

CONCEPTUALISING THE NATURE OF LEARNING IN VOLUNTEER TOURISM

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ABSTRACT

Volunteer tourism is an increasingly popular and commercialised holiday experience that blends the activities of tourism and volunteering. While on holiday either domestically or abroad some individuals choose to volunteer their time, money and effort to a cause or project. Volunteer tourism projects vary widely in their focus, duration and cost but are often perceived and marketed as opportunities to learn and truly engage with the host community and gain both personal and professional benefits. This study recasts these experiences in the specific context of learning, offering an interpretation of volunteer tourism as an informal learning experience where active, free-choice and experiential learning opportunities may arise through social and physical interactions with the local community, other volunteer tourists and the natural environment. With a specific focus on questioning *what* and *how* individuals learn through volunteer tourism, this research aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of contemporary volunteer tourism experiences that recognises the complex and multifaceted nature of learning and volunteer tourism.

Semi-structured interviews with 13 participants were used to explore their previous volunteer tourism experiences. The interviews revealed that volunteer tourist learning related to three major categories: 1) skills and knowledge, 2) the Other, and 3) Self. The findings suggest that some of the most significant learning gained by volunteer tourists may result from enduring challenging and/or dangerous experiences. Recognising and understanding their learning is encouraged when volunteer tourists engage in critical reflection; however, while some individuals may reflect on their volunteer tourism experiences immediately, others may only reflect long after their project has ended. It is also argued that integrating orientation sessions and educators as elements of formal learning into volunteer tourism programmes may provide volunteer tourists with the knowledge they need to better navigate and process their experiences.

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1 THESIS OVERVIEW

1.1 Introduction

Learning does not occur solely in the classroom nor does it end when one finishes high school or graduates from university. Instead learning is a lifelong process that can occur in a multitude of settings beyond the classroom environment. This thesis focuses on volunteer tourism as one such setting and explores its potential as a learning experience for its participants. Volunteer tourism is an increasingly popular and commercialised holiday experience that blends the activities of tourism and volunteering. While on holiday either domestically or abroad some individuals choose to volunteer their time, money and effort to a cause or project. Volunteer tourism projects vary widely in their focus, duration and cost. A significant proportion of volunteer tourism projects place individuals from developed Western countries in much less privileged countries (Tourism Research and Marketing 2008). Common to all projects, however, is that they are promoted and perceived by many as an idealistic experience that can benefit both volunteer tourists and host communities (e.g. Wearing 2001, Brown & Morrison 2003, Uriely et al. 2003, McGehee & Santos 2005, Clifton & Benson 2006, McIntosh & Zahra 2007, Lepp 2008). Volunteer tourists are often promised a ‘once in a lifetime’ or ‘life-changing’ (Zahra 2011) learning experience that can help them achieve personal and professional development while having the chance to truly engage with the host community. Furthermore, the close interactions between the differing cultures of volunteer tourists and host communities often link volunteer tourism with positive outcomes of increased cross-cultural understanding and the creation of culturally competent global citizens (McGehee & Santos 2005, Wearing & Grabowski 2011).

Within the existing literature on volunteer tourism the majority of studies have focused mainly on volunteer tourists, looking at their profiles, motivations, benefits, needs and experiences both during and post-trip. However, what is lacking in the literature is a greater examination of volunteer tourism’s inherent learning opportunities. Located outside of the classroom and without the structure and restrictions of formal education (Ramsden 1992) volunteer tourism theoretically offers individuals an informal learning experience. Volunteer tourists are motivated by reasons such as wanting to be

immersed in a different culture, exploring a new country, meeting new people, finding out more about themselves and gaining insight into a future career path (Galley & Clifton 2004, Brown 2005, Rehberg 2005, Harlow & Pomfret 2007, Söderman & Snead 2008, Sin 2009, Lo & Lee 2011, Schott 2011). Such motivations are often fulfilled and discussed in terms of the resulting benefits gained by volunteer tourists. However, what is noteworthy but often overlooked is that learning is inherent in each of these desires and the experiences these desires inspire. A volunteer tourist's personal and professional development cannot be separated from the learning of particular personal and professional skills and knowledge that must occur first, just as cultural immersion often relies on an understanding of the host country's local customs and its particular socio-cultural, political, economic and environmental contexts.

