment of youth hostel associations worldwide. In addition, a new form of travel was developing among the more radical and affluent youth of Western countries. Specifically, during the 1960s and 1970s hippies who were in opposition to war began to explore outside Europe and the United States in what they deemed as "exotic" locations untouched by mass travel and tourism. They had a new curiosity to abandon their routine-home lives and seek adventure abroad.

DRIFTING COUNTERCULTURE

He often goes abroad in order to get away from his homeland; he is at best un-patriotic and some contemporary American drifters were even expressly antipatriotic and combined drifting with an anti-Vietnam war campaign conducted from abroad.

—Erik Cohen, 1973

Backpacker studies scholars often link contemporary backpacking directly to the *drifters* who traveled during the 1960s and 1970s from Europe to Southeast Asia with no apparent instrumental purpose, except to experience the unknown and discover one's truer self (Cohen 1973; Cohen 2003). They drifted east as they became so consumed with traveling to new places they simply heard about along the way from other like-minded travelers. According to Cohen (1973) "the drifter" is

...the type of [international] tourist [who] ventures furthest away from the beaten track...He shuns any kind of connection with the tourist establishment...He tends to make it wholly on his own, living with the people and often taking odd-jobs to keep himself going. He tries to live the way

the people he visits live...The drifter has no fixed itinerary or timetable and no well-defined goals of travel. He is almost wholly immersed in his host culture (P., 89).

In this sense, drifters are the “most individualistic and least institutionalized type” of tourist (Cohen 1973:89).²⁴

Although many drifters grew up in affluent homes and were well-educated, it was common for them (both young adult men and women) to temporarily abandon their conventional living standards in their home countries, opting for a simpler, pre-modern rural lifestyle abroad (Cohen 1973). They were part of a growing hippie counterculture that had a conflicted ideology about war and the political and social unrest during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Adopting the drifting form of travel allowed them to suspend their adult lives and middle-class responsibilities for something more meaningful than their seemingly organized lives back home. The drifting counterculture was driven by their sense of alienation in their home countries. They believed that to overcome their alienation they needed to abandon their privileged Western lifestyle altogether and “seek spontaneous experiences in the excitement of complete strangeness” (Cohen 1973:89). The “exotic” Eastern countries they would experience exposed them to entirely different ideologies, religions, and cultural practices than what they had been accustomed to in the West. In the East, drifters not only discovered places away from war, but also off the beaten path experiences untouched by mass tourism.²⁵

Cohen (1973) and Loker-Murphy and Pearce (1995) suggest that central practices to the drifting counterculture included anarchism and hedonism. As opposed to institutionalized mass travel, or even collectivist-oriented youth movements, drifters were more individualistic and disdainful of ideologies

²⁴ Vogt (1976) has also referred to what Cohen (1973) calls “drifting” as “wandering.” Like drifting, wandering entailed travelers who arranged their trips independently, as to situate themselves opposite to traditional tourists who utilized travel agents for planning. They looked for direct contact with the local culture and wandered impulsively as a form of risk and thrill travel.

²⁵ Not all 1960s and 1970s travelers were drifters, or part of a counterculture. Alderson (1971) notes that other 1960’s travelers were partaking in a kind of “New Grand Tour,” visiting the same places and routes as tourists from the 18th century Grand Tour. As a form of education about their continent, the New Grand Tourists remained in Europe, but travelled to other countries to increase their worldliness and cultural awareness of various trends occurring nearby. Americans, Canadians, and Australians also continued to visit Europe. They also stayed in youth hostels.

(Cohen 1973). Some drifters even relived the tramping form of travel that involved seeking casual employment while traveling abroad; although their mode of casual employment was valued more from a romantic standpoint (Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995). Trampers only worked if they had to work in order to gather enough funds as a means to extend their journey. Drifters on the other hand were more inclined to beg, scavenge and share food and lodgings with like-minded acquaintances (Cohen 1973). Like the tramps, drifters pursued a nomadic lifestyle that incorporated adventure and sightseeing. Yet, unlike the tramps (and American Hobos) who often came from the lower social strata and pursued a nomadic way of life out of necessity, drifters tended to hail from middle class or higher strata and tramped by choice (Cohen 1973). Many drifters were also interested in consuming drugs, further marginalizing themselves as a counterculture opposed to rules, laws, and conventional social norms (Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995).

Many drifters began their travels in Europe, hitchhiking their way through the continent. Eventually they crossed into Asia through Istanbul, making their way into the Middle East and into India along the hippie trail, and finally to reach Southeast Asia. As drifters traveled east into unknown territories, they increasingly relied primarily on word-of-mouth information from other drifters. Istanbul in particular was an important destination in which drifters were able to exchange travel information about the Middle East and East Asia. *Lale Pastahanesi* (The Pudding Shop), a Turkish cafe, which opened in 1957 (and still exists today), was the central meeting place and message center for drifters to hitch rides in VW vans and learn from other drifters about countries in which to explore and places to stay overnight. They would post information on the cafe's travel board for other drifters passing through.

Initially, drifters relied solely on word-of-mouth information about how and where to travel next. That was until travel guidebooks paved the way for travelers in East Asian countries. Australian drifters, Tony and Maureen Wheeler, pushed forward the transformation toward institutionalized drifting with their popular *Lonely Planet* travel guidebooks (now owned by BBC Worldwide and the largest guidebook publisher in the world). The Wheelers felt inspired to write and publish their first travel guidebook *Across Asia on the Cheap* in 1973 after backpacking from Istanbul to Nepal. During this trip, they realized that

travel information should be logged in a book for other travelers to learn from and share with each other (Parsons 2007).

Even though drifting expanded beyond Europe into Asia, it remained a thoroughly Western phenomenon associated with a postmodern era (Cohen 1973). Although a contested term, postmodernity is an era that has seen a change in the social function of culture, a *postmodern culture* having a property of “semi-autonomy” and an “existence, for good or ill, above the practical world of the existence” (Jameson 1991:48). In ideology, the *postmodern drifter* was attributed to having a “decentered self,” motivated to vanish into unknown territories, which was expressed by the aimlessness of the typical drifter’s travel form (Cohen 1973). As Cohen (1973) describes:

The loosening of the ties and obligations, the abandonment of accepted standards and conventional ways of life, the voluntary abnegation of the comforts of modern technological society and the search for sensual and emotional experiences are some of the distinguishing characteristics of the counter-culture in its various forms, which motivate the young to escape from their homeland, and to travel and live among different and more “primitive” surroundings (P. 93).

The postmodern drifter was all about experiencing an intensive “trip,” delving into the unknown yet serving as the spearhead of penetration into new and marginal “authentic” destinations (Cohen 2003).

In a postmodern era, however, authenticity has been replaced with a fundamental mutation of texts, or *simulacra* whereby encounters perceived as exotic are simply masked to a point in which seeking the so-called real is no longer the point of travel (Jamison 1991; Baudrillard 1994). Drifting in the postmodern era was signified by travel for the sake of experiencing the unknown simply for self-satisfaction. “The quest for authenticity loses its primacy as a culturally legitimising principle of (sightseeing) tourism; the hedonistic enjoyment and fun tends to take its place in post-modern tourism” (Cohen 2003:101).²⁶ Cohen (1973) further explains how drifting changed from a relatively remote travel

²⁶ As explained in the Introduction and Literature Review chapters to this dissertation, MacCannell ([1976] 1999) provides a discussion about tourism and authenticity, as well as staged authenticity. MacCannell ([1976] 1999)

form, encompassing just a small fraction of the traveling public, into a travel form associated to mainstream tourism. Cohen (1973:90) suggests that “on the one hand, it became more closely associated with the ‘counter-culture’; on the other hand, however, though originally a reaction against routinized forms of travel, it also became institutionalized on a level completely segregated from, but parallel to that of ordinary mass tourism.”

As airlines expanded and offered increasingly inexpensive flights to inexpensive destinations, drifting became more accessible and desirable to the budget traveler. The airlines realized they could capitalize on the very alienation experienced by the radical youth traveler, marketing to them opportunities for escape in order to find themselves abroad (Cohen 1973). Drifting eventually became encumbered by the same mass tourism system that established such traits as fixed travelling patterns, established routines, tourist facilities and services catering now to a youthful mass-tourist (Cohen 1973). Drifting itineraries were gradually formed and aligned with the travel tastes and interests of the contemporary mass youth (Cohen 2003). Yet, the ideology of drifting off the beaten path to explore the unknown and discover one’s truer self has remained central to similar contemporary travel forms, even among the contemporary mass youth who romanticize about drifting.

Today’s backpackers are direct descendants of the 18th century Grand Tour, the early 20th century Youth Hostel Movement, and the 1960s and 1970s drifting counterculture. Each of these travel traditions involved youth travelers who sought out adventure from mainstream tourism modes, yet none more so than the drifter. As Cohen (2003) suggests, contemporary backpackers maintain an ideology most resembling that of drifting, yearning for escape from their home lives to travel and live among different and foreign surroundings. They intend to engage in an aimless form of travel, with no set destination in mind. They are interested to travel in search of sensual and emotional experiences and to learn about one’s truer self.

further suggests that tourist spaces are increasingly organized around staged authenticity, the development of a constructed tourist attraction for those subject to what Urry [1990] (2002) calls, the collective tourist gaze.

In the following chapter, I move to discuss backpackers in Central America. These backpackers are the contemporary manifestations of past youth tourers, hostellers, and drifters. I begin by describing the ideological principles expressed by backpackers in Central America. These principles distinguish the subcultural meanings that backpackers embrace and use to explain their adventurous travel pursuits.

CHAPTER 5

BACKPACKING IDEOLOGY

International backpackers maintain a multifaceted *ideology* that guides their travel experiences throughout the world. According to Eagleton (1991), ideology gives people meaning about the reality of the material world. Ideology combines ideas, beliefs, and values, as well as desires, intentions, and motivations, that groups use to define their characteristic practices. Ideology defines why and how people think about their way of life. International backpackers define their way of life in opposition to mass tourism. They emphasize ideas and aspirations to maintain a “road culture” traveling off the beaten tourist path with a level of risk and adventure that mass tourism expressly avoids (Riley 1988; Sørensen 2003).

This chapter describes the common ideology among backpackers traveling Central America. Using insights provided by backpackers traveling throughout the region, I explain their reasons to travel off the beaten tourist path: to “explore the unknown.” Their sense of exploration emphasizes a 1) desire to escape, 2) find a level of independence or freedom, which defines their 3) sense of adventure, and enables them to 4) self-reflect on their life and identity. While each backpacker has their own unique travel experience in Central America, they also collectively share and maintain these ideological beliefs.

CULTURE AND IDEOLOGY

From a sociological point of view, we cannot understand human culture without considering the fundamental role of ideology. Ideologies influence how individuals develop their lives relative to each other (Eagleton 1991). People create ideology through social interactions and the relationships formed within those interactions. Ideologies are rooted at the most intimate levels of interaction and are also central to societal institutions. Ideologies help to anchor our identities in the social world. Hence, ideology is a social construction created, shared, maintained, and sometimes changed, through interaction.

Dominant ideologies emerge when we collectively consent to ideas that affect all aspects of social life (e.g., family, education, religion, media, politics, and the economy). Collero (2013) argues that since the European Enlightenment, individualism ascended to the dominant ideology in the West where

autonomy, independence, self-reliance, self-determination, and personal expression are highly valued and assumed to allow each of us to make choices free of social forces. The dominant global economic ideology, capitalism, promotes the idea that through individual hard work we can each succeed financially and experience upward social mobility, no matter the social strata in which we begin our lives. Alienated and oppressed groups of people have questioned capitalist ideology and the culture of individualism, manifesting collective resistance to change the social and environmental injustices produced by capitalism.

I define international backpackers as a youth subculture who maintain an ideology that opposes mass tourism. No matter where backpackers travel, they ideologically resist increasingly standardized and commodified forms of travel and tourism controlled by powerful capitalist interests. While global tourism's growth has provided increased opportunities for all sorts of people to travel around the world, it has also structured and controlled the travel experience. International backpackers represent a distinct group of travelers who resemble a youth subculture as they share ideas, beliefs, and values about experiencing authentic travel off the beaten tourist path.

I understand international backpackers in Central America as a youth subculture inasmuch as they too embrace an ideology characteristic of backpackers traveling throughout this region. Central America is an "ideal" region to understand backpacking ideology because it offers opportunities for travel far off the mass tourism path into local cultures and pristine natural environments. The ancient Mesoamerican region area contains an interconnected web of various cultures and ethnic groups, including five countries that share the Mayan culture. While Central America accounts for only one tenth of one percent of the Earth's surface, the region is considered a biodiversity hotspot, containing seven percent of the world's biodiversity (The Nature Conservancy 2015). Central America also consists of some of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere with an underdeveloped, although rapidly emerging, tourism industry. Central America is a prime destination to understand the ideas that backpacking travelers in the region might share.

Throughout this chapter, I explore backpacking ideology as told by Central American travelers whom I interviewed, as well as from my own reflections as a solo backpacker in Central America. Below, I begin with a narrative about my experience one evening talking with four other backpackers during our stay at a backpacker hostel in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala. While exchanging ideas through conversations with other backpackers is an important backpacking *practice*, which I expand upon in a later chapter of this dissertation, these conversations reveal important backpacking ideas and intentions shared and reinforced by backpackers.

EXPLORE THE UNKNOWN

On a cool, rainy evening I sat with four backpackers—a Brazilian man, a German man, a British man, and an American woman, all in their thirties or twenties—on the hostel’s back patio. We had retreated from a party that began among the new arrivals to the hostel. Manu Chao’s song, “*Me Gustas Tu*,” played like a broken record through the tattered screen door. Three candles burned atop the wood table at which four of us sat, while the Brit swung nearby in the hammock. We had all just returned to the hostel after a day of wandering around Xela (the common indigenous name of the city).

We started talking about “what it means to backpack.” The Brazilian man, the oldest in the group, had brought up the topic. He mused that while perusing the city, he realized how most backpackers, himself included, pursue the same backpacking path. In Xela, he had planned to take a break from “actual backpacking,” to instead settle down for a few weeks to improve his Spanish. He said he had heard from other travelers that Xela was an ideal location in Guatemala to learn Spanish because there are far less tourists compared to the gringo hub of Antigua, providing a greater likelihood to be immersed in the culture and learn the language directly from locals. While inquiring about private lessons at a small language school he had found, he ran into a familiar face, another backpacker he had met just a few weeks earlier in Nicaragua, who had the same goal in mind.

“It is sometimes difficult to get off the...what do they say, gringo trail?” expressed the Brazilian. “You know, we all have this goal to travel, not like the tourists, but is this a real possibility?” he asked.

The German hesitated at first, then said,

“I think so...” And then with assurance, “No! No way, it is not possible, but...”

The Brit chimed in, slightly raising one fist, exposing his arm covered in tattoos:

“Fuckin’ yes we can! I’ve done all sorts of things during my travels these past three months that simply contrast from most tourists’ approaches to travel. I mean, you don’t even actually see tourists unless you’re visiting these colonial towns. Other backpackers I’ve come across, surely. Antigua, that’s a place, loads of tourists. But when I was in the Rio Dulce...any of you been there before? I hardly saw anyone that resembled a tourist.”

The American was quiet at first and simply listened as I did. This was her first backpacking trip.

As a 22-year old, she was the youngest of the group.

“Like, I don’t know, but I just want to be a hippie in nature and get away from everything back home,” she said, followed with a tranquil laugh. “I feel like I can experience that here in Guatemala. I really came to see the jungle. Maybe go back to San Marcos and meditate by the lake, I don’t know. So far I wouldn’t say I’ve experienced that much tourism, except for, yeah, maybe when I was in Antigua. But, I just started my trip. Plus, this is my first time backpacking, so...”

As the five of us discussed this meaning of backpacking life, defined as why we decided to travel Central America to begin with, we drew on our personal travel experiences. As we shared our experiences, we clarified and contributed to existing ideas about what it means to backpack. The ideas we cited as motivation to our travels resembled a set of core values we held in common: to experience the unknown, to discover something unfamiliar and unique compared to our lives back home. We each seemed to share a value to search for experiences previously unknown to us.

Our conversation stalled. We looked out into the dark sky and I contemplated what everyone had said. The situation now felt more intense to me. With his arms now crossed behind his head, the Brit expressed in a calm, low voice:

“I’ve had this recent urge to cross the Darién Gap. I’m dead serious. I’m backpacking south...not quite sure where to exactly. Have you heard of this Darién Gap?” he asked the group. “It’s that massive jungle region that separates Panama from Colombia. Every backpacker I’ve ever talked to traveling between these two countries, detours, either taking a boat on the Caribbean side, or flying from Panama City to Bogota.”

The German leaned forward, grasping the table with both hands, and warned:

“I think it is nearly impossible during this wet season. It might be one of the most dangerous jungle regions on earth, especially at this time...it’s too hot and you’ll likely get dengue fever or malaria, and probably there are these deadly snakes, and then also the guerillas, you know the Colombian rebels who are hiding in there...”

I mentioned to the group that I had just finished reading a book about a man who attempted a solo motorcycle ride through the Darién Gap, but had to give up and instead paid some of the local villagers who lived on the outskirts of the jungle to help him through by jeep, boat, foot and machete. It seemed like an almost impossible adventure for a foreigner to take on, which is why not many outsiders have done it before. But something about the way the Brit pulled us all into his story, we felt, and related to, his desire to pursue the Darién Gap, which for me, was very tempting to try alongside him. I was at the end of my backpacking trip, however, getting ready to fly back to the States, though still infected by the backpacking bug and ready to explore some more. I assured him that I would return and meet him in Panama once I took care of some university work, but I never did make it “back out.” In that very moment, I was as serious as the Brit was, to at least attempt something I had never attempted before.

“You see,” said the Brazilian. “This is my point. We all want to do the same thing. We might not do exactly the same things, but we want the same. I hear this from so many

travelers I meet. It is like in that Leonardo DiCaprio movie, *The Beach*. You know, the one about finding this hidden beach...we have that, same desire also...we...to do things that not so many people have done. This Darién Gap that you talk about, yes I agree, it is much too dangerous. I would like to do it myself, but no way, this is just impossible man. It is the same as many places in my own country. I would not think to travel to places in the Amazônia. It is possible, one day it can be possible...”

“You guys are fuckin’ crazy!” exclaimed the American. We all turned her way. She said: “I could never even think to do something like that as a woman. Not alone at least. Like, maybe with somebody. I mean hearing you talk about this, yeah I kind of want to do it too with you guys, but...”

Through conversations like this one, backpackers share ideas and aspirations about traveling in Central America. They reflect on why they value backpacking so much more than any other travel form. For the Brazilian, it may be the idea to temporarily live in a city immersed in Guatemalan culture to learn Spanish directly from the locals; for the American, it may be the desire to find her truer self in nature experiencing the jungle; for the German, it may be the pursuit to obtain true independence traveling alone; and for the Brit, as well as myself, it may be this passion for adventure, to face and overcome challenges such as crossing the Darién Gap. Each of us idealize a travel form noted in prior backpacker research as most resembling (and symbolizing) *drifting*—to experience something new, off the beaten tourist path without any of the comforts or constraints we are accustomed to experiencing in our day-to-day lives “back home.” Backpackers certainly realize that while they value traveling outside the mass tourist routes, there are other travelers like them who embrace similar ideological notions about unfamiliar and unexpected travel experiences.

Below, I expand my description of the common Central America backpacking ideology. Specifically, I lay out the central ideas, beliefs, values, hopes and intentions contained within this ideology. I describe the travel ideas that motivate backpackers to choose to backpack in the first place and what they intend to search for and gain from backpacking, providing a sense of how they think

backpacking should be. Some of my observations reflect Sørensen's (2003), Welk's (2004), and Binder's (2004) descriptions about backpacker's as a culture-sharing group and travel intentions (see Chapter 2). I also contribute to the research literature with findings specific to backpacking ideology in Central America, which in some ways contrast from previous research findings.

ESCAPE

Backpackers see travel as a more meaningful life where they can escape the structure of routine responsibilities of their mundane lives. They see the everyday as a blasé culture of unenthused people working tedious corporate jobs, studying long hours for university exams, or waiting in unison with others at stop lights to cross auto-filled streets. This culture also includes 24-7 news cycles, virtual networks, and social media that present an overstimulating range of information and images, which act as distractions to their seemingly senseless day-to-day experiences. Backpackers expect that travel will provide them with opportunities to experience a sense of freedom from such a standardized and predictable culture and hyper-modern lifestyle.

Christiaan, a 26-year old Dutch backpacker traveling in Guatemala, quit his accounting job in Rotterdam to backpack from Mexico City to Panama City. He started working immediately after completing his university studies. After two years on the job, he began to question his career path altogether, as it no longer felt rewarding to him. So one day, he decided to quit. He explained:

I wanted to get away from everything. Sitting in my desk most my day in front of the computer screen, I was feeling like I'm American...that life I couldn't take it any longer, so I gave it up to travel.

He feared that if not for his recent urge to travel, he would have remained working long-term at that job. He was up for a promotion and figured that if he climbed too far up the corporate ladder and started earning a higher income that it would become too difficult for him to leave. He also recently started to see himself settling down with a partner and having a family, a goal his mother had encouraged him to pursue. Before he dedicated his life to such a career and family life, he decided to escape, as he stated, "any of these normal obligations everyone follows."

Emily, a 28-year old community college professor from Michigan told me that she felt discouraged during her last year teaching English writing courses to first year students who seemed to care more about social media than developing creative writing skills. She was frustrated with her students constantly pulling out their cell phones in class to text each other or update another social media timeline, even while she found herself skimming through her Facebook newsfeed during office hours. She hoped that by traveling to indigenous villages throughout southern Mexico and Guatemala, and seeing the ancient Mayan ruins of Palenque, would allow her to take a step back in time and experience a life entirely disconnected from Western technology. She explained: “Well I knew I wanted to go somewhere close because I only have 6 weeks, but somewhere remote, and somewhere that’s not all reliant on cell phones and the Internet and all that shit that really, well, complicates my life even more.” Like Christiaan, Emily wanted to break free from it all.

Avi, a 21-year old Israeli backpacker who recently finished his compulsory military duties described similar motivations for backpacking. While Avi had been traveling mostly Central America for close to three months, drifting north from Peru to Mexico, he expressed his primary reason to travel, which was always on his mind. Avi’s intent to travel was twofold: to finally retreat from almost three years of military service and from always being around other Israelis. As he explained:

Before I arrived in Peru, I was finishing the Tzahal. I was in the army. I’m not sure if you know this, many Israelis we have military service obligations, and then after, many of us travel. This is part of our culture to travel...it lets me get away from all of the rules I must follow in the army...this time now in my life is just for me man, to leave all of my friends and family behind.

Avi believed that travel would allow him to break the daily cycle he had been most accustomed to while serving in the military: waking up early, wearing a uniform, undergoing combat training, and eating canned goods. He also commented that travel would also provide him that outlet to escape other Israelis.

Anti-Tourism

Since backpackers are motivated to escape the humdrum of their organized lives, they also hope to rid themselves from anything that resembles that dour lifestyle. Accordingly, when it comes to travel,

backpackers tend to express anti-tourism sentiments. They view the mass tourism industry as a culprit that reduces travel to predictable, unadventurous, and passive gazing. For backpackers, the appeal associated with backpacking travel is that they get to exist outside the “tourist bubble” of destinations and experiences packaged and sold to hordes of mainstream tourists.

Anna, a 25-year old backpacker from Australia who was traveling with her boyfriend in Nicaragua, had been globe-trotting for almost a year. She had previously worked as a cocktail waitress on a major cruise line out of Sydney, because, at the time, she just wanted to earn easy money that she could save to backpack. She explained: “I thought it would sort of be an easy way for me to earn some dollars, and it was, but what I really learned from that experience was everything I hate about tourism.” Working in such an all-inclusive leisure environment, she had experienced the epitome of how mass tourists travel: with organized trips to pre-set ports of call, staying in rooms that resemble any standard hotel, planned itineraries within the various ports they stopped along the way, and indulging in a variety of amenities, such as 24-hour buffet-style eateries, swimming pools, numerous bars and nightclubs, casinos, spas, fitness centers, shopping malls, and cinemas.

Anna developed an anti-tourism attitude as she realized that her ideas about travel contrasted drastically from what she witnessed while working on the cruise ship. She sees backpacking as a form of “mindful travel” that enables her to experience pleasure from the actual journey because she is aware of her surroundings and making conscious travel decisions along the way. She explained:

Cruising seems to be on the extreme end of tourism. They honestly do sort of travel in a bubble. They might be enjoying themselves in that bubble, but they could care less about what goes on outside of it...even when they get off the ship to have a look around the town, they still scurry around in that bubble. That's not who I am as a traveler. I try to travel outside the bubble and make time to explore all that exists beyond it...actually care for the people and places I visit.

Anna felt that cruisers, more than any other tourist type, missed out on experiences beyond the ship, and beyond the ports of call. She was adamant that she would never travel that way, or work in that type of environment again.

Emily shared similar ideas about travel and suggested that backpackers maintain ideas that travel should be unplanned, unorganized, and unpackage. She held strong anti-tourism opinions about not only the most obvious forms of packaged tourism, such as resort tourism, but even with less obvious forms. She felt that backpacking was the only true form of unstructured travel that still exists. She explained:

I knew all along that I wanted to backpack instead of going through a tour agency or staying at a resort. Even my friends wanted to go to Tulum and I was like, “yea let’s go to Tulum, but I’m not going to stay in a resort,” even though that’s what they all wanted to do.

She proposed to her friends that instead of going to a resort they should travel in a more meaningful way. She suggested, “to maybe book one of those Reality Tours through Global Exchange, which would have been more meaningful to me than relaxing by the pool and partying it up at some resort with a bunch of other Americans.” In the end, however, Emily felt that booking a trip through Global Exchange still did not meet her desire to travel in the most unstructured way possible, so she chose to backpack instead.