While a handful of studies (Simpson 2004, Jones 2005, Sin 2009, Coghlan & Gooch 2011) have made specific links between volunteer tourism and the concept of learning, there is still more to be known about the quality and depth of volunteer tourists' learning experiences and how they come about. This approach raises some significant questions about the volunteer tourist experience: Are volunteer tourists only superficially engaged with their host country and organisation or are they able to learn to view their experiences holistically and make connections at scales ranging from personal to global? Do volunteer tourists learn everything immediately during their project or does their knowledge and understanding emerge more slowly? What kinds of volunteer tourism experiences lead to particular learning outcomes? Answering such questions may be able to add a new layer of meaning to previous volunteer tourism studies as well as improve understanding of contemporary volunteer tourism experiences. In order to seek such answers, this research refocuses the discussion of volunteer tourists' experiences within the specific context of learning. In the following thesis it is argued that through volunteer tourism individuals have opportunities to engage in a range of structured and unstructured, active, experiential and free-choice learning of skills and knowledge, about the Other, and about Self. Additionally, this research examines some of the challenging realities of how individuals learn through volunteer tourism projects and suggests that including elements of formal learning may help volunteer tourists in navigating and processing their experiences. This research has important implications for how volunteer tourism organisations develop and manage projects so that they may provide participants with safer and more effective learning experiences.

1.2 Research questions

This research recognises that understanding what kind of learning, if any, individuals gain from their time as volunteer tourists is inextricably linked to identifying how the learning experiences are facilitated or come about (see Ramsden 1992). Thus, the development of this thesis has been guided by two key research questions:

1. *What* do individuals learn through their volunteer tourism experiences?
2. *How* do individuals learn through their volunteer tourism experiences?

Through an in-depth examination of these questions, this thesis aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of the nature of learning experiences in volunteer tourism that recognises the complex and multifaceted nature of learning and volunteer tourism.

1.3 Scope of study

Previous studies in volunteer tourism have often focused on specific types of volunteer tourism projects. For example, Raymond and Hall (2008) researched short-term group volunteer tourism projects arranged through international sending organisations. Schott (2011) concentrated on volunteer tourists who had chosen individually-based projects that were relatively long-term and directly arranged with host organisations. Other studies have differentiated experiences according to the project focus, such as looking specifically at conservation volunteer tourism projects (e.g. Wearing 2001, Caissie & Halpenny 2003, Broad & Jenkins 2008, Cousins et al. 2009a,b). The present study, however, has not limited the research focus to any particular type of volunteer tourism experience so as to gain a more comprehensive understanding of volunteer tourist learning across as wide a range of scenarios as possible. In fact Lyons and Wearing (2012) emphasise that future volunteer tourism research should focus on “how volunteerism and tourism related phenomena intersect” (p.92) rather than limiting research to stereotypes of characteristics, interests or behaviours. Consequently, this research is inclusive of more atypical volunteer tourism activities, such as service-learning and cultural exchange programs (Lyons & Wearing 2012), in addition to more conventional volunteer tourism experiences.

In discussing the range of volunteer tourism learning experiences, this study acknowledges the potentially negative impacts of volunteer tourism that are increasingly

debated in the literature and popular media (see Raymond & Hall 2008, Guttentag 2009, Palacios 2010, Fraser 2012, Stein 2012). Certainly, understanding learning through volunteer tourism may have some relevance to concerns about cultural misunderstanding, reinforcing cultural stereotypes of the Other, and whether learning is mutually beneficial to host communities. However, in order to remain within the scope of the research questions, this study does not directly seek to contribute to these existing debates. Nevertheless, such issues may form the focus of future research into learning in the volunteer tourism experience.