While backpackers tend to express anti-tourism attitudes, most backpackers acknowledge that they are indeed “tourists,” in the sense that they are foreigners traveling abroad. Yet, they see themselves as distinct from most mainstream tourists traveling in their bubble that offers pre-set menus of a country’s highlights. Emily observed, “I mean of course I’m a tourist, we all are, but I’m also a ‘backpacker,’ which I feel this type of travel is so much more organic, and right now in my life I’m more interested in being organic.” Backpacker’s anti-tourism attitudes have more to do with their travel preferences in comparison to most mainstream tourists.

Anna described herself as more of a “pseudo tourist” and highlighted the main distinction between backpackers and mainstream tourists: the value that backpackers place on traveling with no set goal in mind, but simply to travel. She said:

I wouldn’t call myself a tourist. I mean, I know I’m sort of a tourist because it’s obvious that I’m a foreigner traveling in this country. But I decided to backpack because we don’t travel the same way that tourists do. I mean, we don’t really pre-plan our trips and follow an itinerary.

Similarly, Isabelle, a 31-year old Brazilian tattoo artist traveling throughout the Yucatan Peninsula said:

You see the tourists. They have their entire travel planned out before they arrive to the country. Like, you know, they want to see this and that and go down this list of what they have to see before they return home. But we just want to go and be free, and, just be a traveler.

Both Anna and Isabelle suggest that the backpacking travel form is rooted in the idea that “to travel, means to be free,” to allow the journey to freely take its course.

Backpackers traveling Central America not only distinguish themselves from mainstream tourists, but many of them also describe themselves differently from less experienced youth travelers (particularly those between the ages of 18 and 21) who typically travel other parts of the world. They see themselves as among the most experienced and adventurous backpackers and view most of the Central American countries as more off grid of typical backpacking destinations (with parts of Costa Rica as the exception). For example, many backpackers traveling Central America may have previously backpacked Europe, as well as Southeast Asia and they recall these locations ripe full of young amateur backpackers. As such, they sometimes consider the term “backpacker” as signifying “youth.” Anna further explained: “I actually see myself more as just a ‘traveler’ because ‘backpacker’ I feel that it signifies younger, and I don’t know, I’m not like backpacking Europe.” Anna’s boyfriend Colin, a 29-year old backpacker from New Zealand, summed up these particular backpackers as, “all these young blokes in places like Bali, Bangkok, and Amsterdam.” Nonetheless, backpackers recognize and adopt the term backpacking as their travel form because, as Colin further mentioned: “Well, in the end, I mean, we’re still backpacking around the world...backpackers, travelers, the real dirty hippie types, or whatever man...you, me, even those young blokes, we’re sharing a lot of the same feelings about tourism, you know, that we do our best to get the fuck away from it.”

INDEPENDENCE

Whether young or old, experienced or not, backpackers share the idea that to completely self-abandon the mundane, they must strive for independent travel. Backpackers believe that backpacking is the most independent travel form as it frees them to travel however, whenever, and wherever they desire.

As explained by Christiaan:

I think of backpacking as the most free way to travel because I can travel the way that I really want to travel. I prefer not to open the guidebook and I don't like tours...I want to experience each day by exploring on my own and discovering something new—not that I read about in the guidebook.

Rather than create a travel itinerary or partake in a guided tour, backpackers prefer to travel on their own terms, without any constraints or limits that might affect their experiences.

Accordingly, backpackers also believe that independent travel is best represented by traveling alone. They feel that group travel, even if it involves just one or two others, constrains their own travel preferences and intentions. Emily explained:

I don't really like traveling in groups because then you have to follow what everyone else is doing and most of the time people can't make up their minds. All my friends wanted to come with me on this trip because they're all teachers, but I wouldn't let them because they're not going to do what I want to do. I'm not going to have that conversation with someone every day, like that awkward saying, "what do you want to do today," because they might not want to do it. But they're going to do it anyway, so everyone is dependent on one another. I can't really deal with that. I would rather be independent and do everything my way.

Similarly, Avi noted how important it was for him to travel alone, rather than travel with the group of friends he had made during his military service.

While a small group of Avi's friends had decided to travel together through South America, hitting some of the major country highlights, such as the Galapagos Islands and the Inca Trail, he decided to venture off on his own. He continuously expressed to me that to truly escape and experience something different he would need to make his own travels. So instead of traveling south from Peru to Argentina, he decided to make his own route, drifting north through Central America. He explained:

If I want to make a life, so I don't wake up early, I feel that I need to travel on my own. Maybe I have a late night of partying and want to sleep in the next day. No one can tell me when to wake up in the morning. Or, I'll leave Bocas a day late, just because I'm too tired to travel. I don't

know, maybe I never even travel to Costa Rica during this time, because I'll decide to go back to Boquette and work on the finca instead...If I want, I can take a bus right now, anywhere.

Like Avi, backpackers hope that by traveling alone they are forced to make their own travel decisions, from one pursuit to another. Solo travel allows their travel experiences to naturally unfold.

Backpackers prefer to travel based on impulse, spontaneity, and creativity. In contrast to their lives back home, when they backpack alone they hope to live in the moment. Christiaan observed:

I think travel allows us to be spontaneous, like just wait and see what is coming. You never quite know what to expect will arrive tomorrow when you're traveling this way. It's not like at home when I know what will happen because I do it every day. But with travel, I can visit Antigua, for example, and then I just know when to leave because it feels right to leave, and then I don't have any clue what will happen next. Like, at first, I might think I will go to the Rio Dulce, but then, all of a sudden, I might take a different way, and maybe I go to Lago de Atitlán instead.

Isabelle also suggested that maintaining ideas about backpacking as a travel form based on impulse and spontaneity would allow her to express a more creative form of travel, unlike what most mainstream tourists experience in their bubble. Isabelle hoped that backpacking independently would allow her to be more creative as a traveler. She understood travel as an art form and, like other backpackers, could change the course of her travels at any time. She explained:

Travel can be like art. It is art. I believe this. It brings out the artist in the traveler. You know, because when we arrive, it is like we have this blank piece of paper. We don't know what to expect, how it will look in the end. But we have these ideas, what we want to do. When we are starting to travel again, we suddenly go the other way, or then go back, or staying longer in a place than we think we might stay....so then we have our piece of paper that is now full of our colors we choose. We can be creative like any artist and make a travel how we want to make it.

Like an art form, backpackers express a preference for impromptu travel. In fact, they believe that once they rid the constraints of their home lives, and let their impulse drive where and how they travel off the

beaten tourist path, they open up new ideas and intentions about travel and adventures that await them along the way.

ADVENTURE

Backpackers characterize part of their experience of independence and escape as seeking a sense of adventure when they travel. For them, a sense of adventure means that they: (1) embrace the journey as a puzzle and put the pieces together as they go, (2) interact with the local people, and (3) directly experience nature. Backpackers claim that travel gives them a sense of excitement and accomplishment that makes them feel fully alive. Adventure means that they must step outside their comfort zone, which provides them with a continuous flow of immediate, intense, chance encounters with the world around them.

The Journey

Backpackers value the experience of the journey because the journey in and of itself defines the adventure. As Isabelle explained: “I just enjoy travel so much when I’m on the road, because we just go and when we let go, we have these exciting moments, and all of these moments makes the journey.” Likewise, Emily expressed: “I think the actual journey is the most adventurous part about traveling because you don’t really know what lies ahead of you, so you’ve got all this adrenaline, and you’re alert, and sometimes even scared, but this is what you have to expect from backpacking.” Backpackers believe that the journey will provide them with the uncertainty that gets them out of their staid, routine lives off the trail.

Backpackers express ideas about travel in a dreamlike state in which they believe that by embracing the journey they can go anywhere. They talk about boundaries blurring as they allow their travels to naturally unfold with no set destination in mind. They yearn for experiences of uncertainty, danger, and risk. Conveyed in the words of Uli, a 58-year old kinesiology professor from Germany, who was backpacking along the Guatemalan and Honduran Caribbean coastline with his 21-year old son:

These young travelers today, they share this common idea about the journey, that it can take them anywhere. I think it’s an old idea shared by many travelers, you know, from the time of Marco

Polo...and that idea is very real and it will consume you. I can see it in my son's eyes, he is wanting to keep experiencing this special type of adventure that travel brings to us. And the longer we travel I believe he is becoming addicted to the adventure.

Uli was familiar with this idea about travel because he too previously traveled this way. He once longed for this sense of adventure in which he believed travel could take him anywhere without constraints. And like the travelers who came before him, he alluded that today's travelers romanticize about a drifting travel form.

Uli reminisced about the time in his life when he was about his son's age and also yearned for adventure, so he too temporarily abandoned his home life to travel. He expressed to me that in the early 1970s he was attracted to this idea about fleeing Europe for experiencing something new, adventurous, and exotic in the east. Like many of the young travelers at that time, they were consumed by the actual journey while they drifted east. He explained:

When I was a backpacker, all I needed for my journey to continue was holding onto this desire many of us shared and this desire was to let ourselves be free to travel. We traveled east, dreaming about a life on the Silk Road...and then into Iraq, and into Pakistan...finally we reached India, and then you have this moment when you realize how far removed you are from your own world, because you are caught up in the actual moment of travel. Now that I'm here in Honduras, and even in my old age I am also feeling again that same sort of sensation.

While backpackers traveling Central America desire adventure by way of the journey, they also hope that the journey leads them to experience impromptu encounters with the local people. And so for many backpackers, they seek a sense of "exoticness" in their adventure and, for them, the local people represent the sense of the exotic.

Be Like the Locals

Part of backpackers' motivations to travel rest with opportunities to learn about local cultures *in situ*. Particularly in Central America, backpackers hope to find adventures experiencing the lifestyles of the indigenous peoples they encounter during their travels, which they see as entirely unfamiliar to their

lives back home. While museums about pre-Hispanic civilizations and organized tours to see Mayan ruins provide tourists with highlights of Mesoamerican cultures, backpackers prefer to learn directly from the local people about the cultural factors that shape their ways of life. Accordingly, backpackers are interested to learn about the local history, religion, architecture, art, and food as expressed by the local people.

Christiaan explained that his initial idea to quit his accounting job in Zürich and instead travel, was inspired by images he saw online of the Guna people (also known as Kuna) of Panama. He was particularly interested in the group of Guna people living in the San Blás archipelago off the southern Caribbean coast of Panama. While he was attracted to the idea of staying in a raised hut directly above the turquoise water along the shallow shore of one of the many palm-covered islands, he also felt that staying *amongst* the Guna people would provide him with a greater understanding about life entirely different from his own. He said:

When I saw these photographs, I really liked all of these colors in the clothing...it was very beautiful clothing they wear, and it seemed so different to me and so I imagined these people must also have very colorful lives...so I thought, why not just go there and see this in person. And this is how I always imagined the real kind of travel.

Christiaan then began researching about other indigenous peoples of Central America, which he became fascinated to learn more about in person.

Daniela, a 25-year old backpacker from Spain who was traveling with her best friend in the Chiapas region of southern Mexico, also decided to travel because she was interested to learn about the lifestyles of contemporary indigenous peoples of the Americas. She had previously spent a year living in Mexico City, studying as an archeologist at the ancient Aztecs' Templo Mayor just a couple blocks off the Zócalo (main square). While her main interest in archeology was the Aztec civilization, she later became attracted to Mayan culture, which she knew far less about. She said:

The Aztecas were extraordinary, but today they don't exist...ok, yes, of course many Chilangos from D.F. [local inhabitants of Mexico City] say they are descendants, and I believe this, but in

the south, the Maya people are still alive. I was very interested to see what the Maya people are like today.

So Daniela arranged to meet up with her best friend who was volunteering with the SNTE (teacher union) in Oaxaca and the two of them traveled south into Chiapas together where they would seek opportunities to interact with the Tzotzil people in the city of San Cristóbal de las Casas.

Many backpackers value opportunities to immerse themselves in local cultures and believe that backpacking allows for this more than any other travel form. They are attracted to the idea of “being like the locals,” which means, first and foremost, to interact with local people. Backpackers intend to live like the local people and even with them while they travel, which requires speaking their languages, shopping for local food staples in markets, drinking in cantinas, walking everywhere in towns and cities, or taking the local bus transportation when traveling long distances. They also talk about respecting local traditions, dressing appropriately, especially when amongst traditional communities or entering churches and other places of spiritual worship, and purchasing local clothing to wear and blend in more with the local culture. By being like the local people, backpackers hope to experience an array of adventures, such as bargaining with street merchants along Calle Moneda off the bustling Zócalo of Mexico City or attending a Dugu ceremony in the sleepy Garifuna village of Hopkins, Belize.

Emma, a 24-year old Belgian backpacker who was traveling on an “around-the-world” open flight ticket, flew one-way into Mexico City and began traveling south where she would later arrange a flight out of South America. Before landing in Mexico City, she had traveled through India for the past three months. She had long dreads, wore earth-toned harem pants that she brought from Thailand (where she traveled prior to India), and a floral huipil shirt that she recently purchased during market day in Chichicastenango, Guatemala. Emma believed that shopping in the markets would bring her closest to the indigenous peoples and provide her with the greatest sense of adventure while traveling. She explained:

When I can be lost in markets, I have the most adventure because we can watch what the people buy and we can try new kind of foods. Travelers don't like to shop in tourist areas because it is not a real experience, so we want to shop in the markets...we have to speak their language and,

like, make a bargain for these beautiful shirts...and we don't eat in the tourist places. In the market we can know what to buy and to eat, because we can ask the people what to buy, like foods we don't know about, like this small red kind of fruit with the, like, little spikes on them or something, or, this very soft purple kind of fruit with the, also these big kind of different spikes.

As Emma explained, backpackers hope that by shopping in the markets they can truly see how the local people interact with each other. In turn, the markets provide backpackers a space in which to also interact with the local people and create adventures by tasting new types of foods for the first time in their lives.

For backpackers, immersion also means taking the common local transportation modes as opposed to tourist vans or first-class buses reserved for a minority of wealthier people. In addition to experiencing the local culture in the markets, backpackers believe that by taking the lower-class buses, they will particularly find adventures amongst the indigenous peoples. As stated by Emily: "Taking these vintage American school buses is the only way to travel like the locals." Throughout Central America, the only transportation mode for many of the local people is by way of 1950s and 1960s North American yellow school buses, repainted in many regions, such as throughout Guatemala and Panama, in bright colors with festive decorations. Predominantly in Guatemala, the infamous "chicken bus," jammed packed full of people, cargo, and the occasional chicken or two, is rumored among backpackers to be one of the most adventurous ways to experience the country.

Backpackers believe that most tourists bypass taking the chicken bus over long distances as they fear the buses are unreliable and unsafe, especially when traveling along narrow, winding dirt roads. Yet, as backpackers are attracted to ideas of adventure, uncertainty, and risk they feel riding the chicken buses offers such experiences to occur. As Emily further stated: "No trip in Guatemala is complete without experiencing the chicken bus." She explained:

Tourists would never take these buses because of how packed they get, without air conditioning and all the comforts. They'd probably complain, and be like "it's too hot, and noisy, and crowded, and smells of exhaust, and takes way longer than the van," but how can you truly experience Guatemala if you don't take the chicken buses. Like, even knowing the bus could

break down at any moment or, Jesus, a chicken gets loose...backpackers would still rather take the chicken bus because then it's like, ok, now that the bus is broken, now you got to figure out what to do.

Anna shared similar ideas with Emily about taking the local buses to experience a sense of adventure and thrill. She also highlighted that backpackers prefer taking the local buses because they further provide opportunities to interact with the local people. She explained:

The chicken bus truly is the preferred transportation we use to travel...it's how we can literally rub shoulders with the locals, which might turn into something so much more than that. With the tourist vans I imagine you're surrounded by people just like you...but in the buses I love sitting next to locals because maybe they tell me about a place I've never heard of before.

While backpackers prefer to take the common, lower-class buses, such as the chicken bus, they realize that the everyday lives of the local people are not so seemingly adventurous to local people themselves.

Backpackers are conscious of the fact that Central America has some of the most economically deprived communities in the world. When backpackers travel through heavily congested and polluted streets of Tegucigalpa, Honduras or see shanty towns on the outskirts of Managua, Nicaragua, they recognize their privilege as travelers and feel a great sense of wanting to help the local people. As such, backpackers maintain the idea of being like the local people as they prefer to spend their money in places off the beaten tourist path, contributing directly to the local economies untouched by mass tourism. And, in turn, backpackers believe that if they are mindful of the local economy, they inevitably experience the local culture in ways they intend to do. Therefore, it becomes even more important among backpackers to maintain the preference to shop in markets or purchase street food as well as eat in small locally-owned restaurants, as opposed to foreign-owned restaurants in tourist towns or even contribute to the infiltration of McDonalds, KFC, and Starbucks across the world.

Backpackers also prefer to stay in locally-owned accommodations rather than foreign-owned accommodations or chain hotels and value staying with host families when the opportunity arises. By

staying in accommodations run by local people, backpackers hope to both contribute to the local economy as well as experience staying in a place with very little to no tourists at all. As explained by Anna:

I certainly try my best to stay overnight in the local places...this is one of the main reasons why I like backpacking, because I'll most likely end up in a town off the beaten path where there isn't a whole lot of tourists...so I sort of have to stay at the local places...and this way I feel I can give back to them, so it's sort of a win-win situation. So I always try and just pick a random place to stay, but as long as it's a local place.

By staying in accommodations run by local people, or with host families, backpackers also hope to learn about what to do and see in the towns and cities, as well as what to avoid, during their travels. Described by Emily:

Wherever I end up staying the night, and by the way I always prefer the local place...I always try and ask a ton of questions, especially to the locals who work there. Then I know what the vibe is like in the town so if it's a quiet place, like in Flores [town in Guatemala] for example, then I'll keep it modest...if I always remember to learn from the people who live there then it helps me to pay closer attention to what's going on, so that I can be a part of it...and they always give the best advice about things to do that you don't find in the guidebook so it's even more of an adventure that way.

By staying in locally-owned accommodations, then, backpackers hope to gain a richer experience about the local culture than they would by staying in foreign-owned accommodations with staff that offers only the cultural highlights of a place.

Since backpackers are concerned about the local economy as they travel, all while hoping to experience the local people off the beaten tourist path, they also intend to experience the natural environment. Specifically, they value the backpacking travel form as it offers them opportunities to seek adventure by way of exploring the natural environment. Backpackers feel that Central America offers all sorts of opportunities to experience an unspoiled nature, untouched by mass tourism development. And as they seek these off the beaten tourist path opportunities in nature, they become sensitive to environmental

degradation that mass tourism brings throughout some parts of the region. Therefore, backpackers also maintain ideas with respect to the overexploitation of the natural environment, much like they maintain ideas about respecting the local culture.

Retreat to Nature

Traveling throughout Central America puts backpackers in touch with nature. It is an experience that they highly value. They believe that experiencing nature provides them with a greater sense of adventure. Many of them from Europe, the United States, Canada, or Australia are unfamiliar with the Central America terrain and the extensive biodiversity. The region's tropical climate (both wet and dry seasons), two oceans, rugged mountains, active volcanos, limestone lowlands, savannas, rainforests, and collection of swamps, lakes, rivers, and waterfalls, provide an exotic backdrop for travelers longing for adventure in unfamiliar environments. Adding to their longing for adventure, many backpackers hope to encounter some of the region's exceptional fauna, including the West Indian manatee, brown-throated sloth, howler monkey, scarlet macaw, and resplendent quetzal, to name just a few.

Backpackers share the belief that being in nature provides them with a deeper sense of retreat from their home lives. Jón, an Icelandic solo backpacker traveling to Nicaragua was intrigued with Central American volcanoes, and explained:

When I finally arrived in Central America, I had this idea to do a lot of hiking. I love hiking. I wanted to hike many volcanoes...because I am from a village in Iceland and we appreciate nature in my country. But now I'm living in Berlin—it's very much like this futuristic metropolis. I couldn't wait to leave Berlin, you know from the city chaos, like no more, all these people. I don't have to take the U-Bahn now. This is why I wanted to travel here because I watched a documentary about the rainforest and the volcanoes and knew I had to hike this.

Backpackers are particularly keen to experience a different kind of nature than what they are used to experiencing back home. As Jón further explained:

This type of volcano is so very different from Iceland. Here I can hike to the top of a volcano, with this rainforest below me, and watch the clouds surround me. And this is a different experience, I

think than when I was hiking the national parks in the States. I'm sure you know, but the parks are very organized in the States, with the signs and trails everywhere. It's the same thing in Germany. But not here. Here it's free to grow and not so many trails...seems like a perfect place for adventure that I had dreams about discovering one day.

While backpackers value adventurous, natural experiences as a way to escape their home lives, they also believe that being in nature is integral to fully understand a country and its peoples. Backpackers talk about the way that nature experiences help them to learn more about the countries and cultures they visit. Backpackers see natural elements represented in local people's art, clothing, and spirituality and they hope to feel similar connections with nature as the local people do. Backpackers also value nature simply as a retreat from all urban experiences. As Isabelle explained:

To know about the locals, we have to leave them too. I believe it's very important for backpackers to also experience the nature. We spend so much time in these towns, like we want to learn about the history and see the market, and the cathedral...I don't want my experience of travel to be inside the towns. I don't want to drink coffee all day and then beer in the night because this isn't how to know the locals...but, I believe if we go to the nature, I believe we feel a connection more to the locals, because it means so much to their lives, and it's their history.

Accordingly, backpackers believe that experiencing nature provides them with a greater understanding of and connection to the local people.

Backpackers also idealize nature based on their environmental values, which often intensify through their travels. As backpackers learn how important the natural environment is to the local people, they also become more sensitive to the environmental impact of tourism development throughout the region. Backpackers often learn about ecological conservation measures and come across ecotourism projects aimed at preserving threatened ecosystems. Backpackers sometimes even take a break from their travels to volunteer with these environmental campaigns. By combining ideas of environmentalism with responsible travel, backpackers hope to tread lightly upon the very places they visit.

Backpackers are aware that if too many people end up in one place, especially when economic pursuits are involved with the mass movement of people and material items to those places, environmental change is inevitable. Accordingly, backpackers embrace the attitude that backpacking should be a travel form explicitly concerned about the ecological effects of mass tourism development. As described by Christiaan:

I am always having concerns about the environment. Like you know when you go to a national park and they don't want you to step certain places because they don't want you to ruin the vegetation, by having footprints on the vegetation. I believe in having this respect for the environment. I feel like that's the way you have to be when you travel this way. I don't think tourists care as much as backpackers do about the environment...overtime the tourists will destroy the place.

Part of the backpacking ideology in Central America emphasizes a belief that theirs is a “tread lightly” pursuit that does not damage locales, but helps them develop in concert with nature. They see mass tourism development as a prime culprit in socially and ecologically damaging development. By distinguishing their form of tourism from mass resort tourism, they define themselves in contrast to a bad “other,” which helps concretize their own ideological principles as eco-sensitive travelers.

Many backpackers are also aware that some growth in the Central American tourism industry growth has been in the eco-tourism sector. Eco-tourism purports to protect nature and local cultures, while bringing beneficial development opportunities. But, they are skeptical of the degree to which eco-tourism is truly ecologically and socially sensitive. Avi observed that, “backpackers always want to see a place before it changes.” Generally, backpackers hope to avoid mass tourist locations altogether, even those that present their attractions as ecological. Avi continued: “I don't want to go to Monteverde [town in Costa Rica]...because I hear that it's full of many tourists who go there to do this zip-line through the rainforest.” Backpackers claim a preference for places without even eco-tourist highlights that draw mass tourists for a standardized experience. They maintain the idea that backpacking should involve solo travel while considering the threats of mass tourism development to the natural areas off the beaten tourist path.

The adventure that backpackers hope to experience in Central America—through the journey, through the local people, and through nature—also provides them with a sense of accomplishment to their travels. That said, backpackers recognize that it becomes very difficult at times to completely escape their Western lives as well as the gringo trail. Yet, they continue to push themselves as travelers, hoping to find those spontaneous and intense travel moments that they embrace. They also value travel for what it offers to them over the long-haul as well. They piece together their journeys bit by bit, with each part becoming aspects of a long term travel experience they hope to look back on fondly and often.

SELF-REFLECTION

While backpackers imagine travel as an escape from their daily humdrum lives, they also use their journeys to reflect upon the lives they escape while abroad. Traveling afar, immersed in unfamiliar people and places, helps them see their lives in new ways. As Emily explained:

I want it [travel] to take me away from my everyday environment, to really let me reflect on myself in new places and really see what I've been doing and how I've been existing. I think I get kind of wrapped up in my work back home so by taking a break to travel in someplace new, I think it allows my peripheral vision to widen.

Backpackers talk about travel as the way they gain a new perspective about life in general and learn new things about themselves. Backpackers hope to discover their “truer self” on the road. For example, Avi explained backpacking as “...my time in life to focus on myself on the road and find out who I really am.” To find their truer self, many backpackers plan to leave behind anything that resembles their lives back home. For instance, Avi was adamant that he would not travel alongside other Israelis. He was motivated to immerse himself entirely among unfamiliar cultures, which he believed was the true meaning of travel to reflect upon his own culture. He further explained:

If I pay attention to the culture, then I can also focus more on myself, like who I want to be as a traveler, and a person. But I have to break out of my comfort zone to do this and is why I left my friends to travel alone. I really fucking believe this is the only way man, if I will find out who I am as a traveler, but really who am as Israeli too.

When backpackers engage local people in Central America, they often feel attracted to their ways of living because they are so different from what they know. Backpackers sometimes hope that by understanding the local culture, they can also discover a “different self.” As Daniela explained: “I want my experience of traveling among the Maya to make me feel like a different person.” And by stepping out of their comfort zone, as Avi had suggested, backpackers intend to be more social and outgoing, particularly among the local people, and try different activities and foods than what they are used to back home. Daniela further explained: “I think the best way for me to understand the Maya and also for me to just be a different person like them, I need to learn about their religion and their customs, but also to see it.”

While backpackers pursue adventure by way of exploring the local people, they also anticipate downtime to self-reflect about their identity. Anna explained:

Making time for lazy days is important because then we can relax and soak in everything we've experienced so far...sometimes traveling is exhausting...it sounds perfect to stay at the ecolodge in my own cabaña without electricity for a few days, and to hear the sounds of the jungle, and really think deep about who I am, and where I am, and how I ended up here.