This research uses the experiences of university students studying at the University of Otago in New Zealand as a case study to explore learning through volunteer tourism. Although university students are not representative of the diverse range of individuals who participate in volunteer tourism, it is useful to highlight their uniqueness and relevance in the context of volunteer tourism. Within the wider youth population university students make up a discrete subgroup with different demographics, socio-cultural, and socio-economic characteristics that make them a significant population of tourists worthy of study (Davies & Lea 1995, Carr 2003). With significant periods of free-time outside of university schedules university students also have greater time-related flexibility and different holiday patterns to other young adults working full-time (Pritchard & Morgan 1996, Carr 2003, Richards & Wilson 2004). University students may therefore have greater opportunities to participate in volunteer tourism projects in the holiday periods between semesters or years.

Many (but not all) university students are young people, who as a group constitute one of the key markets and most frequent participants of contemporary volunteer tourism projects (Callanan & Thomas 2005, Cousins 2007, Tourism Research & Marketing 2008, Dykhuis 2010). The popularity of volunteer tourism experiences among young people often between the ages of 18 and 25 is reflected in the number of studies that research their motivations and experiences as volunteer tourists (e.g. Wearing 2001, Simpson 2004, Rehberg 2005, Lepp 2008, Matthews 2008, Söderman & Snead 2008, Schott 2011). It is recognised that not all university students are young people and so a direct comparison between the two groups is not necessarily possible (Carr 2005). However, the overlap that does exist between young people and university students is sufficient that studies on the former as volunteer tourists, general tourists (e.g. Richards & King 2003,

Carr 2005), as well as volunteers (e.g. Handy et al. 2010, Nenga 2010) may be used in this research to help form an understanding of university students as volunteer tourists.

The increasing presence of students in volunteer tourism may be connected to the globalisation of higher education (Lyons & Wearing 2012). In particular Lyons and Wearing (2012) point to the trend of university students being expected to engage in international volunteering experiences that provide a practical element to their theoretical studies. These volunteer tourism projects are packaged as service-learning trips and “increasingly seen as a nonnegotiable component of undergraduate education” (Lyons & Wearing 2012, p. 90). As has been found among student volunteers in general, volunteering can double as work experience, which students may then use to enhance their CVs and employability (Hustinx 2001, Holdsworth 2010). Similarly, Jones (2011) suggests that volunteer tourism as ‘unconventional work’ may help prepare university students with the skills and knowledge they need to become part of the global labour market. However, it is also possible that university students may have much less specific reasons for becoming a volunteer tourist. For example, Holdsworth (2010) found that boosting their CVs or ‘doing good’ were not feature motivations for many student volunteers. Instead, some students did not necessarily have clear views or motivations about Self and volunteered “as much on a whim without a clearly defined purpose” (Holdsworth 2010, p.435). University student participation in volunteer tourism may also be less driven by personal motivations than the pressures and expectations from social groups such as family and friends (Francis 2011). As frequent participants of volunteer tourism, university students thus offer a useful and suitable lens through which to explore learning in these experiences. However, from this discussion it is also clear that university students may have certain defining characteristics that should be considered in the subsequent examination of what and how individuals learn through volunteer tourism.

1.4 Thesis structure

This thesis is organised into seven chapters. Chapter 2 presents an overview of the existing literature on volunteer tourism. Chapter 2 begins by introducing the concept of volunteer tourism in relation to its roots in volunteering and grounding it in its historical, political and social contexts. The development of volunteer tourism is discussed, including current issues with its commodification and commercialisation, to provide an understanding of how public participation and motivations for volunteer tourism

experiences have changed over time. The volunteer tourist is then established as the focus of this research through a discussion of the different types of volunteer tourists, their motivations and the benefits they may gain from their experiences.

Chapter 3 brings the review of volunteer tourism into the context of learning. The concept of learning is clarified, allowing for a discussion of how learning takes place, namely through formal and informal learning, free-choice and experiential learning and reflection. This chapter reviews the evidence for learning in the general tourism environment before narrowing the focus to discuss three main categories of learning - skills and knowledge, the Other and Self – in the specific context of volunteer tourism. Following this is a section on the potential obstacles to learning through volunteer tourism.

Chapter 4 explains the qualitative methods used in this research. This chapter justifies and describes the research strategy used to gather the information needed to explore volunteer tourists' learning experiences. The analysis of the results is explained and the role and potential impact of the researcher on the research project are considered. General participant information is then presented.