Isabelle expressed similar feelings about exploring her identity through travel. She valued travel for its meditative offerings and how through travel she could elevate herself to focus on certain aspects about her life. She explained:

Traveling is also meditation. If we want, we can travel so we can be by yourself lost in your mind no matter where we are. I believe that when I let my instinct just take me away, then it's like I am in this meditation. This life is clear. When I feel this, I realize things about my life in Brazil that I'm not so happy about anymore. But travel brings me to this higher level so I can be aware how I might change those things about me.

For other backpackers, their downtime may be relaxing in a beachside hammock reading a book or sitting alone on rock in a secluded cove along Lago de Atitlán. What they share in common is to use these

moments for contemplation, often in solitude, to think about how they might change their lives for the better.

Ultimately, backpackers expect that their travels in Central America will be a transformative experience. As Emily mentioned: “It’s like you want to create a new individual, a new psyche, so that when you return home you’re this new and improved version of your old self.” Backpackers idealize the notion that travel can provide them with new ideas about their “truer identity” and how to fashion it. Isabelle exclaimed simply that, “travel can change a person’s life!” They expect that upon returning home they will look back upon their backpacking experiences with new life changing insights.

When Christiaan landed in Mexico City to begin his journey south to Panama City, he knew that his trip would be life changing, but not in the way it initially began to unfold. Walking through the airport to collect his backpack, he had already begun to self-reflect about why he actually decided to quit his accounting job and instead travel to experience the entirely unfamiliar Guna people. Yet, by the time he reached Guatemala, he already changed his plans. He explained:

When I left my job, I wasn't sure what life would be like when I returned home. But when I landed in Mexico City, everything was sort of very real to me. I thought, now I am here. And so I started my adventure. Remember I wanted to see the Guna people...traveling here in Guatemala I feel it has changed me and now I'm thinking why not stay and maybe work here. But this is a risk, I know, because I might miss out on something else and I might also disappoint some people in my life back home...but who knows, maybe I just stay for a while and work as a guide at the Quetzaltrekkers...some kind of job like this, even if it's temporary I think would have more meaning to me.

Prior to traveling, Christiaan never expected that his ideas about travel would suddenly change, despite also claiming that being free to choose where to go and what to do day by day is backpacking’s essential quality. He now saw travel as this opportunity to actually stay to live and work for the local people, escaping his home life in the most extreme sense. He found value in his travel experience of discovering a non-profit organization in which he believed he could make a difference to local people’s

lives in Guatemala. To work in this kind of environment, he believed, would be the most unfamiliar and foreign experience he could have ever imagined.

CONCLUSION

Backpackers both metaphorically and literally, individually and collectively, take a similar path as they think about and discuss their travel experiences in Central America. While backpackers do not prescribe to a simple ideology, they share common values and aspirations that they use to define who they are and what they do as backpackers. Specifically, the Central America backpackers that I spoke with embrace similar ideas about international backpacking as an (1) escape, (2) a form of independence, an adventurous experience, and (4) a mode for self-reflection.

The backpackers I interviewed and observed yearn to escape their mundane lives by seeking adventure through travel outside of mainstream, mass tourist experiences. Backpackers also believe that, to escape, they must travel independently, often alone, and to follow their impulses toward creative spontaneity. The backpacking travel form offers a sense of adventurous journeying, which can help backpackers connect with indigenous peoples in natural spaces. Backpackers hope that their travels will help them find a “truer self” through their reflections about the people and places they encounter along the way and the home lives they left behind.

My findings about backpacking ideology in Central America supports some of Welk’s (2004) prior research that details how backpackers travel with the intention to be free, independent, and open-minded. While backpackers do indeed express their preference to travel for an extended period of time and on a budget (the other two travel intentions claimed by Welk), these preferences were never central to the common ideology about yearning to experience the unknown. When these intentions did arise, backpackers mentioned them in regards to their desire to see more places (more unknown places). As such, backpackers were more inclined to discuss what they hoped to experience and gain through travel, which emphasized ideas of escape, independence, adventure, and self-reflection.

Backpacking ideology among the travelers I observed helps shape a distinct travel identity that defines the backpacking subculture. This backpacking subculture stands in a loosely-coupled relationship

to mass tourism development that backpackers claim to oppose. They are loosely-coupled in the sense that all youth subcultures are defined in opposition or subordinate status to the mainstream. Backpackers see themselves as a distinct subgroup of tourists who tread lightly, embrace localism, and contribute to “good” tourism development. They define good tourism as ecologically sound and respectful to indigenous needs.²⁷ They also value mindful travel, or “slow travel,” that emphasizes making conscious choices on how to move from place to place and to not let the anticipation of arrival to a new destination undermine the pleasure of the actual journey itself.

In the next chapter, I discuss backpacking practices. Specifically, I focus on the activities, methods, and behaviors that backpackers engage in while they travel. In doing so, I weave in a discussion about the core tools backpackers utilize that allow them to carry-out their practices. Understanding backpacking in practice allows for a greater understanding to how backpackers think travel should be (their ideology) and the ways in which they actually perform their travel (their practice). This chapter also begins to bring light to an understanding of backpacking as a youth subculture and whether or not there are in fact tensions between what backpackers believe and what they do.

²⁷ In 1990, The Ecotourism Society, the world’s first ecotourism organization and now The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), coined the term *ecotourism* (Honey 2008). Ecotourism refers to responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people (Honey 2008). Increasingly, ecotourism involves adventure tourism, nature tourism that requires physical skill, endurance, and risk (Honey 2008).

CHAPTER 6

BACKPACKING IN PRACTICE

International backpackers share common travel *practices* that also define their subcultural status. Following Eagleton (1991), practices refer to the real world, intentional applications of ideas or beliefs. Backpacking ideology informs a wide range of practices that backpackers use while traveling and in their everyday lives. These practices demonstrate cultural proficiency in a certain way of thinking and living as an international backpacker. Practices involve the use of *tools*, which are physical items that provide utility to perform certain tasks for productive and creative purposes. Practices provide important symbolic meanings to human culture (Kelly 2000). International backpackers express their travel ideology through backpacking practices. They use tools, especially the backpack as tool to experience travel off the beaten tourist path (Sørensen 2003).

This chapter describes common travel practices among backpackers traveling through Central America. Drawing from my observations and interviews of backpackers traveling throughout the region, I describe their travel activities and behaviors. I pay particular attention to what they do and the tools they use as they travel. Broadly, their key travel practices emphasize the use of 1) the solitary backpack, 2) particular transportation modes, and 3) specific information sources they use to guide themselves. While backpackers have their own unique travel experiences in Central America, they also share and maintain these travel practices in common.

CULTURE AND PRACTICES

From a sociological perspective, we cannot understand a group's culture without understanding the fundamental role our practices play in defining and displaying culture. Many of our practices utilize tools as essential of our everyday experiences. And, the tools themselves can reshape our culture.

Because tools open up options, they remake us. A really fantastic atlas of the world is literally a new world. A whisper-quiet ultra-efficient electricity generator and wireless Internet let us see ourselves as more nomadic than perhaps we have seen ourselves lately (Kelly 2000, P. 1).

The human practices and tool use lead to new ideas, which inform our practice in modifying existing tools, which we further put into practice. This process continuously reshapes human culture.

Take for instance the practice of using fire to cook food. Around 500,000 years ago, the human use of fire to cook food transformed the entire concept of food. Before early humans used fire to cook food, we ate it raw or else it decayed and putrefied (Derven 1999). When cooked with fire, toxic and inedible roots and indigestible and unchewable parts of game became edible (Derven 1999). Fire cooking allowed us to consume more than double the amount in calories we could than from a raw diet. Fire cooking not only enabled us to expand our food options, but to expand our minds about how to improve cooking with modified cooking tools. Organically-made tools, such as sticks, ashes, smoke, leaves, stones, spits, and pits were all utilized to aid in the fire-cooking process. With the advent of stone ovens, we could preserve food, to be eaten later when food supplies went scarce. Through this initial practice of using fire to cook food, we explored new ideas about cooking that were then reflected in refined toolmaking, and reshaped the human relation to food.

To understand and explain international backpackers as a youth subculture requires understanding backpacking in Central America as a human practice that includes common travel activities and behaviors characteristic of backpackers traveling throughout the region. Throughout this chapter, I reveal common backpacking practices as stated and observed by travelers whom I interviewed. I also rely on my own travel experiences backpacking through Central America. I also discuss how backpacking practices (the use of backpacking tools) have important symbolic meanings, which inform backpacking identity.

Below, I begin with a narrative about my experience arriving in Guatemala City to begin one phase of my travel research and discuss the importance of the backpack to the life of the independent traveler. Among the best ways to detail how backpackers begin their travels is to describe the instance of losing the backpack. The backpack is the backpacker's single most important travel tool because it distinguishes them from mass tourists and allows them to *be* "backpackers." To lose the backpack and all the personal belongings inside means to lose everything, from basic accoutrements to one's travel identity.

THE BACKPACKER'S PACK

“Ladies and Gentlemen, we are now on our final approach into Guatemala City. Please remain seated with your seatbelts fastened...” I woke up from a red-eye flight direct from LAX with a slight pain in my neck, lifted up the window shade, and looked out. The sunrise illuminated the clouds hovering over the serene volcano peak beyond the city sprawl. I began to feel the anti-anxiety meds wear off and, although the sight was slightly euphoric, I felt the immediate need to get off the plane. I was anxious and concerned to have my feet on the ground, strap on my backpack, and be on my way.

To begin any adventure, backpackers need a loaded pack on their back. The most critical tool to backpackers is their backpack,²⁸ which some travelers also referred to as a rucksack, or in Central America, *la mochila*. Backpackers use the backpack primarily to compactly carry all of their belongings. The single backpack gives backpackers the mobility for unfettered extended travel through their destinations, across unfamiliar terrains, and during unpredictable weather conditions. The backpack symbolizes and enables freedom, spontaneity, and creativity while traveling.

The backpack that most international backpackers use is similar in appearance and function to a military pack, yet comes in a vibrant color array, different sizes, and configurations. The backpacker pack is a roughly 65-liter storage pack, secured with two large straps over the backpacker's shoulders, a hip-belt, and chest strap, for support. The backpack is made of heavy canvas, Cordura®, or nylon fabrics known for their durability and resistance to abrasions and tears, and ability to withstand all sorts of climate conditions. Contemporary backpacks tend to have an internal frame that permits the pack to fit closely to the backpacker's back and minimizes load shifts. Most backpacks load from the top into one main storage compartment that holds most travel items. They often have a removable top lid with a smaller storage compartment, outer mesh side-pockets for water bottles, as well as outer straps used for a

²⁸The backpack tends to be the only luggage item that backpackers carry. Sometimes they also carry a smaller backpack, or “daypack,” for easy access to smaller and valuable items (e.g., passport, digital camera, and laptop), which can be thrown over one shoulder or on the front of the chest.

sleeping bag (or pad) and trekking poles. Additional backpack accessories might include a stowaway rain cover, built-in hydration system, and an extendable top handle and bottom wheels for a more customized transport method. When fully loaded, the backpack can weigh more than 50lbs (or approximately 22kg). The price of backpacks can range anywhere from \$100 to \$500 or more.

Still feeling slightly delirious, I proceeded through customs where an airport attendant directed me to the luggage carousel. When my backpack turned the corner of the conveyor belt, it appeared much smaller than when I checked it in at the LAX airport. “What the hell!” I thought. As I grabbed my backpack, I noticed the top pouch designed to wrap over the main backpack compartment was completely gone. In its place, was my backpack rain cover tied around the top. I felt a sudden, intense jolt of panic that quickly diminished any remaining effects of the anti-anxiety meds I had taken. I was wide awake and my heart raced. I tossed the backpack to the ground, quickly untied the rain cover, and saw that the top of the backpack was torn completely open and soaked with the pungent almond smell of Dr. Bronner’s Magic Soap!

Backpackers will do everything they can to protect their backpack during their temporary lives as travelers. Losing one’s backpack is thought of as equivalent to losing one’s home with all one’s belongings stuffed inside. Florian, a 26-year old Swiss backpacker I met during our search together for a backpacker hostel in San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua, said to me: “We carry our homes on our back, like turtles.” When something happens to the backpack, if it becomes damaged or, at worst, lost, backpackers lose everything. As Colin, the 29-year old Kiwi backpacker, observed: “Everything we own on the road is in this backpack.”

The items that one packs for a months-long trip throughout Central America hardly resembles what mass tourists pack for a more sedentary two-week holiday/vacation at a Caribbean seaside resort. More sedentary tourists may pack a large suitcase or two that remains in a hotel room for the entire length of their stay and can hold a variety of clothes and beauty maintenance products for sunbathing, sightseeing, fine dining, and nightlife. Backpackers can only carry so much in the backpack. Backpackers tend to go through a long trial-and-error packing process, during which they pack the bag at home, take a

walk around the neighborhood or go for a short hike, return home, take some things out, and continue the process until comfortable and assured by the weight. Their true packing skills are tested once they begin their trip and are actually backpacking.

Since backpackers spend a considerable amount of time outdoors, they pack a particular set of practical tools designed to function well for outdoor exploration. Common tools include: a waterproof rain jacket (designed to stuff inside of its own front pocket), quick-drying UV-protective shirts (short- and long-sleeved), cargo shorts, and dual functioning pants with legs that zip off, moisture-wicking underwear and socks (e.g., light wool socks that dry quickly and resist odors), sandals and flip flops, such as the well-known Brazilian-made Havaianas®, bathing suits, and highly-absorbent quick-drying towels. To further keep their clothes dry, as well as from smelling, backpackers sometimes carry with them a portable clothesline. Each of these tools has a specific and important purpose for backpacking during the summer wet season. Adding a pair of sturdy hiking boots to their set of practical tools prepares backpackers for treks along the most rugged terrain. Backpackers also pack basic toiletries, hygiene products, and medicines to help resist mosquito bites and prevent regional diseases and illnesses, such as Malaria and traveler's diarrhea.

I rummaged hysterically through the inside of the backpack searching to see if anything was missing. "NO!" I cried out. My rain jacket was slashed, my headlamp busted, my prescriptions—Chloroquine (for malaria) and Cipro (for traveler's diarrhea)—had been marinating with the almond-scented liquid soap all over my clothes. I wondered how could I possibly travel like this. Trying not to completely lose my composure, I figured the clothes could be washed. The headlamp, I'd just have to do without. I'd hope to find a cheap rain poncho somewhere. But, my precious North Face backpack, the same one that traveled with me through 21 other countries prior to this trip, just couldn't be replaced. I was horrified. Where in Guatemala would I find such a reliable backpack? And how could I afford to pay for it? I felt completely lost. Though in the end, I found out that my backpack had snagged on something sharp while moving through the luggage transport process. Nothing was missing on the inside, but I was certainly out of sorts.

While backpackers are concerned to pack a set of practical tools that function well for outdoor exploration, others pack more comfortable and “fashionable” clothing to wear while lounging around their overnight accommodation, taking a yoga class, or going out to a bar or nightclub in a town or city. Seasoned backpackers choose only to bring a small selection of these particular clothing items so they do not compromise their storage space, as one pair of jeans would take up an entire fourth of the space inside the backpack. But mostly, backpackers choose quite practical, fashionable clothing items. Light Converse® sneakers can fit inside of the backpack side water-bottle pocket or even tied to the outside of the backpack. Yoga pants, harem pants, Capri pants, skirts, sarongs (which can also be used as a towel), tights, swim trunks, tank tops, and a variety of headwear including bandanas, dread caps, and the all-purpose Buff®, are all fashionable items that take up minimal storage space inside the backpack. In reality, backpackers pack a combination of functional and fashionable clothing and gear to appropriately choose from as they travel.

Travel clothing and gear are not only for function and fashion. They also reflect backpacking preferences and one’s nationality, wealth, individual style, and backpacking experience. For instance, many Germans sport the German-brand Deuter® backpack while the French tote the French-written *Routard* guidebook. Some Canadians proudly display a small maple flag patch on their backpack, especially to distinguish themselves from Americans. While laptops and tablets have become essential tools that most backpackers can afford to backpack with, more affluent backpackers might bring portable GPS devices and a variety of prosumer HD digital cameras. To reflect their own style from home, some backpackers wear Dr. Marten® boots instead of traditional hiking boots. Others wear hair dreads or harem pants to extend their “hippie” or “holistic” lifestyles from home into their backpacking lives. Some backpackers carry portable music equipment, such as the minimalist “backpacker guitar,” harmonica, or MP3 player and headphones. Knowing to bring a headlamp, or head “torch,” or wearing old and weathered backpacks or clothes, are signs of the experienced backpacker or someone traveling for a long period of time—even if they have recently arrived by plane. Finally, every backpacker carries their

passport, visas, proof of vaccinations, as well as money and credit cards, in the most secure location (sometimes inside a money belt concealed underneath one's clothes).

There are few worse things for backpackers than to find their backpack damaged, lost, or stolen, especially to start their trip. To lose the physical backpack and all personal belongings inside means to also lose the ability to travel and explore. When such unexpected incidences do occur, backpackers can only make do with what is left, reevaluate their initial plans, and improvise their remaining trip. Or, as Uli, the 58-year old German backpacker traveling with his son had reminded me: "The adventure begins when everything's gone wrong." Uli was right. Losing my backpack at the very start of my backpacking trip meant I would spend the next five hours bonding with a Guatemalan cab driver driving me around parts of Guatemala City he had never even been to before, all so I could find a new backpack. Entirely unplanned and unexpected, my backpacking adventure began when the worst had happened.

Being Mobile

The backpack is critical to backpackers' mobility. Backpackers travel for extended periods compared to most mainstream tourists. They cover vast distances, sometimes traveling through an entire Central American country in one day. Backpackers move in and through different terrain and experience the local people also moving along with their goods. Backpackers sometimes find themselves in extremely remote locations where other travelers, as well as the local people, are hard to come by.

Once the backpack is packed and strapped securely to the back, backpackers are relatively free to drift. During their travels, backpackers adapt physically through various built, social, and natural environments as they encounter them. Colin observed: "With the backpack, we're free to travel [whenever and wherever we want], because we carry it on our backs." Marcus, a 25-year old French backpacker whom I met at a hostel and traveled with from Copán, Honduras to Suchitoto, El Salvador, considered the difficulty traveling with anything other than the backpack. He compared mainstream tourists who travel with rolling suitcases, to himself as a backpacker traveling with just the solitary backpack. He said:

Sometimes I see tourists with these suitcases, with wheels, like many of them I see here in Antigua, and I can't even imagine what that would be like. Pulling the suitcase through the market and on top of these stone roads, come on.

Marcus' denigration of both the rolling suitcase and the tourists who use it, marks a boundary between what it means to be a backpacker, their practices, and the tools that define them.

Backpackers experience all sorts of public spaces and challenging terrain in Central America. In a single day they may be trotting along ancient stone streets, walking atop busted sidewalks, jumping across flooded potholes, and trudging through clay mud, hopping along wet rocks, and scurrying through soft sand. In some cases, backpackers cross over shallow rivers holding their packs high up above their heads in search of a campsite for the night. When carrying just the backpack, backpackers twist and turn their bodies through some of the most densely populated public spaces in the world. In every direction that backpackers move, their backpack moves with them. Crossing cobblestone streets in colonial plazas is difficult enough to walk atop, but the task is doubly difficult when the street is tightly packed with people.

John, the 28-year old British backpacker traveling south to the Darién Gap, summed up the difficulty being mobile, when he described a time that he veered off Mexico City's massive main square, down the densely crowded *Calle Moneda*, in search of a cheap accommodation for the night. He said:

Imagine having to carry a suitcase down Calle Moneda. I'll never forget that experience entering the Zócalo. Just the sheer size of it alone. I almost pissed myself. Fuck, all that life. Madness. All the people, the noise, and commotion from all of the street vendors, fire dancers, the sound of bells...so much going on down Calle Moneda too...it was sort of like all these people packed like sardines down one street, selling everything you can imagine—razor blades, socks, umbrellas...and the smell of burning sage, beggars, and Mexican hot dogs...there's absolutely no bloody way in hell I would've been able to walk down that street with several bags.

Like every other backpacker that ventures down the *Calle Moneda* or similarly packed streets, John experienced human agility impossible when you are carrying anything other than the backpack.

Carrying just the backpack also enables one to adapt to such unexpected situations that often occur in transit between destinations. Colin admitted that each time he leaves a new town for the next, he is often in a hurry. During one particular morning, he woke up in a panic, re-stuffed his backpack as quickly as he could, rushed to the bus terminal, and quickly loaded both himself and his pack onto a moving bus. He described:

There's been a number of times, when I wake up a bit hung over, and have to rush out to the bus terminal. Just about a week ago in Masaya, I was in such a hurry to catch this one bus...I see a bus pulling out, and I'm like, oh fuck, is that my bus!? So I start running as fast as I can. But all these chicken buses look exactly the same...so I'm running, and I'm trying to read the little sign in the window to see if it says Apoyo. Then this man opens the back door of the bus, waves for me to hurry and jump on, and, so I'm wondering if this's even the right fuckin' bus! Of course he just knew where I was headed. I make the leap, with my backpack on of course, which feels like I'm carrying stones at this point...it's situations like that one, when I'm having to run and jump onto a moving bus and, I'm thinking, can you imagine carrying any other sort of baggage.

Once on the bus, the backpack is often stuffed overhead, under a seat, or loaded in the very back with other bags piled high. Although the pack may be out of sight, it is never out of mind. In a jam-packed bus full of mostly local people and their bags (and the occasional chicken) during their daily commute, backpackers might have to hug the pack in their lap, which could last for hours depending on where they are headed.

When backpackers walk to and from bus stops, they tend to always keep their packs close to their back. Yet, this practice sometimes creates problems. Backpackers often find it difficult to maneuver in tight spaces with their pack attached. Catarine, a 31-year old solo backpacker from Canada, who went by the name “Maya” during her travels, described the difficulty loading her backpack onto buses.

Sometimes we only have a few minutes to load our backpack on the chicken bus. And if it's not checked in for under the bus, well then it's tossed all the way to the back, on top of the bags full of fruits and vegetables...If I had more than one bag, this would be so very difficult to keep an

eye on all of them like this. I like having just this one backpack and it's very easy for me to carry to the buses, but when I get on, I'm sometimes bumping the people, like when I am searching for a seat...I hit the people with my backpack and I feel so bad about this.

Throughout their travels, backpackers constantly pass their backpacks on to local attendants whose job it is to load them along with other passenger bags onto the bus. If not loading onto buses, then the local attendants load them onto a variety of other transport options backpackers use while traveling.

Even when the backpack is temporarily detached from the backpacker's back, it always remains present to them. Backpackers always know where their backpack is located. In fact, the backpack is so important to the life the backpacker, that the backpack as tool also gives these travelers their name. As such, the backpack is an important cultural symbol to the backpacking travel form. In the next section, I expand on this idea about the backpack as a cultural symbol. I also discuss how the backpack helps shape a backpacking identity.

Backpack as Cultural Symbol

While the backpack serves as a utilitarian compact storage tool and offers mobility while traveling, it is also a shared cultural symbol in at least two ways. First, the backpack is the symbol locals use to identify and interact with backpackers. Second, the backpack allows backpackers to identify and interact with each other (also during transit encounters) and, through their interactions, inevitably develop a distinct backpacker identity, noticeably distinct from mass tourists.

Local people identify backpackers, or *mochileros* in Spanish, as they wait inside of bus terminals or arrive in a new town in search of accommodation. When backpackers arrive by bus to a new destination, local men stand just outside the bus station strategically waiting for backpackers to pass by. As backpackers pass, they hear the common call: "*Hola mochilero, you need place to sleep?*" The informal salesmen also hold up signs, advertising budget accommodations not always found in the travel guidebook. They hope to recruit backpackers for the accommodation owners who pay them a small commission for their work. Backpackers, especially those reluctant to practice their Spanish-speaking skills, tend to pass by the local men, extending just a simple "*no gracias*" and, instead, trust what they

have read in the guidebook or learned from a fellow backpacker. Backpackers move along in a hurry, as they know that by wearing the backpack they stand out from everyone else.

Backpackers recognize each other according to the pack on their backs. No matter one's origination point or ethnicity, the backpack signals to all that you are a certain category of traveler. According to John, the backpack as a symbolic identifier announces to other backpackers: "We are like-minded travelers." The backpack is a social lubricant of sorts. The backpack enables backpackers to identify and interact with each other.

Backpackers' interactions with each other help to create, sustain, and reinforce a loose collective identity among themselves, based on a sense of connectedness, fellow-feeling, and *esprit de corps*. For instance, I met Mike and Lindsey, a married American couple in their early thirties, as they traveled from Puerto Barrios, Guatemala to Punta Gorda, Belize. Puerto Barrios is a port located along the Guatemalan Amatique Bay. Backpackers use the port (along with the local people) to take water taxis across the bay, arriving on the other side of the bay into Punta Gorda. One morning, Mike and Lindsey approached me while I waited for the next water taxi. As Mike recalled the experience a couple of weeks later, he said to me:

I remember seeing you, waiting with your backpack and drinking a beer, and I said to Lindsey, "we need one of those." And then I was like, "let's go find out where he got that beer and if he knows where we can exchange our quetzals for Belizean dollars." We knew to ask you because we figured you already found the guy making the exchange...and since you were also backpacking, we decided to ask you instead of having to struggle speaking in Spanish to the locals...then we all had beers together...I'm glad we met that day, because we wouldn't have known to check out Placencia.

From this one encounter, created by the shared symbol of the backpack and the shared knowledge we held about backpacking, the three of us decided to travel together from Punta Gorda to Placencia, where I showed them a hostel I had stayed at during a previous trip. We connected and then backpacked together for the next two weeks.

Backpackers tend to gravitate toward one another. The backpack symbolizes commonalities before any conversation occurs. They anticipate camaraderie and helpfulness from others carrying the “house on their back.” In this sense, backpackers are part of a culture-sharing group whose members create temporary nomadic tribes who share the backpack as their common symbolic marker.

Securing Culture

Backpackers’ sense of attachment to their backpack goes far beyond its material quality or utility for travel. The backpack also takes on a subjective representation of backpacker’s identity and experiences. The backpack represents backpackers’ Western lives “back home,” as well as the places, people, and hardships that backpackers encounter as they travel through unfamiliar lands. Throughout their travels, backpackers develop all sorts of stories that generate personal feelings about their backpack.

In some ways, the backpack, and everything they use packed inside of it, are reminders to backpackers who they are as Western travelers backpacking in new places. Backpackers are not only physically attached to and reliant on their backpack and the goods it holds, but their Western identity and a sense of security is embedded in the meanings they associate with their pack. To many, the backpack becomes a “security blanket” of sorts. The one main link to their life off the road. Mike spoke of the psychological comfort his backpack afforded him. “It feels safe just knowing the backpack is always there,” he said. If backpackers lose their backpack, they lose so much more than the material backpack and their belongings inside. They lose themselves. Losing a backpack can mean losing the very sentiments, feelings of attachment, and sense of security they dearly hold onto while they travel.

As backpackers’ security blanket, backpackers must remain vigilant about its whereabouts all of the time. It seems that backpackers I observed can almost always locate their backpack. When it is not secured tightly on the back, it serves as a foot rest while waiting at the bust stop or as a pillow to hug in one’s lap during bus rides. When the backpack is loaded underneath for a long bus ride, backpackers keep a close eye on who disembarks, what items they take from the bus, and whether or not their backpack remains with them as they travel on. As Lindsey explained: “Sometimes I worry when I can’t see it

because it's under the bus, so when the bus stops I always take a quick look out the window to make sure that someone getting off doesn't grab it."

When backpackers finally make it to their destination and check into their hostel dorm room, they typically store the backpack inside of a locker. If they choose not to use a locker, or one is not available, they keep it below their bed, in a nearby corner, or even sometimes on the bed. Backpacks also become placeholders on hostel beds to show others who share the room that a bed is already taken by a fellow traveler. Backpackers start to unpack some items once they have established some sort of relationship with others sharing the room or feel comfortable with the social atmosphere of that particular hostel.

Backpackers' emotional attachment to their backpack is amplified by the memories associated with it. As Maya mused:

I am very attached to my backpack, even though it's damp from this weather and makes my clothes stink...it's going to be very strange when I'm home and don't carry this everywhere with me...but it's always exciting to unpack my bag and remember all of the things I left behind, and think about the people I met, and then see all of the new things I brought home with me, like things I exchanged with another traveler or purchased at a market.

Mayerfeld Bell (2012) explains that people develop feelings for things that go beyond their material qualities. New Zealand's Maori people have a single word to express the sentimental experience of material goods: the *hau*. The *hau* is the Maori word for both "wind" and "spirit." Maori use this word to convey the social spirit attached to material things. For the Maori, the *hau* of a thing represents the intermingling of souls, the intermingling of people and their experiences with that material thing that provides a greater subjective meaning than its material or utility aspect it provides. The people and places that backpackers encounter become something akin to this intermingling of souls. Backpackers experience travel in relation to other backpackers, with the local people, and with change, places and conditions. The backpackers and their backpack must endure all of it together on the road. Through these experiences, backpackers build an emotional attachment to their pack, which they vest with memories of their adventures.

BACKPACKER TRANSPORTATION

Backpackers spend considerable time using various transportation modes during their travels. Most backpackers recall their travel experiences not only in reference to their destinations, but also during their transit between destinations. As Lindsey mentioned:

Even though we spend so much time on the buses, we also see so much of the country...like the bus ride is a major part of our sightseeing. We get to pass through the small towns, and see the villages, and we get to see the people walking along the side of the road carrying the basket of fruit on the head, and all of the farmland, and then there always seems to be a volcano somewhere in the distance. And then even when you enter a city and sometimes you see the poor side of it with the slums, or all of the trash on the side of the roads...or just the experience of being in a bus with all of the locals.

Central America is a regional backpacking destination in which backpackers begin and end their travel. They typically fly to the region and, once there, travel by foot, car, van, bus, and boat. They travel along various backpacking loops, generally a northern loop and southern loop. Yet sometimes backpackers pass through the region, entering from Mexico in the north or Colombia in the south. Backpackers traveling the region sometimes travel in just one Central American country, such as Costa Rica or Guatemala, depending on their interests and travel duration. Backpackers almost always begin their travels by way of a major airline into one of the country's capital cities, which serves as the gateway to their adventures. Guatemala City, Managua, and San José are common gateways into the region.

Since backpackers tend to travel along a loop, they purchase roundtrip flights in and out of their gateway city. One popular backpacking loop in the northern half of the region begins in Guatemala City, north into the Mexican state of Chiapas, east through the Yucatán Peninsula, south into Belize, and then the return trip back west into Guatemala. Another loop involves traveling along the Pacific side of the region to then travel back along the Caribbean side, or vice versa, while making inland detours along the way. For example, backpackers traveling the southern half of the region begin in Managua, then travel south along one coastline to Panama City and then returning north along the other coastline. Or,

backpackers purchase multi-flight tickets, beginning their trip in one city and ending it in another, such as from Guatemala City to Panama City. Another flight option, increasingly popular among backpackers traveling for a year or more, is the around-the-world ticket. With this pre-packaged multi-flight option, backpackers hop around the world by major airlines, with a set number of one-way flights connecting several global regions.

Most backpackers in Central America almost exclusively book their flights online, just as Emma arranged through the Oneworld alliance website. Backpackers use a host of airline websites or travel metasearch engines, such as TripAdvisor, Google Flights, or KAYAK, to make their flight purchases. Few backpackers go to an onsite travel agency and book their flight in person. Emma, the “hippie” Belgian backpacker, had been traveling five months when we met at a hostel in Guatemala. She purchased one of these around-the-world flight packages before the start of her trip and planned to travel for more than a year. Central America was one of four global regions in which she decided to travel (1. Thailand-Cambodia-Vietnam-Laos; 2. India; 3. Central America; and 4. the South American Pacific side). She began her trip in Bangkok and then flew from Laos to India, then India to Mexico City where she began traveling south into Central America. Her final region would include traveling from Columbia to Chile. Emma described how she went about arranging these flights and her travel plans. She said:

A friend of mine told me about this. I was so excited when I find out. I did not know it was possible. But it's called "One World." Like several airlines have this, I assume sort of partnership. And you go on the Internet. They have a website. And you can choose your flights from the many airlines...so I make this travel by choosing where I want to travel and I was very careful because of time. Like I start in Bangkok and travel around Southeast Asia; then I take a plane from Laos to India; then India to Mexico City; and I take the bus from there all the way to here. I will travel all the way to Santiago and return to Belgium.

Some backpackers do arrange their flights in person, within their home country, and several months in advance. STS Travel is a travel service designed specifically for students traveling on a budget. Many backpackers who use STS book in person at onsite STS offices, which are located near several

universities in Western Europe and the United States. The service is also available online to book. Since STS targets students, these backpackers include younger backpackers (first or second year university students) as opposed to most other, older backpackers (university graduates or young professionals) traveling Central America. They also carry an International Student Identity Card (ISIC), which shows their proof as a student to qualify to use such a student travel service.

Once traveling throughout Central America, backpackers rely on a variety of overland transportation modes, including local buses, shuttle vans or minibuses, and local people's vehicles (in the case of befriending a local person who offers a ride or hitchhiking). Backpackers almost always purchase these tickets in person and on the day of departure. As Mike stated:

We always buy the day of because in case we change our minds at the very last second, like if we want to leave on a different day we hadn't anticipated, because that would really suck to waste away a ticket...and then, what if we decide just to go somewhere else...like we weren't even thinking about going to Placencia until you told us about it.

In some cases, backpackers purchase their ticket ahead of time to reserve a seat on a first-class bus or tour van known to sell out a day or two before departure. Backpackers also take *lanchas* (water taxis) across bays or rivers, ferries from the country mainland to an island, and sometimes wooden canoes along remote rivers. When traveling from Panama to Columbia, backpackers either fly, which they book in person at a local travel agency or arrange to sail with a tour company along the Caribbean side. Once settled into a town or city for a few days, backpackers opt to walk as much as they can, rent bicycles, and will occasionally hail a taxi.

The most popular backpacking transportation mode is the "chicken bus" because of the relatively cheap price backpackers pay for a ride. As Emma explained: "I take the chicken bus to see pure Guatemala because you travel with people that have no money and they can only afford a bus trip from here to there, so you know this is cheap because the locals take it." In Nicaragua, a chicken bus ride between León to Granada, the country's two colonial cities, takes about 3 hours (not considering the stop

in Managua) and costs around US \$3. As the cheapest option (aside from hitchhiking), the chicken bus is one of the most adventurous transportation modes. As Maya described:

I like the chicken bus even when I have to change buses five times a day which may take like 24 hours more than the direct bus, but you change in the little towns and...sometimes a little woman will step on the bus for a moment, yelling out “gallinita, gallinita con torti,” and so of course you have to buy, just to taste. On the bus all day like this is always an adventure.

The chicken bus allows backpackers to come into close contact with the local people.

In particular, Maya enjoyed the moments interacting with the local people on bus rides. I met Maya at a hostel in Granada and we decided to travel together to Laguna de Apoyo, a natural wonder known for its crater lake set inside of a lush tropical valley. Without knowing beforehand, the day we left for Apoyo was a national holiday. As many of the local people stayed home to celebrate the day with their families, the buses were fairly empty. Maya described the experience:

The day we came here, that was special to me. Remember how funny it was to get on that bus and the music was playing very, very loud, more than normal, and the people dancing to bachata...the vaquero was making the two women dance with him. It was so fun this day to have this party on the bus. And then when he pulled me in to dance with him and you were having a good time drinking rum with the old man smiling very big...ah this was the best day! Only, what, maybe eight of us on this bus and we made this special party, I will never forget.

On these rare occasions, backpackers experience interactions with the local people they could hardly imagine would occur on any other type of transport. While backpackers take the chicken bus often, they compromise time and comfort to do so.

For long-distance international trips in the region, backpackers regularly take the first-class buses. At a higher cost, the first-class buses offer comfort with air conditioning, reclining seats and, among the nicest, American B films dubbed in Spanish. A nine-hour bus ride from Managua to San José costs a backpacker around US \$36. However, when they travel overnight, they benefit from not having to spend money on accommodations. While these buses feel safer and far less crowded than the chicken buses,

backpackers can also find some adventure on them. These trips make frequent pit stops at small roadside stores, restaurants, and street stands that offer an assortment of local foods and beverages to try, as well as a closer look at the local way of life. And while these buses are considered “first-class,” they have their challenges. First-class buses are also known to have the occasional flat tire or mechanical issues that test backpackers’ patience, as passengers unload to stand outside on the open highway, in the heat, for several hours before the issue is solved.

Among the fastest, safest, and most efficient ways to travel include shuttle minibuses and vans, catered specifically to tourists and backpackers. They are similar in cost to first-class buses and can be accessed at some hostels. While the experience traveling amongst the local people is entirely absent with this form of transport, backpackers can find some adventure here as well. Daniela, the Spanish backpacker who studied archeology in Mexico City, first heard about “The Bamba Experience” from another backpacker she met staying at the hostel on the *Calle Moneda*. The Bamba Experience is a shuttle service marketed as “Independent Travel Made Easy!” It offers “hop-on-hop-off” shuttle service between several Latin American towns and cities. Backpackers obtain a shuttle pass and use it along the various travel routes. They customize their trip by staying in a place of interest for as long as they please, until they decide to hop on the next shuttle passing through to the next destination.

Daniela arranged her Bamba Experience to travel from Mexico City to Oaxaca. While at first she was skeptical of taking the so-called backpacking van, because “it wasn’t the local way,” she described her experience as a memorable one. She explained:

I didn’t want to take it at first, but it was convenient because it picked us up at the hostel. I know that backpackers are seeing many places this way, but I was only going to Oaxaca and I was also tired of taking buses...I like this experience because, well, one, I meet so many cool travelers, and my favorite part, when we went to see the magical desert. I didn’t know we would see this place: all of these kinds of giant cactus everywhere, and we drank the pulque, was fun. If I took the bus, I would not see this place.

On lesser occasions (primarily because of availability), backpackers purchase a full-transportation package, commonly referred to as “jeep-boat-jeep,” that offers a thrill ride across various terrain. Years ago these combo transports involved taking a jeep across remote dirt roads, followed by a canoe down a river, to then take another jeep to the final destination. Passengers passed through remote jungle areas and indigenous villages along the way. These transport arrangements still exist today, but in place of jeeps are shuttle vans or small buses, since most of the former dirt roads are now paved. Small motor boats have also replaced canoes. One “jeep-boat-jeep” excursion takes passengers in an air-conditioned van from the El Panchan traveler community in the jungle near the Palenque ruins in Chiapas to Frontera Corozol. From there, passengers take a small motor boat up the Río Usumacinta to Bethel in Guatemala, and then another bus on to Flores, the jumping off point to see the Tikal ruins. Another “jeep-boat-jeep” excursion takes passengers in Costa Rica from La Fortuna in Arenal (known for its magnificent waterfall) to the Monteverde cloud forest where backpackers participate in canopy tours and zip-line excursions.

These backpacking transportation modes are important to the backpacking travel form because they enable backpackers to experience escape, independence, and adventure, which they have opportunities to reflect upon. Yet these transportation modes also limit the places where backpackers travel to, which set parameters to the “adventure.” Backpackers also utilize important information sources that further guide their travel experiences. In the following section, I describe these backpacking information sources.

BACKPACKER INFORMATION SOURCES

Backpackers navigate their travels using key information sources. The most common sources they use are the Internet, guidebook, word-of-mouth, and advertisements. These sources provide backpackers with valuable information about where and how to travel appropriately in a country for an extended period of time. Prior to any trip, backpackers use the Internet to begin initial searches for overview information about their destination. They also purchase a travel guidebook for practical information on what to expect traveling in that destination, how to prepare and pack for it, and how much money per day to set aside for their budget. During their travels, backpackers continue to use the

guidebook, but also exchange word-of-mouth travel information with each other. Occasionally, backpackers use advertisements that promote accommodations, alternative travel, ecotourism and volunteer opportunities, which they use to further enhance their backpacking experiences.

These information sources enable the travel, but also constrain it by signaling where to go and where to avoid, further setting parameters for the “adventure.” They also link backpackers with other backpackers, indicated by the common backpacker routes and accommodations, which backpackers learn about from these sources. These sources also establish some degree of safety and security, but enough choice that the travel feels open and free (i.e., adventurous). While backpackers plan to use these information sources as they travel, too much information goes against their ideology of an overly planned trip with too many expectations.

Internet as Resource

When backpackers plan their trip, they use the Internet to read about the history and cultures of various Central American countries and look at photographs that inspire their travels. Backpackers search for information about visa requirements and vaccines. Some backpackers inform their bank and credit card accounts about their upcoming travels and establish online bill pay. Backpackers also use the Internet to seek travel advice by reading travel blogs or joining travel forums to ask questions they may have about traveling in a particular country. They research a range of topics covering local transport options, border crossings, regional diseases, the political climate, language courses, volunteer opportunities, and current weather conditions. As backpackers develop their knowledge base on these topics, they become more aware about what to expect traveling throughout the region.

Brian, a 22-year old Canadian backpacker who completed his university studies just prior to traveling, backpacked from Mexico City to Costa Rica over a span of five months. This was his first backpacking trip and he incessantly researched travel forums before he left. He said: “I’d stay up all night...seriously man, like I was addicted to reading through these travel forums, just asking all sorts of questions about travel because I had never traveled like this before.” Brian primarily used the Lonely

Planet Thorn Tree forum and took note of some of the forum posts, which informed his travels in Central America. He explained:

I was reading through a bunch of posts in the Central America forum and I came across this one about teaching English in a Lenca community [in Honduras]. I didn't know anything about these people. Dude, all I knew about Honduras were the Bay Islands. But after I read this post, I added the Lenca people to my bucket list in this little black notebook I keep in my back pocket about places I need to check out..I finally made it to the Ruta Linca and that was for sure the highlight of my trip.

Like Brian, most backpackers use the Internet to learn about a place prior to departure, but they seldom use it for those same purposes once they begin their travels.

Emily also used travel forums before she began her trip and mentioned that once she started traveling, she no longer felt the need to use them to learn about a place. She said:

The forums are helpful before you actually take off, because, if you don't know anything about a country, or even backpacking for that matter, then it's nice to get some idea about what to expect. It can be kind of nerve racking when you're just about to leave and you're doubting yourself, like have I got everything covered. But really, it's like, you can't plan everything. You just got to go and then figure things out along the way. So when I'm finally here, I never go back to the travel forums. Why would I if I've got all the information I need right here in the country.

Backpackers who continue to use travel forums during their travels use them more so to connect with other travelers backpacking the region. Avi mentioned that Israelis tend to stay connected via Israeli travel forums. This was also the case for Jun, a solo Japanese traveler backpacking in Mexico, who used a Japanese travel forum to connect with other Japanese backpackers traveling nearby.

Guidebooks

Backpackers purchase guidebooks before the start of their trip to gain practical travel knowledge on a particular region or country. While backpackers originate from different countries and speak their native languages, many of them use English-written guidebooks. Most backpackers tend to speak English

and the English-written guidebooks are the most readily available and cover a large selection of countries throughout the world. For Central America travel, the common regional guidebooks include the *Lonely Planet Central America On a Shoestring* and *The Rough Guide to Central America On a Budget*. Both *Lonely Planet* and *Routard* publish country specific guidebooks. John, from England, stated: “Every backpacker carries a guidebook and I guarantee it’s the bloody bible, and if they don’t, at some point in their trip they’ll certainly use the Lonely Planet.”

Usually written by a handful of contributing authors, who serve as “country experts” because they have traveled extensively throughout a particular region or country, guidebooks are presented in a language that spells “adventure.” For example, according to the authors of the *Lonely Planet Central America*: “Central America is an unforgettable trek...a kaleidoscope of cultures...is making new friends.” Yet guidebooks are also organized for travelers to learn about current events, history, culture, transportation, sights, restaurants and bars/clubs, food and drink, dangers, health concerns and vaccination info. Guidebooks provide a range of accommodation suggestions ranging from low-end budget to high-end budget and provide brief descriptions about them. They also provide maps, suggested travel routes, and bus schedules. In the back of most guidebooks is an overview of the language and common expressions used by the local people. For Central America, some of these guidebooks provide a “Green Index” offering advice for environmentally responsible travel.

Backpackers also like to have the guidebook in advance of their trip to begin mapping out a semi-structured itinerary. While backpackers travel much longer than most mainstream tourists, they still carry concerns about how best to manage their time throughout their travels. As Emily explained:

I like reading through the guidebook before I leave just to have an idea about the places I want to see. Like, six weeks of travel isn’t that long, so I had to plan my trip wisely...I like how the Lonely Planet has these suggested itineraries, like with routes for the two-week traveler, or the adventure traveler, or the traveler who wants to experience the culture, or nature, or things like that. I haven’t actually kept up with these suggestions, but the info was helpful just to help me plan where I wanted to go.

Backpackers are also flexible in their pre-trip itinerary planning as to leave open opportunities for impromptu travel while on the road. As Jón, the Icelandic backpacker, stated: “I will buy a Lonely Planet, but I try not to get the book too far in advance otherwise you psych yourself out too much and over plan...once I’m traveling I sort of let my instinct take me wherever.”

During their travels, backpackers generally use the guidebook most for its country maps, transport options, bus schedules and fares, and accommodation or restaurant and bar recommendations. Jón further stated, “Ok, so I do also like to use the guidebook to look-up the bus schedule, that’s important, because it’s easier this way so I won’t have to make a note every time I’m at the bus station.” Backpackers are particularly inclined to read accommodation reviews while they travel. Judy, an Australian backpacker traveling with an Irish traveler she met at a previous hostel-stay in Mexico, explained:

I use the guidebook most often to read about a place to stay. I think the guidebooks do a pretty good job describing the hostel atmosphere. They aren’t always accurate, but at least you get an idea about which ones are the party hostels, and which ones are the quiet ones, or the cheapest ones that are always a bit dodgy or located far from the main plaza.

On occasion, backpackers also use the guidebook for restaurant and bar reviews. Judy further explained:

Most of the time I find restaurants on my own by walking around and just picking some random place, but sometimes I’ll use the guidebook to read about the best restaurants or where to find the best street food...like in Antigua I read about Doña Maria who stands at this street corner and sells the most delicious tamales.

Backpackers recognize that other like-minded travelers use guidebooks as well and, as a result, they often end up in the same places where they exchange travel information with each other.

Word-of-mouth

Backpackers rely on word-of-mouth information more than any other travel source. Word-of-mouth involves the exchange of travel experiences to inform others about what to do or not do.

Backpackers use this information both when planning their trip and during their travels to decide where to

travel next, where to stay overnight, where to eat and drink, and to even find out about places not written about in the holy guidebook.

When planning their trip, backpackers will sometimes talk with friends or family members who traveled in a similar way or within the very countries backpackers plan to travel. For Emma, she spoke with a close friend who introduced her to the OneWorld alliance. Maggie, a 24-year old British backpacker traveling solo for two months along the southern Mexico, Guatemala, and Belize loop, spoke with a former travel-mate about her trip. She explained:

I knew my friend Bettina, this Australian girl, had recently traveled to Mexico. We traveled together in New Zealand and she taught me how to hitchhike, so I trusted her. I knew she had been here, so I e-mailed her because the best advice comes from someone like her, who isn't scared to travel alone. She's like the Lonely Planet, but someone I know and someone who's experienced as a traveler...also, I was about to buy a ticket to Honduras because I really wanted to go to the Bay Islands for the diving, and then I spoke to this professor, who also traveled here, and she was like, "NO! Go to Guatemala and Chiapas!"

In fact, the main reason why backpackers use word-of-mouth information more than any other information source is because of the trust factor that inspires confidence in a plan more than any other source.

Backpackers recognize that pre-trip planning can only prepare them for their actual travels to a certain extent: reading overview info about the country, purchasing an airline ticket, checking off travel requirements (e.g., passports, visas, vaccines, etc.), and packing their backpack. They know that the best way to travel is to actually travel and figure things out along the way. And they trust that other travelers will also help them figure things out along the way. As David suggested: "You never want to overdo it with your planning, because you never know what's in store when you're finally traveling, so just trust the people you meet when you travel." Backpackers often meet travelers eager to offer travel suggestions. Anna added: "Travelers love talking to each other about where they've been so we always tell each other about things to see, which I trust so much more talking with someone than relying on the guidebook."

Backpackers tend to choose word-of-mouth information over guidebook sources because other travelers' experiences are more meaningful to them. Whereas the guidebook is written by just a handful of travelers (who they never meet), backpackers come across all sorts of travelers with whom they actually interact. Anna further explained:

That is actually how I found out about this one hostel in Puerto Escondido. I read about other hostels, but then I explored Oaxaca all day with this French girl and she said, "you really have to go to this place, it's not in the Lonely Planet and it's the most fantastic hostel." I didn't even think twice about going to the other hostels in the guidebook.

And while many backpackers do in fact use the guidebook, they sometimes find inaccurate information.

As Jón explained:

There are times when the guidebook is absolutely wrong, for example, when they write about a hostel. I have arrived to a location before, looking for a hostel that I read about, and there is no hostel...these books are probably written years in advance before published, so they don't always have the current information...when I talk to another traveler about a hostel, I always trust his knowledge more than the guidebook.

Backpackers not only rely on other travelers' experiences, but in general, they constantly seek out travel advice from others.

As backpackers come into contact with each other, they also look out for one another.

Backpackers are concerned that other travelers might make the same mistakes they already made traveling. Accordingly, they offer travel advice for the benefit of other travelers. While Daniela lived in Mexico City, she often took hostel tours to some of the major sites, but also as a way to meet other travelers. And while on the tours, she shared her experiences taking the other hostel tours. She said: "I have been telling people about this pyramid tour, this one that you are taking tomorrow, because I feel that of all the tours this hostel offers, this is the best one." Similarly, Florian mentioned: "Everyone at this hostel is talking about the zip-line tour in Monteverde, so I know once I make it there then I have to try it because most of the time the backpackers know about the best things to do."

Backpackers also share travel information about more off-the-beaten path places, places difficult to even find listed in the guidebook (or at least have very little information about). As backpackers follow along the various Central America loops, they also detour to places they knew nothing about before. Anna explained: “The other thing about the guidebook, is that there are so many places to read about and you never know which place is best to see...this is why I like talking with the other travelers.” While Emily planned her trip to see the Mayan ruins, she also found out about other places to see by relying on the use of word-of-mouth information. She said: “Also, this San Cristobal place, I don’t really know what is there, but I know that people have told me that it’s a great place and it’s a colonial city, so now I want to check it out.”

Backpackers also sometimes rely on the local people’s knowledge about a destination. Maggie explained that when she hitchhikes, the local people are her only source of travel information. In this sense, she trusts the local knowledge more than the guidebook and other travelers. She explained:

When I hitchhike, and then arrive with the local people into a new place, they tell me all sorts of things about that place, like where to stay for the night...these people that pick me up are my main guides, so for me, their knowledge is the most important type of knowledge.

Carlo, a 25-year old Spanish backpacker traveling through Nicaragua with his girlfriend, also explained why he likes the local people’s knowledge to learn about a place. He said:

I speak Spanish so it’s easier for me to communicate with the people than other backpackers... there are times when I arrive to the town and first ask the local people, like “how do I get to this hostel?” Sometimes they tell about a different place to stay. I don’t always take their recommendation, but sometimes I do. So it helps to speak the language, to know more.

And not only upon arrival to a new destination, but these travelers also rely on local knowledge once they actually explore the town. Backpackers ask employees at accommodations, cafés, and people they meet along the streets or bars.