Chapters 5 and 6 offer the key findings and discussions that resulted from the analysis of the participants' interviews. Chapter 5 begins by addressing the first research question and critically examines the learning described by the research participants in relation to the wider literature on learning and volunteer tourism. Specifically, the learning that is discussed is based on the three categories of learning established in Chapter 2. The analysis provided in Chapter 6 highlights emergent themes pertaining to exactly how the learning identified in Chapter 5 came about. Chapter 6 is therefore tied back to the findings of Chapter 5 to examine potential relationships between learning outcomes and the types of experiences or situations an individual may encounter as a volunteer tourist.

Chapter 7 presents a summary of the key findings and a conclusion to this research. This last chapter also discusses the implications of the findings for volunteer tourism management in developing safer and more effective learning experiences. Alongside the conclusions, recommendations are made for future research with a specific call for studies exploring learning in the context of different types of projects and volunteer tourists to build on the research presented herein.

2 VOLUNTEER TOURISM

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is concerned with introducing the concept of volunteer tourism and how it is situated within the related theme of volunteering. A discussion of early volunteer tourism and the development of volunteer tourism over time leads to an understanding of volunteer tourism experiences offered today. The diversity of contemporary volunteer tourism projects is also identified to show the range of experiences that may be considered within the scope of this research. As this research focuses on the learning experiences of individual participants, this chapter also provides some background understanding of who volunteer tourists are. This understanding is based in part on the types and continuums of volunteer tourists already identified in the literature. Volunteer tourists' motivations and how they are said to benefit from their experiences are considered for their potential impact on learning through volunteer tourism. Overall, this chapter presents a conceptual understanding of volunteer tourism as a necessary backdrop against which Chapter 3 will discuss the concept of learning and how it relates to volunteer tourism.

2.2 Volunteer tourism and volunteering

The concept of ‘volunteer tourism’ is formed at the intersection between the activities of volunteerism and tourism. The term ‘volunteer tourism’ faces a range of definitions which have been proposed by academics, industry and other stakeholders such that there is no single description accepted by all or applicable to every volunteer tourism project. Projects vary hugely in many respects, including the nature of their volunteer activities (i.e. community- or environment-based), geographical location, sending and host organisations, guiding objectives and principles, duration, cost, level of volunteers’ contact with locals, and the skills required by volunteers. Such diversity is clear in the key clusters of volunteer tourism projects and their associated sub-activities found by Tomazos and Butler (2009) in an analysis of just under 2500 volunteer tourism projects (see Table 2.1). Community welfare, teaching and environmental projects were found to

Table 2.1: Diversity in the key clusters of volunteer tourism projects

<i>Project cluster</i>	<i>Sub-activities</i>
Community welfare	Community development Care of children and elderly Disability Peace Human rights/legal
Teaching	Teaching a foreign language Sports coaching
Environmental	Nature conservation Wildlife protection Global warming
Medical	Hospital support Pandemic (e.g. HIV) support Drug rehabilitation
Cultural	Arts Cultural exchange Empowerment of women Heritage conservation Museum support
Business development	IT support Accounting support Farming/organic
Building	Construction Renovation Water management
Research	Wildlife monitoring Land-mapping/zoning
Other/Miscellaneous	Catastrophe relief Olympic games

Source: Tomazos and Butler (2009)

be the most common across the range of projects (Tomazos & Butler 2009). For some projects, individuals are able to contact and organise their volunteer tourism experience directly through a host organisation. However, for the most part, individuals book their experiences while they are still at home with the assistance of international volunteer tourism sending organisations based in developed Western countries (Raymond 2007).

These sending organisations then place individuals with non-profit volunteer tourism host organisations in developing countries where individuals volunteer on a project for a period of time. The volunteering component may take up a little or all of an individual's trip and is often supplemented by opportunities to engage in more traditional touristic activities and explore the destination.