Advertisements

Increasingly, backpackers are exposed to advertisements that cater to their alternative and adventure travel needs. Hostel bulletin boards are often covered in these advertisements promoting other accommodations, language courses, volunteer and ecotourism opportunities, yoga and meditation courses, restaurants, bars, and temporary work. Louisa, a 31-year old physical education teacher from Ireland, mentioned:

I'll sometimes pick up a flier showing a new hostel, because I've got an older guidebook...and it seems like yoga is popping up everywhere these days. You don't read too much about yoga classes either in the guidebook, unless it's San Marcos for the meditation...these advertisements are sometimes useful when I want to take a break from traveling and do something different like take a yoga class.

Brian also explained that advertisements are useful because they provide more options about things to do while traveling. He said:

When I was at this hostel in Grenada, I came across a lot of advertisements for language courses. I read about some of the language courses talked about in the guidebook, but some of these are really expensive. And the ones I found were so much cheaper. I actually took a class for two weeks.

In Costa Rica, where ecotourism is the most established among the other Central American countries, advertisements promote adventure tours, such as zip-line excursions, kayaking, hiking, and other outdoor exploration opportunities.

Some backpackers traveling long-term also find these advertisements useful when searching for temporary work. Anna and Collin came across an advertisement at the front desk of an Antigua hostel promoting temporary work at their sister-hostel in Xela. Isabelle found a flier on a hostel message board about temporary tattoo work in Tulum, which she took advantage of one weekend. Avi saw a hostel flier about volunteer work on a coffee finca in Boquete, Panama, which he kept in the front page of his guidebook to refer to at a later time. Likewise, other travelers find hostel advertisements promoting

volunteer opportunities concerned with environmental issues in the region or teaching English in rural communities. In fact, backpacker hostels have become important sources, which backpackers use to find such advertisements, meet other travelers, come across used guidebooks, and gain access to the Internet.

In many ways, the backpacker hostel is the most important backpacking tool that travelers rely upon during their travels. Hostels are the first places backpackers search for when they arrive to a new destination. They not only provide them with a place to stay overnight, but a place to come into contact with other travelers where they begin to exchange travel information. They also establish relationships with each other inside hostels. And from the hostels, backpackers then filter into the cities, towns, and villages where they begin to experience adventure and the local people and their environments. The hostel is also the place where backpackers return at night, reconvene with each other, exchange ideas, self-reflect, reinforce ideologies, and share their backpacking practices. In the next chapter, I describe the backpacker hostel in detail, why and how backpackers use it to maintain their ideologies (discussed in Chapter 5) and the practices described in this chapter.

CONCLUSION

Backpackers take similar paths traveling Central America by using common tools, which they put into practice. The backpack, transportation, and information sources are critical to the backpacking travel form. These tools have important symbolic meanings to backpackers, none more so than the backpack, which enables mobility and signals to a distinct backpacking identity in opposition to most tourists. Backpackers use their tools exactly how they are designed to be used, but they also customize them, using them in similar ways that add to their common travel experiences. In a sense, backpackers remake these tools as they use them specifically for backpacking. Yet these tools also guide backpacking experiences and set limits to the places backpackers travel to in Central America.

Backpacking practices further define the backpacking subculture. Backpackers share many common practices. The backpack itself is a shared cultural symbol among backpacker. It represents notions of mobility and escape from backpackers' routine home lives and the beaten tourist path. Yet it also represents everything about who backpackers are both while traveling and at home. The backpack

itself extends ideas of a backpacking subculture to one of a “Western youth culture” increasingly on the move, within a globally mobile world. And as a western symbol, the backpack also embodies a sense of familiarity and security for backpackers while visiting faraway peoples and places.

In the next chapter, I expand upon the idea that while backpackers are also a mobile youth subculture, they bring with them their very Western culture while traveling abroad. I discuss an apparent contradiction in backpacking ideology through an explanation of the hostel as central to backpackers’ lives. I describe why and how backpackers use the hostel during their travels, their common travel practices associated with it, and compare how those practices align with their ideology. I explore how backpackers negotiate tensions between their ideology and practices.

CHAPTER 7

THE BACKPACKER HOSTEL: IDEOLOGY, PRACTICES, AND CONTRADICTIONS

In the previous two chapters, I described the core travel ideology and common practices among international backpackers in Central America. Backpackers in Central America believe travel should involve adventurous experiences off the beaten mainstream tourist path. They talk about travel affording them a sense of escape, independence, adventure, and time for self-reflection. A key element of their adventurous experience is their reliance on a single backpack to carry their life's accoutrements as they move. They consider the backpack as their primary tool. It is the source of their travel name and identity and it enable them to move more freely than any other long term travelers. Backpackers also rely on common transportation modes and information sources that both enable their movement and set parameters on how they travel.

To further understand international backpackers as a youth subculture requires an understanding of the relationship between their ideology and practices. In this chapter, I analyze the role of the hostel to the lives of backpackers traveling Central America. I describe the backpacker hostel as the central space through which to understand backpackers' travel ideology in relation to their practices. As their home base, backpackers use the hostel connect with one another and during those connections they negotiate their common notions about their backpacking identity and practices. Backpacking ideology is reflected through the actual practices among backpackers traveling throughout region. Backpackers spend a significant amount of time inside of the hostel, which they use as their basecamp, venturing outside of it to capture the unique experiences that they claim to seek.

CULTURE AND CONTRADICTION

While backpackers in Central America reveal a core travel ideology and common practices, as well as a distinct backpacking identity, they also express contradictory relationships between their ideology and practices. Contradiction refers to a "situation which allows the satisfaction of one end at the cost of another, i.e. a bind or constraint" (Bottomore 1992:109). It seems reasonable to believe that

ideology should reflect the actual practices employed by a particular group of people. Yet, people often respond to structural constraints that they experience by acting in ways that appear to contrast with what they desire. In other words, practices do not match one's ideological principles. In a Marxian sense, the contradictory nature of ideology under the structure of capitalism can give rise to false perceptions of social reality. As a result, ideology is represented through contradictory relationships, or practices, that are actually more in line with the interests of mainstream society and the status quo.

In this chapter, I discuss the contradictory relationships between backpacking ideology and practices in Central America. I discuss these contradictions according to what backpackers that I observed say that they desire and what they actually do in practice. I explain how the backpacker hostel is a social and cross-cultural space that backpackers utilize as their home base while they travel. Backpackers use the hostel to share their travel experiences and also to critique, negotiate, and come to terms with contradictions in their travel experiences. I explain how backpackers play a part in creating contradictions between ideology and practices, as well as how they embrace and reconcile those contradictions. In the end, this chapter provides an empirical look at Cohen's (2003) claim that the backpacking travel form requires some features that challenge backpacker ideology and that, in the face of those challenges, backpackers negotiate their sense of identity to maintain their sense of freedom and adventurousness.

Below, I begin with a narrative about my experience using the common space of a popular hostel in Guatemala. I provide this narrative to describe the hostel milieu as home base, social atmosphere, and exploration node, which I then expand upon throughout this chapter. The hostel is the central place where backpackers meet one another and rest while travelling. If the backpack is the traveler's primary symbolic and utilitarian tool defines who they are, then the hostel is the primary space (and tool) where backpackers share ideas that inform their practices and give multi-layered, seemingly contradictory, meanings to who they are.

THE BACKPACKER HOSTEL

I climbed down from my top bunk and tried not to wake the Swedish woman and Italian man who slept below me. With my backpack secured on top of my bed, I made my way out the

cramped eight-person dorm room, down the staircase, and passed the small kitchen area where three elderly Guate women prepared several breakfast plates. I entered into one of three common spaces. Two Israeli travelers sat at a table opposite from one another and tapped away on laptops. One was shirtless, the other wore a tank top, and both were in swim trunks and barefoot. In the movie room, a few travelers had sunken into the big comfy couch to nurse their hangovers.

In search of a cup of coffee, I headed to the café located at the front of the hostel. The café had many purposes. First, it was the entrance to the hostel. Every traveler who arrived to the hostel walked through there to reach the check-in counter located in the very back near the hallway. In the café, I could find my coffee and a menu with a list of four breakfast options to choose from, included in the price of the overnight stay. The bar was nestled in the other back corner of the café. Each evening, travelers convened in the café to drink from the bar and socialize after a day's worth of exploration. This was also the space where one exited to seek adventure in the town or waited for the shuttle van en route to the next hostel along the backpacking loop.

I sat at a front window-side table. "Pablo Picasso," the *Citizen Cope* song, played through the speakers mounted up on the red-orange painted walls. Below the speakers, was the large hostel logo painted in black. Below the hostel logo, sat two British women who skimmed the Lonely Planet and discussed their plans for the day. My view out the window was full of the local people who went about their daily life. A lone, grungy male backpacker with a guitar strapped to his pack walked passed them, into the hostel front door. Like all of us who stayed at the hostel, this would be his home base for the next few nights.

Local Exteriors with Modern Interiors

Most Central American hostels are extensively renovated spaces located in an existing building or house. Hostels range from immaculate colonial mansions to dilapidated, musty beachside inns.

In colonial cities, hostels typically maintain the old style Spanish colonial facade, are usually located near the historic center or main plaza, and are identifiable only by a simple sign. As one Mexico hostel is advertised:

It was built between 1542 and 1549 by order of Don Francisco de Montejo, who was the conqueror of the Yucatán Peninsula. This building is a clear example of the Renaissance style civil constructions.

Another hostel, in Guatemala, is described as:

A quaint colonial house with a central open courtyard. We are located in the best location in town in front of the Cathedral Church and against the corner of the centro historico where all the local life takes place.

While hostels in colonial cities are some of the most exquisite among hostel types, hostels in small towns are typically modest in appearance and style. The interior of most colonial-style hostels display features of the local culture with paintings, murals, pottery, and other crafts representative of indigenous life. Local plants also fill the hostel premises. The hostel atmosphere is relaxed, some with hammocks located in the common spaces, but most certainly found outside within the patio area.

Though resembling the local culture in décor, these contemporary hostels also accommodate the needs of today's international backpackers with modern amenities. As one Costa Rica hostel is advertised:

We have all the comforts and friendly staff to assist you in your travel needs. Wi-Fi and air conditioning, pool table and swimming pool, are just some of the amenities you can enjoy here...6 dorm rooms, can be for men, women or mixed. It features shared really big bathrooms one for men and another for ladies, and a dining area. Breakfast buffet is included in the price of the bed, the kitchen is fully equipped and available 24 hrs. Shuttle from the airport is included in price, just send an email 2 days before arrival with your flight details

Throughout Central America, a bed in a hostel dorm room costs around US \$7 to \$15 per night, which usually depends on the location in the town or city and the amenities offered.

Home Base Away From Home

When backpackers arrive in a new town or city, they first seek out their accommodation. Backpackers typically choose to stay overnight in a backpacker hostel that they either heard about from a fellow traveler, read about in the guidebook, or found online. Judy, the 23-year old Australian backpacker, said:

The hostel is always the first thing on my mind when I arrive. All I can think about is knowing I have someplace to sleep...

Backpackers prefer the hostel over any other accommodation type because it tends to be the most affordable lodging that offers beds in a shared dorm room. Oliver, a 24-year old British backpacker who was traveling solo for eight months, mused:

The hostel is incredibly important in the life of the traveler or backpacker. It's the first place we go to upon arrival in a new place...first, it's cheap accommodation, which is important if you're traveling for quite some time. You want to stretch your budget as much as you can if you're traveling close to one year...

When there is no hostel to choose from in a town or city, backpackers must opt for a budget inn. And in some towns, such as beach towns or remote rainforest and mountain communities, backpackers prefer the cabaña (or ecolodge). While cabañas also offer shared rooms, they are almost entirely absent of modern amenities. And sometimes these lodgings provide hammocks to rent overnight or an outside space to camp for a small fee.

The hostel serves as backpackers' home base throughout their travels. The hostel is the central node that allows backpackers to enter into a new place, stay overnight, and store their belongings, all for the purpose of enabling them to venture out and explore the local culture. As Judy continued to explain:

...and all I want to do is get rid of this backpack. Then I'm pretty much ready to wander around the town and find what makes this place so special.

Oliver continued:

Second, the hostel is the central hub that allows us to do what we do. We want to experience the local culture and most hostels are located right in the middle of everything. We can literally walk out the front door into the main square. We have easy access to the people selling their crafts on the sidewalk or cheap street food...whatever it is you're into, seeing the cathedral, going to the pubs, the museums, it's all right here...

Once backpackers settle into the hostel, they are free to seek out adventure in the town, amongst the local people who they had initially hoped to learn about during their travels.

As home base, the hostel provides backpackers with a sense of safety and security as they travel. It provides them a safe haven to retreat to after a day of feeling secluded when traveling along the remote coastline of Nicaragua or culture-shocked from wandering around the seedy Casco Viejo neighborhood of Panama City. As Judy mentioned: "I guess being in a place like this, which sort of reminds you of home, it makes you feel safe." Louisa, the Irish backpacker who was also traveling solo, explained:

When you're out all day, and you witness the poverty, and you're harassed by street beggars, sometimes all you want to do is just head back to the hostel, maybe have a nice warm shower and then read a book. It's like you need a break from the locals, so being in your bed makes you feel safe, even if you really are surrounded by other strangers [travelers] in the hostel.

Not only do backpackers use the hostel to retreat from the local people, but they also use the hostel as shelter. As Maya, the French Canadian backpacker, had mentioned: "I prefer to sleep inside the hostel than to rent a hammock outside, or to camp where all those mosquitos and sand flies will eat you, and also I want to stay dry." No matter where backpackers travel to, they can always rely on the hostel to provide them with that sense of security and safety, as well as shelter, often with many of their home life comforts.

Indeed, hostels provides backpackers a sense of familiarity and connection to their lives back home. Inside the hostel, backpackers encounter like-minded travelers. And, increasingly, hostels come with a variety of modern amenities. Oliver observed:

Third, everything we need is right here in the hostel: of course other travelers to discuss the hardships we encounter, like the time I survived crossing the border from Honduras into El Salvador...being around other travelers might be the most important thing about the hostel. We have Internet here. I always choose the hostel with Internet. Having a bar is important too...and there's always a Lonely Planet floating around so you don't really need to travel with your own.

And some of these hostel amenities bring travelers together, such as the TV room, or the book exchange, or the hostel activities, tours, volunteer opportunities, and the transportation to and from one hostel to the next one (located in the next destination).

The backpacker hostel is also a place in which backpackers develop trust with one another. Since backpackers share similar travel motives and hardships, they can offer support and sympathy, as well as guidance to each other's travels. Backpackers are also aware of the fact that each of them relies on just a single backpack in which to carry their all belongings while they travel. Backpackers recognize how vulnerable one can become in the event of losing the backpack. So to protect the backpack, backpackers will always keep it inside the hostel, unless in transit between hostels. Accordingly, backpackers must establish a sense of trust with one another, more so than with any local person or tourist. As Kristina mentioned: "I never feel like another backpacker will steal my backpack because we can all understand how tragic that would be to lose everything we own...and they will have to carry it, which is a pain in the ass for them." This sense of trust among backpackers develops as travelers become familiar and acquainted with the hostel milieu, which they see as home base and free of discord. And this trust carries over with them as they become more seasoned backpackers and meet several backpackers throughout their hostel stays.

Backpackers value the hosteling experience of meeting like-minded travelers. They believe that the hostel should provide a social atmosphere in which backpackers have opportunities to maintain their sense of trust throughout their travels. So when reading about a hostel in the guidebook, backpackers almost always seek out the one that is most social, even if it means paying a bit more than another. Emily

mentioned: “You know in the hostel you’re not alone, and so you get your money’s worth when you find one of the more social ones, because not all of them are like this.” And as Oliver concluded:

Finally, the hostel is a place where you can sit around and be merry and talk. In fact, nothing annoys me more than when I walk into a hostel, pay my five quid, and see that there isn’t an area to socialize in with other travelers. Because it’s a place to discuss our travel experiences.

In fact, backpackers often rely on their interactions with other travelers. They hope that other travelers can direct them to the next best social hostel, as they value word of mouth more than any other information source. The hostel provides backpackers a place to share travel stories and exchange travel advice. And the hostel also provides a place in which backpackers see how other backpackers go about their travel ways.

Throughout this chapter, I discuss the hostel as a central place that backpackers not only use as home base, but the space where they create and sustain notions of how travel should be as they interact with one another. Their ideas shape their practices and, in turn, their practices shape their ideas. Specifically, inside the hostel, backpackers witness how other backpackers travel, talk about travel style, and critique travel culture. In doing so, they create, sustain, and sometimes challenge how they think about the backpacking subculture. In the hostel, backpackers bring to light the multilayered contradictions that arise between their backpacking ideology and practices. They also discuss why these contradictions exist and negotiate how to deal with these contradictions.

Social Atmosphere

The hostel is vital to the backpacker because it serves as the social and cross cultural space in which backpackers hope to sustain their travel form in face of mass tourist forms. As backpackers come into contact with each other, they exchange travel stories, which distinguish their travel ideology and experiences from mass tourism. Storytelling is a social act, or practice, that involves others to see the world from the story-teller’s perspective. Through storytelling, backpackers make sense of their travels and discuss how they think travel should be—much like my own experience that night in the hostel in Xela when I discussed the meaning of backpacking with four other backpackers (see Chapter 6)—which

ultimately contributes to subcultural knowledge about the backpacking travel form. As backpackers develop these travel stories inside the hostel, they express and circulate important insights about their subcultural travel ideas, beliefs, and values, as well as interests, intentions, and motivations for travel.

While backpackers begin their travels with ideas about escaping their home life and experiencing foreign cultures as much as possible, in the hostel they come to realize the special connections backpackers make with other international travelers. Backpackers embrace the hostel experience to both learn about and to learn from, other backpackers. Even Daniela, the Spanish archeologist who was adamant to learn about the Mayan culture in Chiapas, expressed how important the hosteling experience is to the life of backpackers explained: “Now I want to meet other travelers all the time and when I stayed for the first time in a hostel, I found out how interested I really was to learn about other travelers and their own cultures...but to also talk about our experiences traveling.” Florian, the Swiss backpacker, also mentioned: “I like staying in the hostel because we are like the United Nations of travelers, and we learn about travel from each other...one time I stayed at a hostel, and in my room, there were these notes left on the walls from other travelers around the world who made messages about their country, but also, things to see here.” Backpackers embrace the hostel experience for the social purpose of bringing together like-minded travelers.

Yet while backpackers value this hostel’s the social atmosphere that allows them to both learn about and learn from other travelers, they also critique the experience as it shapes their travels. In fact, I found this backpacker-directed critique of backpacking very common in the hostels I observed. As backpackers convene, they exchange their travel stories and support one another, but also discover a main contradiction about their travel form: backpacking involves an enormous amount of time being around other backpackers. As Avi, the Israeli traveler, had shared:

We all just end up gathering at night in the hostel and talk about our travels, which is cool, to hear about the places people have been, and how long they have been traveling. But sometimes, man, this also gets very annoying. I want to learn from other backpackers, but let’s do this when we go and hike in the mountains, or something like this.

Kristina, the German backpacker I met inside a hostel shuttle van, illustrated the same point. She described a time when she was irritated with two British travelers who shared a hostel dorm room with her. Conveyed in Kristina's words:

I was sitting on my bed, and these two British girls were sitting there next to me, and complaining about how long the bus ride took them to get here. This is what bothers me sometimes when I travel. It's very important to meet other travelers, but you get very tired of hearing people, all of the time, complain about how difficult it was for them...even their British accents just started to drive me crazy.

Moreover, backpackers often critique how other backpackers travel, even if they fall into the same travel pattern as the backpackers they critique. Marcus, the 25-year old French backpacker, explained: "Travelers like to say all the time how hypocritical other travelers are and how they never leave the hostel, but why say this if you do the same thing." Mike, the American who was traveling with his wife, similarly explained:

I hear backpackers all the time talking shit about other backpackers, like talking about the way they travel. Like, I was talking to these two Aussie guys just the other morning in Antigua, and one of them was hating on these other travelers for spending so much time in the hostel. Funny thing is, later that night these same jackasses were the ones partying all night at the hostel, and with those same travelers who they said never left!

Isabelle, the Brazilian traveler, also mentioned: "I was walking near the shower and I saw these girls putting on their make-up in front of the window together and I'm like, why are you so concerned with being cute, you are traveling, it's ok to be dirty...I didn't say this, but this is what I am thinking in that moment."

The hostel provides backpackers a space to meet people whom they befriend and then travel with. When backpackers first meet in the hostel, they often extend a simple welcome: "Hi, where are you from, where have you been, how long have you been traveling?" Yet, when backpackers spend a significant amount of time with each other, they begin to learn more about who they are, both as people with lives

back home and as travelers. They form actual friendships. As Avi further mused: “But even though we might be critical, we also make real friends, like I made some nice friends with the Japanese travelers I met at the hostel in Boquete.” In fact, backpackers value the moments when they create a pact with a few others inside the hostel, who they then venture out to travel with.

Ivan, the Brazilian traveler I met in Xela, highlighted how the hostel experience involves more than just meeting travelers. When backpackers bond, they explore with each other. These explorations concretize their ideas about escape and adventure. Backpackers go through life changing experiences as they spend the day summiting a volcano or learning how to scuba dive together. And when they finally decide to leave the hostel, they sometimes have a difficult time, until everyone in the pact has left. Ivan explained:

You can tell it's time to go when a new group of people come in who don't really fit with us, it just feels like it's time to go. I mean, it's not that they don't fit, but you know, we all arrived here about the same time, so we had time to make friends and do things together. Now there's this old British couple, the Columbian guy from Los Angeles who won't stop talking, and this Mexican cook who is always sleeping. And then the girl, the girl who doesn't talk. I just feel like I'm ready to move on, you know what I mean, you feel this way too?"

Accordingly, backpackers both enjoy the experience of interacting with like-minded travelers, but they are also quick to criticize other backpackers, and even themselves. When they feel their overnight hostel stay is fulfilled, they move on to the next one.

Backpackers are in constant negotiation in discussing how they think backpacking should be, how they see it, and how it affects the ways in which they then travel. In the remaining sections to this chapter, I refer back to the travel ideology discussed in Chapter 5 to understand how backpackers carry out their ideas about escape, independence, adventure, and self-reflection while traveling Central America. In doing so, I highlight how through stories, backpackers raise important questions about their ideology in relation to their practices. As they reflect on the hostel experience, they offer new insights into the backpacking travel form that challenge the notion that backpacking is in complete opposition to

mainstream tourist forms and solely concerned with the local culture. By placing the hostel experience at the center of the backpacking experience, backpackers allude to ideological shortcomings in their practices, yet they also reveal new values they establish and share in common about the travel experience.

Escaping to the Familiar

Backpackers see travel as a more meaningful life where they can escape the structure of routine responsibilities of their mundane lives and rid themselves from anything that resembles that lifestyle. Backpackers also express anti-tourism sentiments and oppose mass tourism forms. They see themselves and their spontaneous, impromptu travel as different than most tourists. Yet, the hostel experience appears to also structure how backpackers travel, where they travel to, and who they travel with. Backpackers recognize that the hostel becomes a place in which backpackers might not actually escape all that much from their westernized lives back home.

Christiaan, the 26-year old Dutch backpacker who quit his job to travel, became very aware of the constraints that hostels place on backpackers as they travel. He saw hostels as structured in ways very similar to what he was used to before he hit the road. He highlighted how alike many of the hostels are that he stayed in during his travels, no matter where he traveled. He explained:

Hostels are so uniform aren't they? Look around. They are structured in the same way. I mean, every hostel I have been to has the common space, but also a computer for using the Internet. And they include breakfast. They sell beer and water. And they even have the room to watch movies. When I see this, ok, yes, it is very nice to have all of this when I travel, but do I really need all this? And do I really want to watch an American film when I'm in Guatemala?

Avi was also particularly critical of the hostel set-up. But he mentioned how while hostels may offer the same amenities, the experience of staying in the hostel is also the same. He explained:

In the hostel, we do a lot of the same things, like we party, then we are feeling sick together the next day, and then we hang out some more, and maybe have alone time to read or use the Internet. I don't understand why we do this when the point of backpacking is to leave the hostel and see what exists in the town.

John, the British backpacker en route to the Darién Gap, also mentioned:

I've been to several hostels where they have a fuckin' buffet style set up for dinner. Everyone comes in at about the same time and gets in queue.

Backpackers recognize that many hostels are structured in a similar way and offer the same amenities because, they think, backpackers want this experience. Accordingly, backpackers are the ones who shape the hostel experience and suggest what hostels should be like.

Since backpackers originate from Western countries, including Western Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia, the UK, and Japan, backpackers arrive with their Western culture on their backs. They bring modern technology to the hostel and the very places in which they travel. Backpackers increasingly carry laptops and they expect Wi-Fi inside hostels, cameras and so they expect compatible plug adapters to charge their batteries), cell phones, iPods, name-brand clothing, and a youth culture that embraces the use of modern technology, no matter where they travel to in the world. Backpackers are virtually connected travelers who use a variety of social media and messaging apps, including Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. They use these virtual spaces to stay connected with people from home. As Maggie, the British backpacker traveling with her friend, had mentioned: “Facebook has changed my life, especially when travelling, because I’m able to keep in touch with everyone back home...and Facebook is a good way for me to keep in touch with my boyfriend.” Backpackers also use social media to share their travel experiences and to keep in touch with the many backpackers they meet throughout their travels.

While backpackers embrace the use of technology in the hostel, they also recognize how it changes the hostel experience. These amenities take away from the social experience, and backpackers go searching for the hostels with Internet. Anna, the Australian backpacker traveling with her boyfriend, explained:

I think having the Internet at the hostels changes the atmosphere, because now travelers are always expecting a free computer to access, or to have free Wi-Fi. I remember when all you could find traveling was an Internet café. And now, it's like even if you're in San Marcos, you find travelers looking for hostels with Internet.

San Marcos is a lakeside village of Lago de Atitlán, known for its pristine natural beauty, small coffee plantations, and a hippie, holistic vibe. It has become a small hub for travelers looking to become one with nature. But as Anna further explained: “Now everyone just stays in the hostel, searching the web, so how are you supposed to truly experience how magical San Marcos is when you’re more concerned about having Internet.”