It is of little surprise that no definition has been able to encapsulate the increasing diversity of volunteer tourism opportunities, nor the related ambiguities in what particulars constitute 'true' volunteer tourists and volunteer tourism projects (Lyons & Wearing 2012). Although commonly referred to in the literature and media as 'voluntourism', 'volunteer travel', 'volunteer vacation', and 'international volunteering', the term 'volunteer tourism' is used in this thesis because it is the most inclusive in its spectrum of possible volunteer tourism activities compared to terms such as 'voluntourism', which are limited to describing shorter term "touring with a little bit of volunteering thrown in" (STA Travel 2012a). This research is guided by a useful working definition offered by Wearing (2001), who describes volunteer tourism as when:

tourists who, for various reasons, volunteer in an organised way to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society or environment. (Wearing 2001, p.1)

This definition highlights volunteer tourism's roots in the concept of volunteering. Volunteering describes the practice where individuals freely offer their services in an attempt to improve some aspect of society or help make a positive difference (Bussell & Forbes 2002). Traditionally, volunteers have been associated with altruistic motivations, being members of religious or political groups and long-term loyalty to volunteering with the same organisation (Hustinx 2001). However, there are 'pure' and 'broad' opinions and definitions that differ in who they distinguish as a volunteer. For example, Bussell and Forbes (2002) state that "to be considered a volunteer, altruism must be the central motive where the reward is intrinsic to the act of volunteering" (p. 248). Jenner (1982) is much more specific in her definition of a volunteer as "a person who, out of free will and without wages, works for a not-for-profit organisation which is formally organised and has as its purpose service to someone or something other than its membership" (p. 30).

In an attempt to clarify the meaning of the term ‘volunteer’ Cnaan et al. (1996) examined 11 widely used definitions of the term and identified four key dimensions that the definitions had in common. Their study allocated to each of the four dimensions its own continuum of categories, which differentiated between ‘pure’ and ‘broadly defined’ volunteers (see Table 2.2). The first dimension refers to the notion of ‘free-choice’ or how voluntary an act may be. Individuals may choose to volunteer out of free will but at the other end of the continuum they may be obligated to volunteer (e.g. performing community service under a court order). The second dimension concerns remuneration where purist definitions of volunteering preclude any external rewards, while a broader approach allows the volunteer to be repaid a small allowance. The context in which individuals volunteer forms the third dimension, where some definitions distinguish between formal volunteering (when individuals are placed through an organisation) and informal volunteering such as giving unpaid help to friends and neighbours as an individual (Cnaan et al. 1996). The final dimension relates to who benefits from the voluntary act. Cnaan et al. (1996) found that purist definitions only allow people who are strangers to the volunteer to benefit. Lyons (2003) notes that early definitions of volunteering tend to emphasise this altruistic aspect where the “Classic volunteer” (Hustinx 2001, p. 62) seeks only to benefit others. However, progressing along Cnaan et al.’s (1996) continuum, other definitions will accept strangers, friends and relatives and

Table 2.2 Key dimensions and categories of volunteering

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Categories</i>
Free choice	1. Free will (the ability to voluntarily choose) 2. Relatively uncoerced 3. Obligation to volunteer
Remuneration	1. None at all 2. None expected 3. Expenses reimbursed 4. Stipend/low pay
Structure	1. Formal 2. Informal
Intended beneficiaries	1. Benefit/help others/strangers 2. Benefit/help friends or relatives 3. Benefit oneself (as well)

Source: Cnaan et al. (1996, p. 371)

even the volunteers themselves as beneficiaries.

It is possible to further our understanding of volunteer tourism by relating it to Cnaan et al.'s (1996) four key dimensions of volunteering outlined above. Firstly, while some individuals may participate in volunteer tourism freely, other individuals may do so because of expectations and pressure from family and friends (Francis 2011) or because they seek to gain academic credit for their formal studies (Earthwatch 2012). In these latter instances, volunteer tourist participation may contain some element of obligation. For the second dimension of remuneration, volunteer tourists usually (but not always) pay for the opportunity to participate but there are some projects where they are given a modest allowance (e.g. Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development 2012). With respect to structure, this research views volunteer tourism as formal volunteering as most projects are organised through the structure of a sending or host organisation. Finally, volunteer tourism differs from more traditional purist notions of volunteering where the individual is depicted as altruistically motivated (Hustinx 2001) and focused on benefitting others in need. Instead, volunteer tourism mirrors the broadest of definitions as covered by Cnaan et al. (1996) when the volunteer may also be accepted as a beneficiary.

Volunteer tourism is popularly perceived as being mutually beneficial where host communities theoretically benefit from a volunteer's time, money and effort, and volunteers experience personal transformation and development while also enhancing their employment prospects (Wearing 2001). This relationship is frequently promoted by volunteer tourism organisations, such as one sending organisation that claims prospective volunteer tourists can "make an integral difference to the futures of foreign communities, while adding to their own portfolio" (i-to-i Volunteering 2012). In this way volunteer tourists appear to reflect Hustinx's (2001) "New" (p. 62) generation of volunteers, who expect to benefit from their efforts and for whom the act of volunteering is "a matter of giving and receiving" (p.65).

That volunteers tourists typically pay to participate and the position of the volunteer tourist as a major beneficiary of the experience clearly sets volunteer tourism apart from traditional altruistic notions of volunteering. Although these are important differences that mark the point where the two concepts diverge, the roots of volunteer tourism in volunteering are also strong. At a very fundamental level volunteer tourism may be

simply viewed as volunteering that takes place outside of one's familiar home environment. Consequently, this research will draw from the broader literature on volunteers and volunteering to explore learning in the volunteer tourism experience.

2.3 The development of formal volunteer tourism

Formal volunteer tourism where individuals organise their placements through a sending or host organisation is not a new concept. This section outlines how formal volunteer tourism has evolved from its early roots in volunteering its current state as one of the fastest growing trends in the tourism industry (Fraser 2012).

2.3.1 Historical context

Tomazos and Butler (2009) trace the origins of formal volunteer tourism to the formation of the US Peace Corps in 1961 following the political tensions of World War Two. Early volunteer tourism experiences involved skilled individuals embarking on longer-term (two years) volunteer placements in developing countries where the focus was to assist local communities. These early volunteer tourism experiences in the 1960s had their roots in traditional notions of volunteering. Like the Classic volunteers described by Hustinx (2001), early volunteer tourists' choice of organisation and activities was based on strong cultural identification or traditional socio-economic, political and religious associations. As such, volunteer tourism projects were originally offered through charity and government-supported organisations based in developed countries (e.g. Red Cross, the Peace Corps (US), Voluntary Services Abroad (New Zealand) and Voluntary Services Overseas (UK)).

The development of volunteer tourism in the late 20th century is explored in detail by Callanan and Thomas (2005). Following Wearing (2001) they link the growth of volunteer tourism to tourism experiences such as eco-tourism, responsible tourism and sustainable tourism that emerged in the 1980s. Like these experiences volunteer tourism offered the public an alternative experience to the standardised packaged holidays of mass tourism (Callanan & Thomas 2005). It was during this period that the altruistic ideals of volunteer tourism became established through the development of experiences that attempted to minimise perceived negative impacts of tourism on the host community and its resources and be "consistent with natural, social and community values and which

allow both hosts and guests to enjoy positive and worthwhile interaction and shared experiences” (Wearing 2001, p. 32).

The development of volunteer tourism can also be linked to the expansion of volunteering culture generally. For example, interest in volunteering has grown in recent years across the United States of America and Europe (Milligan 2007, Third Sector Foresight 2012). There has also been a global increase in individuals volunteering their time to assist others (Charities Aid Foundation 2011). The naming of 2001 and 2011 as International Years of Volunteers by the United Nations highlights the value of the volunteer at a global scale. To some extent, the growth in volunteer numbers may be linked to the development of a “guilt conscious” (Callanan & Thomas 2005, p. 183) society that is increasingly aware of a range of ethical issues. Volunteer tourism provides these conscious volunteers with experiences “that put them face to face with some of our most important global challenges” (Megan Epler Wood, Executive Director of Planeterra, in The International Ecotourism Society 2011a). By assisting others through volunteer tourism, individuals may be able to better understand and respond to the negative socio-cultural and environmental impacts associated with contemporary society (McGehee & Santos 2005). Volunteer tourism is therefore now perceived by many as an opportunity to ‘give back’ and ‘help out’ the (usually developing world) communities they are visiting and society at large.