In addition to the amenities that influence how backpackers travel, hostels also provide transportation and information sources that further set parameters to where and how backpackers travel. For example, hostels increasingly provide transport to and from one hostel to the next. As Anna explained:

A lot of the hostels now offer these vans to other hostels. They must have some type of partnership with or something. And I see backpackers using them. I won't take them, but I have thought about it simply because it's so much easier and not as stressful when you have to catch a bus.

Colin, Anna’s boyfriend added:

Yeah we don't take the hostel transport with all these fuckin' young blokes. It might have to do with them being so young, I don't know to be honest. But how ya supposed to experience the people if you're taking the hostel van? You talk about controlling the way you travel. We won't use the guidebook either.

Backpackers also come across used guidebooks in the hostel. Anna said:

And since you can always find the guidebook in the hostel, you always have access to one. And if the hostel doesn't have one, then the other backpackers do. Then we all end up in the same place. Because we all talk to each other in the hostel and read the guidebook, we end up along the same route. And so really it's like we're all just in between hostels.

Again, backpackers recognize the use of such guides that shape their travel experiences. They talk about them, and find ways to travel without them.

Seemingly, hostels structure the travel lives of backpackers. The hostel layout is uniform, offering the same types of common spaces, services, and amenities found in just about any hostel. Backpackers

add to the hostel experience by bringing in their own culture, leaving trails of it behind for other backpackers to copy, such as their expectation and practice of using Wi-Fi. As Avi questioned: “Are we really escaping our lives back home?” But as Christiaan, explained:

I think in some ways I am still getting away from my life. I mean I can always choose to leave the hostel and be out in the other world. I can leave at any time. I might not always be out, but I'd say most of the day I'm out seeing what life is like here.

So while the hostel serves as a backpacking hub for backpackers to congregate, interact, as well as take time to catch up on e-mail or social media, it also serves as a central node backpackers use to explore outside the hostel. Backpackers hope to experience the local culture and nature in unstructured ways, by spontaneous, impromptu encounters.

Anti-Tourism Tourists

Backpackers express anti-tourism sentiments because they view the mass tourism industry as a culprit that reduces travel to predictable, unadventurous, and passive gazing. Backpacking's appeal is to get outside the “tourist bubble” of packaged destinations and experiences sold to hordes of mainstream tourists. However, backpackers also experience the many scheduled tours that hostels increasingly offer that cater to backpackers' travel interests. Emma, the Belgian backpacker, explained:

I see in so many hostels that they have these tours. So you don't have to find out on your own how to go and hike the volcano. You can buy a ticket to do this and they might pick you up outside the door. You can even go and surf on the volcano, like they take you, I guess, and you rent a board and slide down the volcano the black sand.

Some hostels offer a variety of tours while others cater to a place's characteristic feature. For example, one hostel in Mexico City offers tours to Frida Kahlo's Blue House, a Lucha Libre (Mexican wrestling) event, Teotihuacán, and also a boat ride tour in Xochimilco with beers and tequila included. Hostels on the Bay Islands of Honduras cater to backpackers who want to receive their diving certification and see the coral reef. In fact, backpackers who travel to the Bay Islands choose Utila, as the

island's hostels offer some of the cheapest diving packages in the world. Uli, the German backpacker traveling with his son, explained:

We were traveling along the coast of Honduras and my son heard about Utila from another traveler. He mentioned to me that he would like to go there and we decided to use some days from our holiday to take lessons for the PADI certification...so we went, and when we arrived, there were young boys who took us to this hostel. And at the hostel they offered their own lessons. It was all of these travelers who stayed there just for the diving.

Many backpackers travel to Monteverde in Costa Rica to stay at a hostel and take a zipline tour through the rainforest. Backpackers also use the hostel tours to see the Mayan ruins. As Kristina explained:

The hostel in Flores has a tour to wake up very early and see the sunrise on top of the temple. When you get to the top you are with all these other backpackers doing the same thing. We are just waiting for that perfect sunrise above the jungle and shine on the temples. But what is funny is that there are so many clouds and it rains so you never get to see the perfect sunrise. And they even tell you that before, but we all still do it.

In addition to the hostel tours, hostels also advertise for other tours organized by local travel agencies.

One such travel agency in Mexico is called Mundo Joven (or, Young World), that advertises inside some hostels and provides all sorts of backpacking services, including accommodations, tours, and travel packages. As Judy had noticed:

You also see these advertisements all over hostels now. Like today I was reading about Mundo Joven. I guess it's sort of like a travel agency that promotes hostels and tours. But it had this slogan that was like: "It's not a tour, it's a life experience." So, surely I want to experience this, right, because I'm not supposed to care about the tour, but the real lives of Mexicans.

And while backpackers notice the hostel tours and also choose to take them, they also recognize that by taking the tours, they again travel like everyone else. As Judy further mentioned:

It doesn't really matter to me to be honest, because sometimes I want the tour, or, "adventure," because it's fun and you meet all sorts of cool and interesting travelers when your climbing up an ancient pyramid together.

As such, backpackers find value in taking hostel tours, particularly as they further meet other travelers.

Some backpackers also take advantage of these tours by making their own tour, much like the one offered in the hostel. When backpackers see these tours, they are also encouraged to figure out how to make the tour along with others. By making their own tour, they also extend their budget. Emma explained:

The tours are also very expensive. If you take your time, you can actually see the ruins by taking the public transportation and you get to see them much cheaper. You don't have the guide, but you have other travelers to figure out why this temple might exist. And maybe we also read the Lonely Planet, but that's ok because we teach ourselves.

As with sharing ideas about escape, backpackers also maintain anti-tourism attitudes while they travel.

They often critique the use of these tours, but also recognize that hostel tours are becoming commonplace.

Backpackers see these tours as convenient and a way to meet other travelers. In some hostels, they choose the tours, especially in places when a tour is the only way to experience the place, such as with the zipline tour. Yet, in other hostels, they find that they can also make their own tour, a cheaper option, and an option that creates cooperation among travelers to figure out how to see a sight as well as learn about it.

Independent Dependence

Backpackers share the idea that to completely self-abandon the mundane, they must strive for independent travel that is best represented by traveling alone. Backpackers believe that backpacking is the most independent travel form as it frees them to travel however, whenever, and wherever they desire. In ideological terms, backpackers prefer to travel on their own terms, without any constraints or limits that might affect their experiences. They feel that group travel, even if it involves just one or two others can constrain their own travel preferences and intentions.

Yet, as backpackers stay in hostels, and come into contact with each other, they find that while traveling it becomes almost entirely impossible to escape others who inform the ways that they travel. As Emily, the American backpacker, had explained:

I remember thinking before I left, like ok, I really want to travel off the beaten path because I knew I could achieve that in this part of Mexico. And I've backpacked before in Europe and Southeast Asia and spent a lot of time with other backpackers. I didn't want that same experience. But then I started traveling and of course I ended up staying at the hostels and, it was like, ok here I go again.

Backpackers not only end up staying in hostels and around other travelers, but in hostels they discover and share information throughout their travels. As John vented: “When you’re around all these travelers who read the Lonely Planet, you can’t help but pass on this same knowledge, so then we aren’t truly free are we, because we follow the advice of someone else, and not just another traveler, but the holy fucking guidebook.”

However, as stated previously, part of the reason why backpackers rely on hostels so much throughout their travels is because hostels are loaded with travel information. Moreover, hostels themselves connect backpackers to the various off-the-beaten path places they yearn to experience as they travel. Hostels are dotted along the backpacking loop and so backpackers feel that they need a hostel in which they establish home base, to then venture out to explore the local environment. Brian, the Canadian backpacker, explained:

I heard about this town [Suchitoto] from another traveler I met at a hostel in Copán and felt I needed to come here because it's off the gringo trail, but I wasn't sure where I would stay. I was worried about that actually, but decided to come anyways. Luckily when I got here, I found this hostel, which you know just opened up. But hardly anyone is here. I think because it hasn't been written about yet. If the hostel hadn't been here I might have left...but thank god, because now I've been here almost a week. I love it here. It's such a special place.

Brian was not aware that the Suchitoto has actually been deemed the next Antigua, “before all the tourists.” Lonely Planet writers describe the town as: “Seemingly lifted from a magic realism novel, Suchitoto has held firm – nay, prospered – against the weight of history just as its weekend arts fest turns the quintessential town square into one giant production of *guanaco* pride.” Brian was right, at the time only that one hostel existed, and as word catches on backpackers may soon be flocking to this “special place.”

Backpackers also rely on the hostel is to find companionship. They know that the hostel tends to offer vibrant social scenes, but sometimes backpackers find themselves seeking out more than that. When backpackers venture off the gringo trail, as Brian certainly did quite a few times throughout his travels, the reality of backpacking can sometimes generate a lonely experience. Even as backpackers come into contact with local people throughout their travels, they have difficulty in relating to their ways of life, let alone speak their language. Brian mentioned this and said: “You know after being here for a week, it’s been nice to actually meet another backpacker because I was beginning to feel kind of lonely, actually for the last month.” Emma also explained the value of the hostel for meeting other people for this very same reason. She said: “I know that when you travel like we do, we think that we should travel by yourself, but this can make me feel lonely, so it is nice to meet other travelers in the hostel...because most of the time, we travel alone between the different towns, but then when we arrive we always discover the town together.”

As Emma traveled the globe on her around-the-world-ticket, she experienced many moments when she felt the need for companionship and safety. Particularly, she expressed that as a female backpacker traveling alone, it was very important for her at times to meet others to travel with. She said:

Maybe, you know, I can't always travel alone, because I am a girl. And I am also small.

Backpacking, I think, it does give me freedom, yes, because I made this entire travel by myself, but it does not mean that I'm always by myself, or even want to be by myself. And a lot of times this is because of...I want to feel safe.

Emily echoed Emma's thoughts about traveling as a woman. Emily too felt that she gained independence traveling alone, which she explained was always important to her when she travels. But she also recognized that she had to be cautious in ways that male travelers may not experience. She said: "I do experience independence because just having my backpack, I go as I please, which for me being a woman is very important, but there are times, or actually places where it's just best that I travel with another person, and, no offense, but men don't experience this."

Throughout Central America, it is not uncommon for women to travel alone. As Emily further explained: "women just have to be more aware about their surroundings than men do." She recognized, however, that male backpackers are also cautious when they travel. Both women and men try to avoid traveling alone at night as well as taking cab rides alone. And much of the concern in traveling alone has to do with the information backpackers share with each other while staying in hostels. Backpackers inform each other when they hear about another backpacker who was robbed, assaulted, or even kidnapped. While backpackers might not experience these unfortunate occurrences, they hear about them happening to others.

Consequently, for women, when they hear about such incidences, they have to be even more cautious as they travel. If they decide to go to a bar late night, they almost always have to find a hostel partner to join along in the search. In contrast to the male backpacking experience, female backpackers experience catcalls while walking alone, and even when walking with another female traveler. Accordingly, women experience discomfort and a sense of uneasiness when travel. But they try to not let these emotions prevent them from traveling alone. As Isabelle had explained:

The local guys always say something to me, like "chica bonita," but it's ok, because I don't think they will hurt me in any way. Of course there are these times when I'm walking alone at night and I feel scared, but I think this is part of travel, even if you're are woman or man...we have to use this common sense, and if we do we can have adventures all the time.

Emily also said that being a female traveler does not stop her in traveling off the beaten path or even searching for the bar alone at night. Although, as she mentioned: “In hostels I don’t really have to worry about going out at night alone, because I can always find someone to go to the bar with me.”

In fact, backpackers find the hostel experience comforting and fun, and a place with an actual purpose for meeting other travelers. While backpackers often critique other backpackers for always hanging around each other and not freeing themselves from others to experience those impromptu encounters with the local people, they find value in hostels as a social place. Hazan, a 27-year old Turkish backpacker traveling solo in Nicaragua and Costa Rica, mentioned: “I can tell you that the best part of hostels are those nights together with travelers with some beers and music, and talking about all of our experiences from the day.” Likewise, Florian explained:

At night when we return to the hostel, we come together and because we’re from different countries, we share different life stories. We even try and discuss how to solve the problems of the world. I like learning about the Nicaraguan culture and the politics, but I also like learning from all these people I meet in the hostel.

Backpackers find that the hostel experience is a major part of their overall travel experience. And while they initially thought they would find true independence traveling alone, they also find independence by choosing to travel along with others, as long as this social practice does not interfere with their adventures.

Adventurous Certainty

Backpackers value the experience of the journey because they believe that the journey will provide them with the uncertainty that gets them out of their monotonous, routine lives back home, as well as off the gringo trail. Part of backpackers’ motivations to travel lie in the opportunities to learn about local cultures, contribute to the local economy, and experience the natural environment. However, backpackers recognize that because of the Westernized hostel atmosphere, it becomes very difficult at times to completely escape their home lives, or even the well-trodden route. Yet, they continue to push

themselves as travelers, hoping to find those spontaneous and intense adventure moments outside the hostel that they embrace. They value travel for what it offers to them over the long-haul.

Long-term backpackers question short-term backpackers' motives and interest in experiencing adventure. Most recognize the backpacking travel form as an extensive, long-term journey on a "shoestring budget" But, the journey is not always as extensive as one might think. Avi explained: "Now that I'm in Costa Rica I have come across lots of travelers who are here for only two weeks and they stay in the hostels because it's cheap and then they can spend all their money on tours." Costa Rica is increasingly becoming known as an American vacation spot where young college students, or even young professionals, take a very short break from their routine lives. Backpackers point this out and critique this type of travel experience, as well as their use of the hostel. As Anna mused:

I met this American couple and they were traveling for only two weeks and staying in hostels the entire time. I don't know if I would call them real travelers. They were both university students and on university break I suppose. It's not like they gave everything up to travel. I thought they were very cool and open-minded, but I think they just came here for the party.

While backpackers differ according to their length of travel, they share a similar travel. Most backpackers wind up staying in a town or city for just a few days before moving on to the next destination. Their hostel stays are brief, just long enough to use it as place to venture into the towns and cities to see the cultural highlights. Part of the reason for this travel pattern has to do with having only a few weeks to travel. Another reason is that backpackers, no matter their length of travel, are concerned to see as much as possible, as quickly as possible, hence their fast pace.

Yet, they also know that to experience a greater sense of adventure they need to slow down and absorb the local culture. To slow down, backpackers attempt to take on the pace of the culture and environment in which they explore. As Mike, the American backpacker traveling with his wife in Belize, explained:

We were traveling at such a fast pace and then when we finally got here to Placencia, life has slowed us down here. We didn't expect to stay here for so long. But the locals here for sure know

how to live life. I mean it's so humid too so also being at the beach makes you want to chill out in a hammock wearing just your swim suit. A lot of backpackers struggle with this I think. Most the time we just pass through a hostel for a couple days and then move on to the next one. And I think it's because we aren't taking the time to soak in the culture.

Adapting to the pace of the local people, is especially true for backpackers who first begin their backpacking adventures. Lindsey, Mike's partner, said: Yeah, it takes some time, definitely, to slow down, like always when I first arrive, I feel like I'm in such a rush to see everything and always have to remind myself to slow down and just live like the locals do."

When backpackers travel at such a fast pace, they compromise the adventure immersing themselves in the local culture and environment. Likewise, as they spend time inside the hostel, they further neglect those opportunities for being outside. Kristina said: "I know that I sometimes I don't spend enough time getting to know the locals, but it is even worse when I get stuck hanging out in the hostel." Backpackers use the hostel as their safe haven and to take a break from their adventures. Hazan also explained: "Sometimes travel can be stressful, and I get tired of like taking surfing lessons or hiking all day long, and so sometimes I prefer to hang out in the hostel and take this time away." Also, backpackers experience stress during the travel between destinations. Kristina mused: "If I'm traveling for a long time, say like 6-hour bus ride, and then I have to find the hostel, this is very stressful...like this is part of the adventure, I know this, but I want to be relaxing in a bed."

While backpackers do find adventure traveling between destinations, they often discuss how tiring the overland transport can be and the toll that it takes on one's body. Indeed, the movement between places can become tiresome when packing up and moving every two or three days. The culture shock among the local people can also burden some backpackers. Sometimes, all backpackers can think about is getting to the next hostel for the night. And once they are at the hostel, they often express their hardships they encountered during transit. For example, Kristina described one Australian backpacker she had a brief encounter with at the hostel we stayed at together. She said:

I met this guy yesterday, and the first thing he said to me was: "I've been traveling around the world for over one year." And he told me that he is homeless and how difficult it has been to travel with a little money. I'm thinking to myself, you are not homeless dude. He did not look homeless and said he was almost out of his money and was trying to work at the hostel.

As Kristina described the man to me, I realized that I also had a brief conversation with him about the meaning of travel. He expressed that to experience adventure means to endure the ups and downs of travel and that the best way to experience this is by taking the local transport. He said that a lot of travelers take the hostel transportation and never really experience adventure. Ironically, later that day I saw him getting into a hostel shuttle van headed to Semuc Champey, a natural monument in Alta Verapez, Guatemala, known for its fresh limestone pools.

Backpackers recognize that the hostel experience provides them a different experience than they initially imagined about their travels. Hoping to experience the local people and their natural environment as much as possible, they find that they only briefly rub shoulders with the locals. As Christiaan had mentioned: "I guess I don't hang out with the local people as much as I thought and...the main reason is because the hostel." Backpackers also realize that they may not contribute to the local economy as much as they planned either, specifically because of the types of hostels they choose to stay in overnight. As Judy mentioned: "Some hostels seem to be locally owned, but I don't know, how do you really know? I think most of them are owned by foreigners."

Some backpackers who know that a hostel is foreign-owned are motivated to seek out those run by locals. In doing so, they risk giving up some of the social scene and amenities of modern, westernized hostels. Yet, backpackers also experience adventure staying in these locally owned hostels, which sometimes becomes the highlight of their travels. As Colin, the Kiwi traveling with his girlfriend Anna, explained:

We've got a bit of a rule when it comes to staying in hostels. We don't like to stay in hostels that are owned by foreigners. We like to give the money back to the community really. That is what happened to us in Antigua. A guy came up to us and said "you know, you can stay wherever you

want, but come stay with us because you know your money is going back to Guatemala and Antigua.” I probably learned most of my Spanish in those four or five days staying in that hostel. The family actually lived in this hostel they ran, so they cleaned the rooms, and the kids played in the courtyard we hung out in. That was probably one of the biggest highlights for me was to actually be involved in the Guatemalan lifestyle. There are a lot of hostels there which are owned by foreigners. Villa Villa for example is actually owned by Belgians.

Backpackers seek out highly social hostels, at times they also opt for the local experience. In reality, they choose between hostel types depending on the type of atmosphere they seek out in that moment of their trip.

Some of the more westernized hostels arrange pub crawls among hostellers to more off the beaten path bars, restaurants, and night clubs where backpackers collectively meet and interact with the local people. As Brian had described about his experience taking a hostel pub crawl in San Cristobal de Las Casas, Mexico:

Some of these cultures don't like to drink. So the pub crawl is fun to party with a bunch of international travelers...and since the pub crawl was arranged by a local guy, he knew where to take us. So we end up at all these seedy bars and I've had some of the most awesome encounters with the locals in these bars. Maybe I would have found this place on my own, but probably not. I actually hooked up with this older Mexican woman during that pub crawl. Best time ever man.

Backpackers also find nature adventures through hostel tours. Similar to how backpackers talk about taking a tour to experience the local people off the beaten path, they also express how these tours take them to natural areas they otherwise could not go to.

In fact, some hostels are located in the rainforest. These ecolodges offer shared rooms inside wooden structures with thatched roofs and screened windows to protect travelers from mosquitos. Some are nestled into pristine natural areas, next to free flowing rivers, and with all the healthful sounds of the jungle environment. Brian described his experience staying in an ecolodge:

Yea, I really like staying in these sort of hostel-style huts. There's nothing like sleeping in one of the huts without electricity and hearing the sound of all the creatures out there. I mean, they aren't "out there," we are out there, in it. It's terrifying sometimes when you hear something screech out or just the thought of a jaguar prowling around you...and it wouldn't be the same if there was internet access here, because it just wouldn't feel right in the jungle.

Yet like any other hostel, backpackers tend to stay in ecolodges for just a few days. After the nature experience, whether that be from staying in an ecolodge, taking a tour to experience a natural wonder, or even finding a waterfall all one's own, backpackers always return to the familiar backpacker hostel.

Backpackers say that they yearn to immerse themselves in the local culture and experience nature throughout their Central American travels. Yet they relish in the thought of returning to the hostel where they can rejuvenate and become motivated to explore again. As Alex, a 26-year-old Australian backpacker traveling solo, mused:

When you leave to stay in places that don't offer comfort, like some of the cabañas or in some remote place, it's like "oh, gotta get back to Antigua and the hostel for a nice hot shower." Just today I showed up not so clean. It's not because I've been roughing it for so long; it's just because I've been away for a few days at the Earth Lodge where there is no hot water. But now that I'm back in Antigua, I get clean again.

Backpackers value the hostel experience as part-and-parcel to the journey and their overall travel experience. As they travel in and out of hostels, they piece together their journeys bit by bit, with each part becoming aspects of a long term travel experience they hope to look back on fondly and often.

Self-Reflection and the Reflected Self

While backpackers imagine travel as an escape from the humdrum of their home life, they also use their journeys to reflect upon the lives they escape while abroad. With the intent to travel afar and immerse themselves in unfamiliar people and places, backpackers hope to see their lives in new ways. They hope that by exploring the local culture, they discover a truer and different self. They anticipate

downtime to reflect on these local experiences so that when they return home they have undergone a transformative experience.

As the hostel serves as a central node to explore a place, it also acts as a place for self-reflection about that place. The hostel is where backpackers spend most of their down time. While backpackers may only end up rubbing shoulders with the local people throughout their travels, they cherish those experiences. As Maya mentioned: “Maybe I don’t spend all my time with the locals, but the time I do, I really do enjoy, like I will never forget the party we made on the chicken bus with the locals and then when I’m home, I will remember to just enjoy life in the moment like that day.” Florian also described what he learned by traveling in Nicaragua, the second poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. He said: “Traveling in Nicaragua makes me rethink how I live back home because they live off very little, but seem happy...and they are very much having a strong value for nature...when I return home I want to try to also live off very little.”

Yet while backpackers reflect on those moments spent with the local people, or when they overcome the challenge of losing a backpack, they also find themselves reflecting upon familiar experiences they find abroad. Carlo, the Spanish backpacker traveling with a friend, was a part-time yoga instructor back home. When he arrived in San Marcos, he saw the lakeside town as a perfect setting in which to practice his yoga, which he had taken a break from while traveling. Come to find out, San Marcos is a backpacker hub for taking lakeside meditation and yoga classes. Carlo reflected upon his time spent there:

I read in the guidebook that San Marcos was the “hippie hangout” of these other towns around the lake, but I did not know that I would find so many yogis. That was really special to me to find this out. But looking back on the experience, I think it was just a bunch of other backpackers coming together to do their yoga for one day. Another one of these moments when I see us doing the same thing.

Carlo had not made this connection about the backpacker yoga experience in San Marcos until several weeks later when he stayed at a hostel on Islas Mujeres, off the coast of the Yucatán Peninsula. There at

the hostel, he found a yoga class offered to backpackers right on the hostel premises. He made the realization that yoga classes are just another amenity, or common activity, that some backpackers are beginning to actually seek out when they travel.

Backpackers continue to question and critique how much they gain from international travel as they frequent hostels filled with modern amenities and other backpackers traveling the same way. Yet they also find themselves valuing the hostel experience as integral to their overall backpacking experience. In the hostel, backpackers experience both sociability and solitude. Hostels' uniformity often makes them simultaneously very inviting and quite alienating. As much as hostels are set up with a common space that brings like-minded travelers together, the common space becomes the café, bar, or TV room similar to home. These types of social spaces require backpackers to partake in the social activity or risk isolation. Though sometimes even within the common space backpackers will sit alone, amongst others, tapping away at their laptops. Accordingly, backpackers find themselves engaging with others, but also being alone inside the hostel.

In hostels, backpackers learn about themselves, the types of people they are attracted to, and qualities about themselves they would like to change. Emily had mentioned:

I've learned about which types of travelers I like more than others. Like I definitely don't want to always hang around the guys that, all they want to do is party. I want to party, but I also don't want to be hungover all day because then you miss out on sitting in the plaza and seeing how the locals go about their mornings. I'm also not into the yoga or hippie types, or the really frugal types, or others who just want to spend a shit load of money eating out at fancy restaurants. You need balance.

Jun, also mentioned: "I like meeting travelers who also like to plan out their day because in my culture we are very organized like this and we want to make sure we see every single museum, so I'm very happy to meet people who are this way."

Backpackers also reflect on the experience of traveling alone and with someone else. Women reflect on what it feels like to travel as a solo female traveler. Others reflect on the experience of traveling with a friend or a partner. Maggie, from England, reflected upon her experience traveling with someone:

When I went to Southeast Asia I traveled by myself and so this time I wanted to travel with someone, but next time I want to travel with my boyfriend. My friend and I have gone through so much together on this trip. It's been very difficult at times, but I think you form a real special bond by traveling with another person.

Colin and Anna also reflected upon their experience traveling together as a couple. Colin explained:

As difficult as two people who are stuck with each other 24 hours a day, I think that when you go home you realize how the other person works and you appreciate them a lot more when you get home. Those times you think "okay fuck it" and leave the room because you don't want to deal with it. Well when you travel you can't really do that. So you learn to work with each other in a different way than when you're back home. You go through the bad times and the good times together when you're on the road.

Backpackers also reflect on the experience of traveling with someone they met at the hostel and sometimes form relationships that last even upon returning home.

In fact, backpackers sometimes form such strong bonds with other travelers that, when the time comes, they have a hard time separating from each other. When they finally decide to leave the hostel for the next one, all on their own again, or leave home, they reflect on the short amount of time spent getting to know someone through travel. And they often reflect upon the very hostels they most enjoyed because of the people they met also staying in them. As Emily described:

I find it really hard sometimes to say goodbye when you settle down for a bit in one place and meet some really good people. I've met some awesome people traveling. And these are the ones I always make the effort to link up on Facebook. I might not actually stay in touch with all of them, but you never know, I could hit them up when I'm passing through their country, and I've actually done that before.