2.3.2 Contemporary volunteer tourism projects

The continuing popularity of volunteer tourism as a holiday option is evident in results from recent industry surveys that indicate a strong and ongoing growth in both supply and demand of volunteer tourism experiences (Tourism Research & Marketing 2008, The International Ecotourism Society, 2011b). Over time, however, certain trends in volunteer tourism have developed, some of which are obvious while others are less clearly defined. A global review in 2008 estimated that the number of individuals taking part in volunteer tourism each year had grown to 1.6 million, which culminated in a total annual market value of between £832m and £1.3bn at the time of research (Tourism Research & Marketing 2008). Participants generally fund their own volunteer tourism experiences and it is not uncommon that volunteer tourism experiences may cost even more than a normal holiday in the same destination (Wearing 2001). STA Travel (2012a) justifies the costs of volunteer tourism participation by explaining that costs usually

include the volunteers' accommodation and food, a contribution to the host organisation or community and measures to ensure the volunteers' safety. Volunteer tourism sending organisations are no longer just non-profit NGOs or government aid development groups but also include academic institutions and private and commercial for-profit organisations (Tomazos & Butler 2009). The majority of participants come from relatively rich destinations and take part in volunteer tourism projects that are usually located in Africa, Asia or South America (Tourism Research & Marketing 2008).

Volunteer tourism today is a highly diversified sector but characterised by relatively short-term projects. In their analysis of 1,222 volunteer tourism project activities Callanan and Thomas (2005) found that projects less than four weeks in duration are the most popular compared to the relatively few volunteer tourism opportunities that last for more than six months. Their study identified that longer-term projects generally require greater commitments from volunteer tourists who are also expected to have specific skills or qualifications, often in areas of medicine and environmental protection. On the other hand, shorter-term projects which are also referred to in the literature as 'volunteer vacations' (Brown 2005), 'voluntourism' (Callanan & Thomas 2005), 'mission-lite' and 'mini-mission' (Brown & Morrison 2003) may be more popular because they are shorter in duration, less focused on the skills of the tourists, and can be easily integrated as a component of an overall holiday.

The rise in the number of available short-term volunteer tourism projects may also be a reflection of current volunteering trends, which indicate growing preferences for episodic volunteering (Holmes & Smith 2009, Third Sector Foresight 2012). This pattern of volunteering activity is typical of Hustinx's (2001) identification of New volunteers who expect some benefit from their efforts, are more selective about their choice of organisation and also "prefer a succession of short-term, clearly delineated commitments that can be terminated easily" as their interests change (p.64). Rather than appealing to more traditional volunteers who are devoted long-term to a single organisation, short-term volunteer tourism projects are better suited to satisfying the needs of New volunteers who as volunteer tourists have a vast array of choices in where to go, how long to stay for, what activities they want to do and generally how they want to spend their time.

International volunteer tourism projects have been the focus of most academic, media (Fraser 2012) and online discussions (Ian 2012, iwenig 2012) of volunteer tourism

even though domestic volunteer tourism does occur (see Caissie & Halpenny 2003). This focus is partly to do with the cross-cultural nature of these volunteer tourism experiences and expectations that volunteer tourists may develop greater cross-cultural awareness and a deeper understanding of developing world communities and become motivated towards engaging in social movement activities (Jones 2005, McGehee & Santos 2005). Consequently, volunteer tourism has also become embedded in discourses of ‘global citizenship’ (Lyons et al. 2011), ‘international development’ (Simpson 2004) and ‘development education’ (Diprose 2012).

The development of volunteer tourism has also led to overlaps with other niche tourism markets such as ecotourism (Harlow & Pomfret 2007) and ‘gap-year’ or ‘OE’ (Overseas Experience) travellers, who are typically young people in early adulthood travelling and working abroad typically for a year (Simpson 2005, Lyons et al. 2011). The presence of backpackers in volunteer tourism has also been noted in the literature (Söderman & Snead 2008), as volunteering abroad may be able to meet backpackers’ motivations to engage with and learn about other cultures (Ooi & Laing 2010). Experiences like service-learning and cultural exchange programs, as other phenomena combining volunteering and tourism, may also be included as volunteer tourism experiences but have heretofore been considered ambiguous or obscured by narrow definitions of the field (Lyons & Wearing 2012).