Ivan also explained how it can be hard to leave the hostel after spending time with certain travelers. He said:

This hostel will be very hard to leave from, especially because this is the last place before I fly back home. There have been, I would say, maybe four or five hostels where you just don't want to leave because of the travelers you meet.

Anna also shared her sentiments about the way she and Colin like to leave a hostel after making good friends. As she reflected:

But it's always good to leave on a high note feeling good about a place. We have met the best people, but we have also met some horrible people, and it's always interesting to meet those people as well because it sort of puts yourself into perspective. And then when you meet people who are on the same wave length, that is awesome. And you always do, you always meet like two or three people in the same hostel that are on the same sort of wave length as you. That is a huge high, but it's always sad to say goodbye. So we usually just run away!

Backpackers leave the hostel reflecting upon the hostel experience. They sometimes have mixed feelings about the hostel as they see it as a central space in which to meet and learn from other travelers, but also where backpackers end up doing the same sorts of travel activities. As such, they wonder what the next hostel experience will be like along the loop, the journey in between hostels, the local people and place in which that hostel is located, and the next group of backpackers they may indeed form bonds with. They discover that travel is special in that, as Brian stated, "it's a life changing experience no matter what, whether I'm hanging out in the hostel with other travelers most the day or protesting with the teachers in Oaxaca." Or as Judy explained: "It's changed my life already in the sense that on this trip, for the first time in my life I slept with another woman, and it just so happened to occur in the dormitory, in the daytime while the others were out."

Yet, in the end, backpackers recognize that they may indeed have created their own bubble and their experiences reflect their own cultural preferences rather than of the indigenous culture they hoped to become immersed in. They acknowledge that, in part, this sameness is difficult to escape as the hostel

experience becomes more standardized. As Avi mentioned: “I feel like no matter where I end up, just about every hostel is the same and it makes me ask why I keep staying in hostels.” Backpackers realize that while they search for the unknown, they continue to enjoy the comforts of home, right inside the hostel, and being around like-minded travelers. And they use the hostel to fulfill their travel desires for experiencing “foreign” worlds. Backpackers feel that they can still express, both inside and outside the hostel, their ideas about escape, independence, adventure, and self-reflection.

The hostel acts as a bridge between the seemingly contradictory relationship between backpacking ideology and some backpacking practices. It serves as a bridge in two ways. First, the hostel connects backpackers to the local people in their natural environment. That is, the hostel provides backpackers a bridge to escape their home life and mainstream tourism to experience solo adventure travel in a new culture. Second, the hostel connects backpackers to other like-minded travelers in a very familiar feeling social environment. In the hostel, backpackers find that interacting with other travelers is just as important to them as learning about the local culture.

Backpackers reconcile gaps and contradictions between their ideology and practices. In collective spaces they evaluate, negotiate, and reshape their initial travel ideology to also reflect their experiences of escape, independence, and adventure among each other. They also continue to push their travel form beyond mainstream tourism, discussing and reflecting upon, how backpacking should be. They leave their homes with ideas about their next trip and how they might travel differently in order to burst the “backpacker bubble.” And as they return home, other backpackers continue to travel, reveling in the same very hostels, or different hostels that also continue to infiltrate more places in which backpackers hope to experience, though never to spoil.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I referred to the core travel ideology and common practices among international backpackers in Central America, specifically in relation to the hostel and its role in backpacker’s travels. I described the backpacker hostel as the central place to understand backpackers’ travel ideology in relation to their practices. I also discussed the contradictory relationships between backpacking ideology and

practices in Central America. I explained how the backpacker hostel is a social and cross-cultural space that backpackers utilize as their home base while they travel. And while backpackers use the hostel to share their travel experiences, they also use it to critique, negotiate, and come to terms with backpacking contradictions as they travel.

When backpackers envision their trip prior to departing their home country, they often imagine an experience approximating full immersion in the local cultures and environments they are traveling to. They actually spend a lot of time inside hostels hanging out with other backpackers, doing like-minded activities that reflect their own cultural preferences and routines. Backpackers tell stories to one another that help them negotiate a way to maintain satisfactory backpacking identities in the face of contradictions between backpacking ideology and practices.

As sociologist Georg Simmel ([1911] 1997) wrote about adventure, one person's adventure is just another person's day at work. The adventure is defined by paradoxical conditions, so as the adventure feels exotic and otherworldly, it only gains shape based on the particular desires of the individual, which might be in contrast to another. Backpackers understand the tensions and contradictions between their ideological principles based on notions of an immersive adventure in a foreign land and hostel experiences that can diminish feelings of uncertainty, discomfort, and disconnection that backpacking travel can bring. They also acknowledge the hostel experience as important and adventurous in itself.

CHAPTER 8

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I discuss the subcultural aspects of international backpackers in Central America. International backpackers are a growing market segment of global youth travel. Like youth travel forms that came before them, such as the 18th century Grand Tour, early 20th century Youth Hostel Movement, and the 1960s drifting counterculture, backpackers resemble the “individual traveler” who maintained ideas about independent, authentic travel, unlike the ordinary mass tourist. As Richards and Wilson (2004) note, contemporary backpackers idealize a travel form in opposition to the constraints of modern society and the modern tourism industry. In search of authentic travel, backpackers imagine their travel as a trail of discovery of places unspoiled by mass tourism.

I contribute to existing backpacker studies that describe international backpackers’ socio-cultural identities and motives for such alternative and adventurous travel (see for example, Hartmann 1991; Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995; Desforges 2000; Elsrud 2001; Sørensen 2003; Noy 2004; O’Reilly 2006). I extend previous findings conceptually and empirically by honing the work of Israeli Sociologist Erik Cohen, whose early research on drifters initiated backpacker studies. Cohen (2003) claims that the actual practice of backpacking is at considerable odds with the idealized image of the backpacker who drifts far off the beaten tourist path. He argues that in contrast to the ordinary tourist, the backpacking travel form is more ideologically “loaded” and backpackers develop expressive mechanisms to maintain their identity in face of discrepancies between their ideology and their practice.

To explore Cohen’s claim, I used a subcultural framework to understand backpacking ideology and practices in Central America. The subcultural framework highlights groups’ relationships to, and functions within, mainstream culture. Youth subcultures contain a variety of features that exist along a continuum of resistance to mainstream culture (Hebdige [1979] 1981). Their members’ degree of resistance is manifested in the subjective *life-world* in which they perceive and express themselves individually and collectively in relation to the dominant culture. I understand backpackers as a youth

subculture insofar as they maintain a core ideology and common practices that contrast with mainstream tourism's practices which they claim to oppose while they travel.

EXPLORING BACKPACKING IDEOLOGY AND PRACTICES

I asked the following research question, which guided the development of this dissertation: What is the character of contemporary backpacking subculture? My answers align with Riley (1988) and Sørensen's (2003) findings that backpackers emphasize ideas and aspire to maintain a "road culture" by traveling off the beaten tourist path with a level of risk and adventure that mass tourism intentionally avoids. Using insights provided by backpackers traveling throughout the region, I described their sense of exploration as emphasizing a 1) desire to escape (both their mundane lives and tourism), 2) find a level of independence or freedom, which defines their 3) sense of adventure, and enables them to 4) self-reflect on their life and identity. While each backpacker has their own unique travel experience in Central America, they also collectively shared and maintained these ideological beliefs.

I find that backpackers hope to experience adventure via the journey, immersing themselves in the local culture, and retreating to nature. Backpackers value the experience of the journey because the journey in and of itself defines the adventure. Backpackers believe that the journey will provide them with the uncertainty that gets them out of their staid, routine lives back home. Part of backpackers' motivations to travel rest with opportunities to learn about local cultures *in situ*. In Central America, backpackers hope to find adventures experiencing the lifestyles of the indigenous peoples they encounter during their travels, which they see as entirely unfamiliar to their lives back home. Traveling throughout Central America puts backpackers in touch with nature, which is an experience that they highly value. They believe that experiencing nature provides them with a greater sense of adventure. Backpackers also idealize nature based on their environmental values, which often intensify through their travels. As backpackers learn how important the natural environment is to the local people, they also become more sensitive to the environmental impact of tourism development throughout the region.

I found that the character of contemporary backpacking subculture also included common backpacking practices. Backpacking ideology informs a wide range of practices that backpackers use

while traveling and in their everyday lives. These practices demonstrate cultural proficiency in a certain way of thinking and living as an international backpacker. I also found that practices involve the use of *tools*, which are physical items that provide utility to perform certain tasks for productive and creative purposes. Broadly, backpackers' key travel practices in Central America emphasize the use of 1) the solitary backpack, 2) particular transportation modes, and 3) specific information sources they use to guide themselves. While backpackers have their own unique travel experiences in Central America, they also share and maintain these travel practices in common.

Richards and Wilson (2004) suggest that the backpacking identity is associated with a “nomadic lifestyle” and adventuring “off the beaten path.” I find that such a claim is manifested in the use of the backpack as tool. The backpack itself is critical to backpacker's mobility, but moreover, is the primary symbolic tool that gives backpackers their name. First, the backpack is the symbol locals use to identify and interact with backpackers. Second, the backpack allows backpackers to identify and interact with each other and, through their interactions, they develop a distinct backpacker identity, noticeably distinct from mass tourists. Backpackers will do everything they can to protect their backpack, not simply to maintain their nomadic lifestyle, but to protect their identity and sense of security. Losing one's backpack is thought of as equivalent to losing one's home with all of their belongings stuffed inside. Yet, losing one's backpack also means losing their subjective representation of the backpacking identity and experiences. Backpackers build an emotional attachment to their pack, which they vest with memories of their adventures.

In practice, I find that while backpackers maintain a “road culture,” they do so by taking very similar paths traveling Central America. Backpackers use an assortment of transport options and information sources. As the start of their trip, backpackers rely on major airlines to fly in and out of gateway cities to begin and end their travels. Backpackers follow along similar “loops” throughout the region, which are defined by guidebooks and other travelers. They also rely on a variety of overland transportation modes, including local buses, shuttle vans or minibuses, and local people's vehicles (in the case of befriending a local person who offers a ride or hitchhiking). The most popular backpacking

transportation mode in central America is the “chicken bus” because of the relatively cheap price backpackers pay for a ride. On these rides, backpackers say that they experience some of the most adventurous journeys in which they “rub shoulders” with the locals and experience their “hardships” as these transport options are the least reliable compared to first-class buses. On other occasions (primarily because of availability), backpackers purchase a full-transportation package, commonly referred to as “jeep-boat-jeep,” that offers a thrill ride across various terrain. Backpackers find out about such excursions from advertisements. My observations support Kain and King’s (2004) research that shows how backpackers prefer “word of mouth” information sources while traveling, although guidebooks and the Internet also play vital roles in informing backpackers’ travel experiences.

EXPLORING BACKPACKING CONTRADICTIONS

While backpackers resemble a mobile youth subculture motivated by the idea to explore the unknown, they bring their very Western culture with them while traveling abroad. To further understand international backpackers as a youth subculture, I also explored the relationship between what they believe and what they actually practice. Following Cohen’s claim that there are discrepancies between backpacker ideology and practices, I asked the following questions: Are there contradictions between backpacking ideology and backpacking in practice? If so, what are the contradictions and how do backpackers resolve them? I found that the backpacker hostel is the social and cross-cultural space that backpackers utilize as their home base while they travel. Backpackers use the hostel to share their travel experiences and also to critique, negotiate, and come to terms with contradictions in their travel experiences.

The hostel is the central place where backpackers meet one another and rest while travelling. If the backpack is the traveler’s primary symbolic and utilitarian tool defines who they are, then the hostel is the primary space (and tool) where backpackers share ideas and negotiate the meanings multi-layered, seemingly contradictory, meanings about who they are and what they do. As backpackers interact with each other inside the hostels, they exchange travel stories that, among other things, distinguish their travel ideology and experiences from mass tourism. Backpackers’ storytelling helps them make sense of their

travels and discuss how they think travel should be. As backpackers develop their travel stories inside the hostel, they express and circulate important insights about their subcultural travel ideas, beliefs, and values, and their interests, intentions, and motivations for travel.

Backpackers value the hostel's social atmosphere, which allows them to both learn about and learn from other travelers. They also critique the way the hostel experience shapes their travels. In fact, I found this backpacker-directed critique of backpacking very common in the hostels I observed. As backpackers convene, they exchange their travel stories and support one another, but also discover a main contradiction about their travel form: backpacking involves an enormous amount of time being around other backpackers. Moreover, backpackers often critique how other backpackers travel, even if they fall into the same travel pattern as the backpackers they critique. Yet they also value how the hostel provides backpackers a space to meet other backpackers whom they befriend and often then travel with.

The hostel acts as a bridge between the seemingly contradictory relationship between backpacking ideology and some backpacking practices. It serves as a bridge in two ways. First, the hostel can connect backpackers to the local people in their natural environment. That is, the hostel provides backpackers a bridge to escape their home life and mainstream tourism to experience solo adventure travel in a new culture. Second, the hostel connects backpackers to other like-minded travelers in a very familiar feeling social environment. In the hostel, backpackers find that interacting with other travelers becomes just as important to them as interacting with and learning from locals.

In this dissertation, I problematize the notion that backpackers idealize a travel form solely in opposition to the constraints of modern society and the modern tourism industry. I address Cohen's claim that backpackers use expressive mechanisms to maintain their identity in face of the discrepancy between their ideology and practice. Backpackers reveal to each other that they are indeed very aware, and see, their travel form as one existing inside of a "backpacker bubble." Urry ([1990] 2002) argues that, in contrast to the traveler, the tourist is now placed at the center of a very circumscribed world, situated in a "tourist bubble" that resembles the familiar society one had previously imagined escaping, the hostel represents a backpacker bubble all onto its own. Paradoxically, now the backpacker who desires a travel

adventure far outside a tourist bubble, also becomes insulated from the “strangeness” of the unfamiliar world they seek, constrained by the backpacker bubble.

In this backpacker bubble, backpackers reconcile gaps and contradictions between their ideology and practices. In collective hostel spaces they evaluate, negotiate, and reshape their initial travel ideology to also reflect their experiences of escape, independence, and adventure among each other. In the hostel, backpackers find value in their ability to escape into familiar experiences that offer a type of independent dependence, adventure and certainty, and ways to collectively and individually reflect upon familiar experiences they find abroad among like-minded travelers. Simultaneously, they also continue to push their travel form beyond mainstream tourism by negotiating ways to make backpacking more of how it should be. In the end, they leave their “homes,” to return home, with ideas about their next trip, and how they might travel differently in order to burst the backpacker bubble.

THE CASE OF CENTRAL AMERICA BACKPACKING

Central America provides an interesting case to understand backpacking as a travel form and backpackers as a youth subculture. According to the latest 2016 UNWTO WYSE Travel Confederation report, Talib Rifai, Secretary-General of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), states that:

Today’s young travelers are said to venture independently to further places, stay longer and immerse in other cultures to build their life experiences than ever before...they are also spending less time in major gateway cities and have an inclination to explore more remote destinations.

Central America comprises some of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere and offers travelers opportunities to interact and engage with locals as well as explore untouched natural areas from mainstream tourism. Accordingly, independent youth travel, such as backpacking, also has important economic, cultural, and ecological effects on communities that have little to no access to tourism opportunities (Scheyvens 2002).

Central America is increasingly marketed as an emerging tourism hotspot. While strong tourism markets exist in Mexico and Costa Rica, tourism in the other countries is rising steadily. Mexico has consistently been a prime tourism destination for international travelers since the 1950s (UNWTO 2011).

According to the UNWTO (2011), Mexico is expected to rank 8 as a top world tourism destination, attracting 49 million tourist arrivals and obtaining a 3.4% market share in the year 2020. Costa Rica has the most developed ecotourism infrastructure among the Central American countries. In 2012, tourism arrivals were greater in regions²⁹ with emerging economies (+4.1%) compared to those with advanced economies (+3.6%). Central America showed the best results (+6%) among all other sub-regions of the Americas.

In the past few years, the five countries that share Mayan cultural heritage—Southern Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, and Honduras—have decided to develop a regional tourism brand, Mundo Maya (Mayan World), to capitalize on growing Mayan interest among tourists. This new tourism venture is supported by the UNWTO, which has long encouraged the development of regional tourism to attract tourists who opt for multi-destination trips. Mundo Maya promotes and offers information on Mayan attractions throughout the region, making it easier now for tourists to travel between the different countries.

Backpackers with environmental affinities are a prime market base for Central America travel and ecotourism. Hampton (1998) also explains how LDC (Less Developed Country) government tourism planners perceive international tourism, and international backpackers, as an economic growth engine. While countries such as Australia have long been tracking backpacker travel patterns, little data exists on backpackers' economic impacts in LDCs (Hampton 1998). Nonetheless, tourism promoters target backpackers as an important youth sector because they are known to stay in areas much longer than the average mainstream tourist and they help spread tourism business, especially in locations not typically part of the mainstream tourist routes.

The backpacking travel form is now integral to global mobility, globalization, and international tourism. Backpackers are situated in a global context, influenced by the profit-driven international tourism industry that shapes how backpackers travel. This is especially true as backpackers rely upon the

²⁹ According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) global regions include (1) Africa, (2) the Americas, (3) Asia and the Pacific, (4) Europe, and (5) the Middle East (<http://www2.unwto.org/en/regions>).

Internet, guidebooks, hostels, transportation, networks, tourism infrastructure, gear, and the circulation of money, goods, and people who aid and support their travels.

Not only are backpackers seen as a potential tourism market, but the hostel itself, the very place where backpackers travel in and out of throughout their travels, is now a global commodity and tourism node. As I explained in this dissertation, backpackers have come to rely on the hostel most during their travels as they value it as a social and cross-cultural space in which to express, share, maintain, and negotiate their ideology and practices in collective. McKenzie (2006) mentions that hotel companies have noticed the growing backpacker sector, and the importance of the hostel to the life of the backpacker. In response, companies, such as the global brand Accor Hotels, have capitalized on the hostel market. Accor has rapidly acquired hostel properties in Australia and New Zealand and standardized them with their BASE hostel brand replete with Western amenities. Accor Hotels is also entering the Asian market. While chain hostels owned by foreign hotel corporations are not yet the norm in Central America, small locally owned chains are beginning to pop up. Also, hostels are available on several online hostel-booking platforms and increasingly cater to a variety of travelers. Some hostels are advertised to the most budget conscious travelers who seek a bed in a dorm room. However, “poshtels,” or the luxury-boutique hostel caters to flashpackers, families, and couples who seek more luxurious accommodations.

Additionally, Central Americas hostels draw backpackers who reflect several of Hartmann’s (1991) varying travel types. For example, Christiaan was the prototypical *moratorium traveler* who left his job to backpack before returning for a career and family life. John was the *adventurer*, testing his limits of endurance with a desire to travel to very remote destinations, such as the Darién Gap. Jun resembled a *goal-directed traveler* who carefully planned his travels to visit museums for educational purposes. Colin was a *party traveler* who socialized amongst backpackers in hostel bars and participated in some activities he would otherwise refrain from doing at home. And Uli was a *Peter Pan traveler of sorts*—older, searching for his “second youth” traveling alongside his son and reminiscing about his past travel days drifting into the Middle East from Europe. While most backpackers I came across expressed a

common ideology and practice, as well as discussed similar backpacking contradictions, their travel form may take new forms as the hostel milieu changes.

Increasingly, hostels are moving towards feeling less like a “home base,” becoming more expensive, less secure, unfamiliar, less social, and much like a “non-place.” Marc Augé (1995) describes a non-place as those ahistorical spaces of transience where social relations are limited to a transaction. As these uses and experiences increase, hostels may morph into spaces quite different from their initial form and use. Consequently, backpackers may also change as their ties within their subculture grow weaker. UNWTO Secretary-General Talib Rifai also acknowledges that the Millennial Generation (and rising Gen Z) is highly comfortable with technology, spends a significant amount of their time using the Internet, and socializes through social media. They now incorporate their virtual mobile lives into their corporeal travel lives abroad. While these young travelers are “social” on social media, I wonder how might they “socialize” inside the hostel. Perhaps the backpacker bubble will continue to grow as more 21st century “adventurers” seek the experiences backpacking provides. On the other hand, backpacking could implode as corporatization and technological trends fundamentally alter the backpacking experience.

Backpackers are neither totally constrained by the structure of international tourism in which they operate, nor are they completely autonomous agents acting freely and with full awareness of the structural constraints that influence them. The truth about backpacking subculture lies somewhere in between these two possibilities. Most backpackers whom I interviewed embraced the hostel experience for its home base experiences that allowed them to meet new backpackers, form temporary communities, and explore new places together. But, changes to the hostel may profoundly upend those experiences. As corporate interests rationalize and standardize hostels, they may start to feel more isolating and alienating to old and new backpackers alike. Yet, they also acknowledge that they participate in the business of backpacking, which drives infrastructure development and changes to tourism cultures that support backpacking travel. And, as the places that backpackers inhabit change, often reflecting the western origin points they hope to leave behind, their definition of backpacking adventure, their subcultural style, and their practices may also change.

SOCIOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTION, LIMITATION, AND FUTURE STUDIES

To conclude, I provide concluding thoughts to the central arguments of this dissertation and its contribution to the field of sociology, particularly the sociology of tourism, global mobility, and subcultural studies. As disciplines across the social sciences, business, and economics notice the importance of studying international backpackers and their travel patterns, we have seen the field of backpacker studies expand within the broad study of tourism and leisure. This dissertation provides sociological insight to this growing field through an in-depth look at backpacking as a youth subculture within global tourism. Globalization increasingly influences backpacking subculture. But as backpackers travel to experience non-Western places and cultures, they simultaneously bring Western youth culture to their travel destinations. This infusion of western ideas, interests, and money changes these places and, consequently the backpacking subculture.

Sociologist Peter Collero (2013) argues that a culture of individualism, which values autonomy, independence, self-reliance, self-determination, and personal expression, has ascended to the dominant ideology in the West. Individualism contributes to a global capitalist ideology that urges people to work hard and play hard as they pursue their self-defined interests. Backpackers simultaneously oppose and embrace this ideology.

Backpackers might reflect what some call “postmodern hyperindividualism” (Muggleton 2002). They embrace individualism, fluidity and fragmentation alongside a modernist emphasis on authenticity and underlying essence. Backpackers are typically people from the most economically advanced countries are increasingly mobile, virtually connected, and narcissistic in a globalized world. In some way international backpackers’ travels are just an extension to their home lives. Their leisure patterns and their home lives are blurred with their travel lives. Sometimes backpackers, especially young professionals and students, are working, studying, and taking a temporary break that actually becomes part of their work/studies, as was my case in this dissertation research).

Further, my research provides an in-depth look at the backpacker hostel as a travel node that backpackers use to then infiltrate into local cultures and environments. In the 21st century, global mobility and the processes of globalization increasingly influence tourists and the local places and people they visit. Tourist activities occur within particular tourist places where local people live, yet involve global movement across borders, which point to global implications flowing from tourist activities. In this sense, tourist activities are part of a dual process of localization and globalization, or what British sociologist Roland Robertson (2012) would call “glocalization.” Glocalization occurs when activities, products, services, or even people, are simultaneously adapted locally and accepted globally. That is, through the process of glocalization, new outcomes arise of local conditions under global pressures. Ulrich Beck (2002) refers to this process as “internalized globalization” and “cosmopolitanization.” Each concept points to the increasing integration of local places, people, and markets into global capitalism and culture.

Future studies should further explore the idea of backpackers as postmodern individuals and link how other travelers have used backpacking and the hostel as an avenue by which to travel and penetrate “unknown” peoples, places, cultures, and environments. Future work should also explore the relationship between backpacker and “local.” Backpackers are said to provide important social, economic, and environmental implications to host environments. Building from the work of Hampton (1998), scholars should closely investigate these claims for their veracity and nuance. Future research may also explore other independent traveler types and compare their backpacking patterns to one another across different settings.

While this dissertation discusses international backpackers in Central America, I was limited to studying backpackers who primarily stay in hostels. As such, my study reveals a particular independent traveler type. I recognize that other independent travelers might also use the “backpack” to travel and may share very different subcultural aspects to one another as well. Yet these travelers are not defined by the backpack as a tool and symbol in quite the same way. These different traveler types range from past to present: Dirt Bags, New Age Travelers, Crusties, Squatters, Deadheads, Spiral Tribes, Freegans, Rainbow Travelers, the Freak Scene, and Burners.

International backpackers may indeed resemble more of a “neo-tribe” or “scene” than an actual youth “subculture.” Maffesoli’s (1996) concept “neo-tribe” describes a group that, unlike the traditional tribe, is not fixed by geography or kinship. Rather, the neo-tribe exists according to a group of people who come together for shared rituals that define and bind the group together. The group celebrate for the ritual’s duration, then separate. Maffesoli argues that neo-tribes differ from subcultures, since particularly youth subcultures have been described as sharing a fixed, unified, and often deviant identity that stands in opposition to mainstream society. Yet nowadays, as Maffesoli argues, people can be a part of many neo-tribes across which they wear multiple masks and can switch between groups, assuming only temporary roles and identities associated with that particular ritual. All sorts of people, no matter social position may temporarily unite to in ritual celebration.

Will Straw (2004) describes “cultural scenes” as more appropriate to describe groups of people who participate in a shared activity within a global capitalist economy. Scene members are also aware of and open to these global influences. Straw describes groups of people who come together for dance music. While these dancers do not always distinguish themselves from the broader sense of society, they come together as a “community” opposing other forms of music. Sociologist John Irwin (1977) also describes scenes as having a lifestyle choice that gives expression to a social world that recognizes the fluidity of social identity (Gelder [1997] 2005). So youth subcultures can also be described as a scene in which they casually enter and exit a particular scene of people (Gelder [1997] 2005).

In the end, whatever the label, backpackers constitute a notable subcultural group with increasingly wide influence in the global tourism space. To learn more about the changing nature of global-local connections, we should remain focused on how backpackers continue to shape the global tourism space and, conversely, how that space shapes them.

Appendix A

Interview Guide

BACKPACKING TRAVEL PATTERNS

Time of interview:

Date of interview:

Place/Location:

Informant description:

Nationality_____

Education_____

Gender_____

Occupation/Student_____

Age_____

Duration of travel_____

Marital status_____

Travel companion status_____

Number of children_____

Funding sources for trip_____

1. Why did you decide to travel in this country or region?
2. Can you describe your pre-trip planning process (e.g., sources of information used to plan trip and pre-trip purchases made)?
3. Do you carry a guidebook and/or use the Internet to help guide your travels? What about word of mouth? Do you ever just wander or drift?
4. Can you describe to me how you see yourself as a traveler? Do you consider yourself a tourist here? How do you feel about other tourists here?
5. Ideally, what do you think is the purpose of this mode of travel (hosteling, backpacking, or independent travel)? Do you feel it has changed overtime? Why do you prefer to travel this way? Have you traveled this way in the past? Where?
6. What types of activities do you like to engage in or plan to engage in during your travels...so in other words, can you take me through a day in your traveling life?
7. How important is it to you to interact with locals? What steps do you take to interact with locals (e.g., learn about their culture, try and speak their language, eat with them, establish close relationships)?
8. What does "authentic" travel mean to you?
9. How do you go about purchasing food and beverages while traveling?
10. What other types of purchases do you make while traveling and who specifically do you buy from?
11. In your opinion, what is the impact of the tourism industry on this mode of travel? And what about its impact in this place or country?
12. How do you go about finding a place of interest (using guidebooks, Internet, word-of-mouth, wandering) such as a cafe, bar, cathedral, town, park or plaza, beach, lake, mountain, etc.?
13. How do you feel about the natural environment here? Is outdoor nature exploration important to you in your travels?
14. Where do you tend to sleep while you travel (e.g., HI hostel, independent hostel, cheap motel, campsite, at a local's home, other)? Why?
15. What is the significance of the hostel while traveling? Do you feel that hosteling has changed overtime? Why? How?
16. Do you know much about the Youth Hostel Movement? What about DJH? Richard Schirrmann?
17. And how do you get from place to place, or what is your transportation mode (e.g., walk, bike, hitchhike, local bus, train)?
18. What is your least favorite part about traveling this way? Lastly, what is your favorite part about traveling this way?

Appendix B
INFORMED CONSENT
Department of Sociology

TITLE OF STUDY: A Historical and Empirical Analysis of Hostelling and Backpacker Travel Patterns

INVESTIGATOR(S): Dr. Robert Futrell and Mark Salvaggio

CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: Dr. Futrell – 702-895-0270

Purpose of the Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to understand the historical and current development of hostelling and international backpacker travel patterns.

Participants

You are being asked to participate in the study because you may be familiar with the history, various settings, activities, ideologies, or practices of hostelling and backpacking; and you are at least 18 years of age or older.

Procedures

If you volunteer to participate in the study, you will be asked to do the following: participate in an in-depth interview that will be recorded. All interviews will be audio recorded upon your consent. Video recording may also be used upon additional consent. If for any reason during the interview you want the recording device turned off or you want to end the interview, just say so. The interview will be conducted in English.

Benefits of Participation

There *may not* be direct benefits to you as a participant in the study. However, your participation will help expand social scientific understanding of hostelling and backpacking experiences and their culture-sharing activities. By agreeing to participate in the study, you will be able to contribute to the development of the knowledge base.

Risks of Participation/Voluntary Participation

There are risks involved in all research studies. This study offers only very minimal risks. At most, you may experience slight discomfort with some of the interview questions and being audio or video recorded. Your participation is strictly voluntary and you may refuse to answer any questions asked or decline to participate at any time during the interview. You may withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice to your relations with the university. You are encouraged to ask questions about the study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

Cost /Compensation

There will not be financial cost to you to participate in this study. The interview may take 1 to 2 hours of your time. You will not be compensated for your participation.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you may contact **Dr. Robert Futrell** at

702-895-0270 or via e-mail at **rfutrell@unlv.nevada.edu**. For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted you may contact the **UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects** at **702-895-2794** or toll free at **877-895-2794** or via email at **IRB@unlv.edu**.

Confidentiality

Information gathered in this study will only be analyzed by the research team. Recorded material will not be confidential because we may use direct quotes from audio or video recordings in written or oral reports about the study. In most cases we will replace your name with a pseudonym if direct quotes are used in any written or oral reports. The use of a pseudonym assures you that no reference will be made that could link your identity to this study. However, in some cases we may want to reveal your identity because your identity may have importance to the study. For example, revealing the names of historians and scholars of the hostel movement and backpacking may provide added significance to our overall findings.

Audio Recording

In the case of audio recording, we would like you to indicate what uses of this audio recording you are willing to consent to by initialing and signing below. You are free to initial as many spaces (from none to all) as you would like, and your response will in no way affect your credit in participating in this study. We will only use the audio recording in ways that you agree to.

You may audio-record my interview. Please initial: _____

Information from the audio recordings may be used for publications. Please initial: _____

You may reveal my identity in any written or oral reports. Please initial: _____

Signature of Participant

Date

Participant Name (Please Print)

Appendix C

Backpackers	Nationality	Gender	Age (in years)	Education equivalency) (U.S.	Occupation	Travel Duration (in weeks)	Travel Form
2009							
David	U.S.A.	M	29	M.S. Political Science	Graduate student	9	Solo
Roland	Germany	M	30	B.S. Computer Engineering	Computer engineer	3	Solo
Caterine	Canada	F	31	Ph.D. Cultural Anthropology	University professor	10	Solo
Jón	Iceland	M	28	B.S. Computer Science	Programmer	4	Solo
Hazan	Turkey	F	27	M.A. Sports Nutrition	Graduate student	8	Solo
Florian	Switzerland	M	26	B.S. Finance	Financial advisor	4	Solo
Maggie	England	F	24	B.A. Psychology	Not employed	8	Female partner
Anna	Australia	F	25	Some college	Not employed	open ticket	Male partner
Colin	New Zealand	M	29	Some college	Not employed	open ticket	Female partner
Avi	Israel	M	21	Military Service	Not employed	16	Solo
Marcus	France	M	25	B.S. Social Studies	Not employed	12	Solo
2012							
Carlo	Spain	M	25	B.S. Art History	Not employed	16	Female partner
Mike	U.S.A.	M	33	M.A. Literature	Graduate student	5	Female partner
Lindsey	U.S.A.	F	30	M.A. Literature	Graduate student	5	Male partner
John	England	M	28	Some college	Not employed	open ticket	Solo
Brian	Canada	M	22	B.S. Marketing	Not employed	24	Solo
Louisa	Ireland	F	31	B.S. Physical Education	High school teacher	6	Solo
Daniela	Spain	F	25	B.A. Archeology	Graduate student	10	Female partner
Judy	Australia	F	23	B.S. Design/Business	Bartender	8	Solo
Isabelle	Brazil	F	31	B.S. Environmental Studies	Tattoo artist	7	Solo
2014							
Christiaan	Netherlands	M	26	B.S. Accounting	Not employed	16	Solo
Kristina	Germany	F	23	B.S. Marketing	Graduate student	6	Solo
Uli	Germany	M	58	Ph.D. Kinesiology	University professor	4	Male partner
Emma	Belgium	F	24	Some college	Not employed	open ticket	Male partner
Jun	Japan	M	24	B.S. Business Management	Graduate student	4	Male partner
Emily	U.S.A.	F	28	M.A. English	College professor	6	Solo

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- Vannini, Phillip. 2012. *Ferry Tales: Mobility, Place, and Time on Canada's West Coast*. New York: Routledge.
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- Wilson, Julie and Greg Richards. 2008. "Suspending Reality: An Exploration of Backpacker Enclaves and the Backpacker Experience." *Current Issues in Tourism* 11(2):187-202.
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- Wylie, John. 2005. "A Single Day's Walking: Narrating Self and Landscape on the South West Coast Path." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 30(2):234-47.

Curriculum Vitae

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September 2016

EDUCATION

Table with 4 columns: Degree, Year, Field, Institution. Rows include Ph.D. (Expected Dec 2016) in Sociology at University of Nevada-Las Vegas, M.A. (2007) in Sociology at California State University-Bakersfield, and B.S. (2002) in Business at California State University-Bakersfield.

DISSERTATION

Bursting the Backpacker Bubble:
Exploring Backpacking Ideology, Practices, and Contradictions

Committee: Robert Futrell (Chair), Barb Brents, Simon Gottschalk, David Dickens, Andy Kirk

TEACHING AND RESEARCH INTERESTS

Environmental Sociology, Urban and Community Sociology, Cultural Studies, Mobilities Studies, Sociology of Tourism, Qualitative Methodology

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Table with 2 columns: Year, Position. Rows include 2016-present (Instructor at Goucher College), 2013-2014 (Instructor at University of Nevada-Las Vegas), 2011-2012 (Instructor at University of Nevada-Las Vegas), 2007-2008 (Teaching Assistant at University of Nevada-Las Vegas), and 2006-2007 (Teaching Assistant at California State University-Bakersfield).

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

2014-2016 Associate Research Fellow, Questionnaire Design Research Laboratory, National Center for Health Statistics, Center for Disease Control and Prevention

ACADEMIC PUBLICATIONS

Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles

Gottschalk, Simon and Marko Salvaggio. 2015. "Stuck Inside of Mobile: Ethnography in Non-Places" *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 44:3-33.

Salvaggio, Marko, Robert Futrell, Christie Batson, and Barb Brents. 2013. "Water scarcity in the desert metropolis: how environmental values, knowledge and concern affect Las Vegas residents' support for water conservation policy." *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management* 57:588-611

Peer-Reviewed Encyclopedia Entry

Salvaggio, Marko. (Forthcoming 2016) "British Marxist Historians." In *The Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, edited by Bryan S. Turner. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell.

Manuscripts in Preparation

"Sustainable City in the Desert? Las Vegas Urbanization, Risk, and the Limits to Growth" (with Robert Futrell and Tyler Schafer, University of Nevada-Las Vegas). For submission to *Environmental Sociology*.

"Toward Solidarity Tourism: A Dialectical Critique of Revolution Tourism" (with Lazri DiSalvo, University of Connecticut). For submission to *Sociological Theory*.

"Whose Community? Gentrification and Community Building in Downtown Las Vegas" (with Andrea Dassopoulos, University of Nevada-Las Vegas). For submission to *City & Community*.

PROFESSIONAL RESEARCH REPORTS

2013 "Community Issues in the Historic West Las Vegas Neighborhood." Prepared for *Southern Nevada Strong in the Resilient Communities and Distressed Neighborhoods Report* developed by Gianpaolo Baiocchi et al. http://www.southernnevadastrong.org/files/managed/Document/283/01_SNS%20Urban%20Ethnography_Executive%20Summary_rev1.pdf

2012 "Environment and Sustainability in Nevada." Prepared for *The Social Health of Nevada: Leading Indicators and Quality of Life in the Silver State* edited by Dmitri Shalin. Las Vegas: UNLV Center for Democratic Culture Publications. http://cdclv.unlv.edu/healthnv_2012/environment.pdf

2010 *City of Las Vegas: Your City, Your Way Initiative Final Report*. Prepared for the City of Las Vegas. http://www.lasvegasnevada.gov/files/Your_City_Your_Way_Final_Report.pdf

2010 *Las Vegas Metropolitan Area Social Survey 2010 Highlights Report*. Prepared for the Southern Nevada Regional Planning Coalition. http://www.unlv.edu/sites/default/files/24/LVMAS_0.pdf

- 2009 *The 2009 UNLV Campus Sustainability Survey Report*. Prepared for the UNLV Urban Sustainability Initiative. <http://urban21.unlv.edu/pdf/sustain09.pdf>

INVITED MANUSCRIPT REVIEWER

Peer-Reviewed Journal

- 2014 *Society & Natural Resources*

PAPER PRESENTATIONS: ACADEMIC CONFERENCES

- 2014 “Whose Community? Gentrification and Community Building in Downtown Las Vegas” (with Andrea Dassopoulos, University of Nevada-Las Vegas), Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP) Annual Meeting, San Francisco, CA
- 2013 “Backpacking Subculture in Central America: Ideology, Practice, and Tourism,” American Sociological Association Annual Meeting, New York, NY
- 2013 “Backpacker Mobilities in Central America: Ideology, Practice and Tourism,” Chicago Ethnography Conference, Chicago, IL
- 2012 “Towards Solidarity Tourism: A Critical Analysis of Revolution Tourism” (with Lazri DiSalvo, University of Connecticut), American Sociological Association Annual Meeting, Denver, CO
- 2012 “Sustainable City in the Desert? Las Vegas Urbanization, Risk, and the Limits to Growth” (with Robert Futrell and Tyler Schafer, University of Nevada-Las Vegas), Annual Meeting of the Pacific Sociological Association, San Diego, CA
- 2011 “Touring the Revolution, Or, Revolutionary Tourism: Critical Theory and *Zapaturismo*” (with Lazri DiSalvo, University of Connecticut), American Sociological Association Annual Meeting, Las Vegas, NV
- 2011 “Managing Water Scarcity in Las Vegas: Understanding Residents’ Attitudes toward Water Conservation Policy” (with Robert Futrell, Christie Batson, and Barb Brents, University of Nevada-Las Vegas), Annual Meeting of the Pacific Sociological Association, Seattle, WA
- 2009 “Touring Revolutions or Revolutionary Tourism? Subjectivity, Performativity, and Commodity Fetishism” (with Lazri DiSalvo, University of Connecticut), Seventh International Conference of New Marxian Times, University of Massachusetts-Amherst
- 2009 “The ‘Backpacker’ Hostel: Commodification, Capital Penetration, and Tourism,” Seventh International Conference of New Marxian Times, University of Massachusetts-Amherst
- 2009 “Environmental Value: The Effects of Race, Political Ideology, and Climate Change Knowledge on Attitudes toward Global Warming,” Annual Meeting of the Pacific Sociological Association, San Diego, CA
- 2008 “The Commodification of Backpacking,” Fourth World Conference for Graduate Research in Tourism, Hospitality and Leisure, Antalya, Turkey
*Awarded second place for outstanding research and presentation among an international

group of university students from countries including Turkey, Israel, Iran, Malaysia, the United Kingdom, and Australia.

- 2008 “Backpacker Sources of Information: Consumption of Space, Place, Culture, and Scapes,” Annual Meeting of the Pacific Sociological Association, Portland, OR
- 2007 “Backpacker Ethnography in the *Ruta Maya*,” Annual Meeting of the Pacific Sociological Association, Oakland, CA
- 2006 “Not in My Neighborhood: Registered Sex Offenders” (with Doreen Anderson-Facile, California State University-Bakersfield), Annual Meeting of the Pacific Sociological Association, N. Hollywood, CA

PAPER PRESENTATIONS: RESEARCH FORUMS/COMPETITIONS

- 2013 “Towards Solidarity Tourism: A Critical Analysis of Revolution Tourism,” The Graduate College and Graduate and Professional Student Association Annual Research Forum, University of Nevada-Las Vegas
*Honorable mention for outstanding research and presentation among students of the Social Science Sessions
- 2011 “Water Scarcity and the Urban Desert: The Effects of Worldview, Knowledge, and Concern on Las Vegas Residents’ Attitudes toward Water Conservation,” The Graduate College and Graduate and Professional Student Association Annual Research Forum, University of Nevada-Las Vegas
*Honorable mention for outstanding research and presentation among students of the Social Science Sessions
- 2010 “Touring Revolutions or Revolutionary Tourism? Subjectivity, Performativity, and Commodity Fetishism,” The Graduate College and Graduate and Professional Student Association Annual Research Forum, University of Nevada-Las Vegas
*Awarded second place for outstanding research and presentation among students of the Social Science Sessions (\$100 award).
- 2008 “The ‘Backpacker’ Hostel: Capital Penetration and Tourism,” The Graduate College and Graduate and Professional Student Association Annual Research Forum, University of Nevada-Las Vegas
*Awarded first place for outstanding research and presentation among students of the Social Science Sessions (\$150 award).
- 2007 “The Commodification of Backpacking,” Ninth Annual Student Research Competition, California State University-Bakersfield

INVITED PRESENTATIONS

- 2014 “The ‘Westside’: Understanding Community Issues in the Historic West Las Vegas Neighborhood,” 2014 Southern Nevada Strong Summit
- 2013 “Tales from the Field: Graduate Students’ Perspectives on Teaching,” Graduate Seminar: Teaching Sociology (Professor Robert Futrell) University of Nevada-Las Vegas

- 2013 “Water Scarcity and the Desert Metropolis: The Effects of Values, Beliefs, and Concern on Las Vegas Residents’ Attitudes toward Water Conservation,” Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA) Conservation Group Meeting, Las Vegas, NV
- 2013 “Social and Environmental Implications of Tourism Development in Central America,” Undergraduate Course: Sociology of Comparative Societies (Instructor Dan Sahl), University of Nevada-Las Vegas
- 2012 “Tales from the Field: Graduate Students’ Perspectives on Teaching,” Graduate Seminar: Teaching Sociology (Professor Robert Futrell), University of Nevada-Las Vegas
- 2011 “Urbanization, Environment, and Society in Southern Nevada,” Undergraduate Course: Introduction to Sociology (Instructor Camille Beeler), University of Nevada-Las Vegas
- 2008 “Sociology of Tourism: Institutionalized vs. Non-Institutionalized Travel,” Undergraduate Course: Sociology of Leisure (Instructor Terry Pfeiffer), University of Nevada-Las Vegas
- 2008 “Toward Urban Sustainability in Las Vegas,” Undergraduate Course: Introduction to Sociology (Professor Fred Preston), University of Nevada-Las Vegas
- 2007 “Conducting Social Science Research: Graduate Students’ Experiences,” Undergraduate Course: Introduction to Research Methods (Professor Vandana Kohli), California State University-Bakersfield

COMPETITIVE FUNDING & AWARDS

Project Grants

- 2009 \$10,000. City of Las Vegas. *Citizen Engagement Initiative* – “Your City, Your Way.” Co-researcher with professors Robert Futrell, Christie Batson, and Barb Brents, and graduate students Andrea Dassopoulos and Chrissy Nicholas
- 2009 \$20,000. Southern Nevada Regional Planning Coalition. *Las Vegas Metropolitan Area Social Survey*. Co-researcher with professors Robert Futrell, Christie Batson, and Barb Brents, and graduate students Andrea Dassopoulos, Chrissy Nicholas, and Candace Griffith
- 2008 \$42,598. UNLV Presidential Research Award. *Las Vegas Metropolitan Area Social Survey*. Co-researcher with professors Robert Futrell, Christie Batson, and Barb Brents.
*I developed the initial research project proposal for Tom Perrigo, Chief Sustainability Officer, which led to this award. I was awarded the graduate assistantship position written into the proposal.

Fellowships

- 2014 \$64,000. Associate Research Fellowship, Questionnaire Design Research Laboratory, National Center for Health Statistics, Center for Disease Control and Prevention.
- 2012 \$25,000. UNLV Foundation President’s Graduate Fellowship, University of Nevada-Las Vegas.
*Awarded 1 of 3 university-wide prestigious fellowships.
- 2010 \$18,000. UNLV Urban Sustainability Initiative (USI), University of Nevada-Las Vegas.

*Renewed university-wide competitive graduate fellowship.

2009 \$18,000. UNLV Urban Sustainability Initiative (USI), University of Nevada-Las Vegas.
*Renewed university-wide competitive graduate fellowship.

2008 \$18,000. UNLV Urban Sustainability Initiative (USI).
*Awarded 1 of 3 university-wide inaugural graduate fellowships. This was the first year this fellowship was offered through USI and was part of a \$506,000 grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Energy.

Graduate Assistantships

2013 \$19,000. UNLV Department of Sociology and Urban Ethnography Institute.

2011 \$18,000. UNLV Department of Sociology and Urban Sustainability Initiative (USI).

2007 \$12,000. UNLV Department of Sociology.

University Scholarships and Awards

2012 \$1000. International Programs Scholarship, University of Nevada-Las Vegas.

2011 \$2,000. Dean's Graduate Student Stipend Award.
*Awarded 1 of 5 scholarships granted among the six Ph.D. departments in the UNLV College of Liberal Arts.

2011 \$550. International Programs Scholarship, University of Nevada-Las Vegas.

2010 \$100. Outstanding Graduate Student Paper Award.

2008 \$2,500. Marie Barbara Woodrich Scholarship, University of Nevada-Las Vegas.

2006 \$750. Graduate Equity Fellowship, California State University-Bakersfield.

2006 \$2,000. California State University Scholarship, California State University-Bakersfield.

External Scholarships

2009 \$1,500. USA Funds Scholarship of America.

2008 \$1,500. USA Funds Scholarship of America.

2007 \$1,500. USA Funds Scholarship of America.

2006 \$1,500. USA Funds Scholarship of America.

Research & Conference Travel Funding

2013 \$400. Graduate & Professional Student Association Conference Travel Award, University of Nevada-Las Vegas.

2012 \$850. Graduate & Professional Student Association Research Travel Award, University of Nevada-Las Vegas.

2012 \$300. Graduate & Professional Student Association Conference Travel Award, University of Nevada-Las Vegas.

- 2011 \$1,000. Graduate & Professional Student Association Research Travel Award, University of Nevada-Las Vegas.
- 2011 \$100. Alpha Kappa Delta International Honor Society Conference Travel Award.
- 2011 \$380. Graduate & Professional Student Association Conference Travel Award, University of Nevada-Las Vegas.
- 2009 \$700. Graduate & Professional Student Association Conference Travel Award, University of Nevada-Las Vegas.
- 2008 \$350. Graduate & Professional Student Association Conference Travel Award, University of Nevada-Las Vegas.
- 2007 \$400. Conference Travel Support for Student Researchers, California State University-Bakersfield.

PROFESSIONAL MEETING ORGANIZING AND SESSION WORK

- 2016 Session Organizer, “Rethinking Environmental Justice Movements,” Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP) Annual Meeting, Seattle, WA
- 2015 Session Organizer, “Communities and Environmental Justice,” Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP) Annual Meeting, Chicago, IL
- 2014 Session Presider, “Social Drivers of Unsustainable Human Ecological Relationships,” Annual Meeting of the Pacific Sociological Association, Portland, OR
- 2011 Organizing Committee Member, American Sociological Association Collective Behavior & Social Movements Section Workshop, University of Nevada-Las Vegas
- 2007 Panel Organizer and Moderator, “Succeeding in Graduate School: Graduate Student Experiences” California State University-Bakersfield

PROFESSIONAL COMMITTEES

- 2014 Committee Member, Regional Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice (RAI), Southern Nevada Strong, Las Vegas, NV
- 2013 Committee Member, International Protected Area Exchange (IPAX), University of Nevada-Las Vegas
- 2010 Committee Member, UNLV Campus Community Garden, Sustainability and Composting Group, University of Nevada-Las Vegas

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIPS

American Sociological Association (Section: Environment & Technology)
 Society for the Study of Social Problems

Pacific Sociological Association (Section: Ethnographers' Circle)
Sociologists for Women in Society
International Network of Scholar-Activists
Pan American Mobilities Network
American Association for Public Opinion Research
Alpha Kappa Delta International Sociology Honor Society

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE & COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

International

- 2012 Malinda Forest Reserve, Dangriga, Belize
- 2009 Mirafior Natural Reserve, Estelí, Nicaragua
- 2006 Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas (Frayba) Center for Human Rights, Chiapas, Mexico
- 2006 The Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO), Oaxaca, Mexico
- 2005 L.I.F.E. Argentina, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- 2005 Bakersfield Sister Cities: Querétaro, Mexico
- 2004 L.I.F.E. Argentina, Buenos Aires, Argentina

Local

- 2014 Vegas Roots Community Garden, Las Vegas, Nevada
- 2013 Vegas Roots Community Garden, Las Vegas, Nevada
- 2012 Vegas Roots Community Garden, Las Vegas, Nevada
- 2011 Tonopah Community Garden, Las Vegas, Nevada
- 2010 De-stigmatizing and Understanding Street Kids (DUSK), Las Vegas, Nevada
- 2009 De-stigmatizing and Understanding Street Kids (DUSK), Las Vegas, Nevada
- 2008 Nevada Conservation League, Las Vegas, Nevada
- 2007 Coalition for Im/Migrant Rights, Las Vegas, Nevada
- 2006 United States Immigration Reform Protests, Bakersfield, California
- 2006 Supervisor Pete Parra Foundation's "Navidad en el Plaza del Pueblo," Bakersfield, California
- 2006 Bicycle Bakersfield, Bakersfield, California

INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL & RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Europe

France, Belgium, Netherlands, Denmark, Germany, Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Austria,

Switzerland, Italy and Sicily, Greece, and Spain (Independent Travel; Dissertation Field Research)

Asia

Turkey (International Tourism Conference) and Kazakhstan (Nuclear Testing Oral History Research)

South America

Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay (Independent Travel; Humanitarian Service)

Central America

Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama (Master's and Dissertation Field Research)

Caribbean

Cuba (Dissertation Field Research)

North America

Mexico (Master's and Dissertation Field Research; Humanitarian Service)

MEDIA INTERVIEWS & RECOGNITION

University of Nevada-Las Vegas

2012 *Rebel Yell* featured article "Sociology forum to showcase city-centered student research." February 2012. <http://www.unlvrebelyell.com/2012/02/13/sociology-forum-to-showcase-city-centered-student-research/>

2009 *UNLV Magazine* featured article "Tools of the Trade: Mark Salvaggio travels through Central America to conduct research." Fall 2009

2009 *UNLV Impacts* featured article "A Different Take on Summer Break: Backpacking More than a Vacation." Issue XVI October 2009. <http://impacts.unlv.edu/2009/octActivities.html>

City of Las Vegas

2009 *Las Vegas Review-Journal* featured article "UNLV students reach out for experience in the summer: Students find lessons beyond the classroom." August, 16, 2009 <http://www.lvrj.com/news/53343382.html>

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