2.3.3 Commodification and commercialisation of volunteer tourism

Volunteer tourism today operates against a backdrop of commodification and commercialisation, which may have implications for the nature of the volunteer tourist experience and the learning gained by participants. Commodification and commercialisation are terms that have been associated with the recent proliferation of volunteer tourism opportunities and the continuing segmentation and diversification of the market. Initial concerns about commodification and commercialisation were raised by the entry of private and commercial companies into the volunteer tourism industry wanting to compete for a share of the market. Looking at the commodification of conservation-focused volunteer tourism, Cousins et al. (2009a) comment that “Once the preserve of charities, the sector now hosts a proliferation of private companies seeking to make money by selling international conservation work to tourists as a commodity” (p. 1). The focus on making a profit emphasised in this comment echoes similar parallels

that others have drawn between contemporary volunteer tourism and the characteristics of packaged holidays in the successful mass tourism model (Brown & Morrison 2003, Tomazos & Butler 2009, Coren & Gray 2012).

The growth in the number of volunteer tourism organisations and concerns about profit-making have raised questions about the nature and quality of contemporary volunteer tourism experiences. While some operations may strive towards the ideals of volunteer tourism, others are clearly operating under a business model where profit is the key objective. In their analysis of volunteer tourism over time, Tomazos and Butler (2009) conclude that “the balance is clearly shifting from altruism and commitment to hedonism and profit”. For example, in a discussion on VolunTourism.org (2008) of the merits and pitfalls of volunteer tourism, it is stated that “Critics assert that some organisations accept voluntourists more because they need the funds this generates than because they need the volunteers themselves”. As a result, there are concerns that some volunteer tourism sending and host organisations do not make efforts to provide meaningful experiences that lead to real benefits for volunteer and host communities (see Ian 2011).

In addition to such concerns about profit-making, critics note a growing emphasis on the holiday aspect of volunteer tourism rather than the volunteering component. Evidence that some volunteer tourism experiences are more focused on hedonistic tourism activities is suggested in the global distribution of volunteer tourism projects. For example, Cousins’ (2007, p.1029) research on UK-based conservation operators found that projects tended to “cluster around relatively few countries (including the popular holiday destinations of South Africa, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Australia, Kenya and Mexico)”. The popularity of volunteer tourism projects in well established tourism destinations suggests that some volunteer tourism sending organisations may establish projects that are biased toward popular holiday destinations instead of allocating volunteers and resources according to need (Cousins 2007, Tomazos & Butler 2012).

The commercial and commodified nature of some volunteer tourism projects may have consequences for the volunteer tourist experience, especially as a potential obstacle to learning as will be discussed later in Chapter 3. A focus on profit-making and offering desirable tourism experiences may mean that volunteer tourism projects are not as well-structured or organised, leading to “many stories of volunteers arriving at projects only to

find there is little for them to do, no logistical support on the ground or they are unprepared or unskilled for the experience” (Stein 2012). As volunteer tourism projects begin to mirror packaged commercial tourism experiences (Tomazos & Butler 2009), the shallower the learning experiences of participants with the host community may become. For example, Coren and Gray’s (2012) comparison of two volunteer tourism projects found that the cultural experiences of volunteer tourists on a more commodified¹ project in Thailand were more superficial than participants on a relatively decommodified² project in Vietnam. Volunteer tourists may also become distracted from their volunteer responsibilities by the attractions of popular holiday destinations (Tomazos & Butler 2012). The commodification and commercialisation of volunteer tourism may therefore reduce the likelihood that individuals will achieve learning outcomes such as developing cross-cultural understanding and a global perspective, which depend on meaningful interactions with the host culture and community.

Importantly, this discussion does not wish to imply that all volunteer tourism experiences are necessarily poorly organised or managed or that volunteer tourists will have only minimal and superficial interactions with the local people if offered by a private-commercial operator. Partnerships between private and commercial tourism companies, NGOs and charities suggest that it is possible for these apparently disparate groups to strive for similar goals. For example, international youth travel agency STA Travel states that their new partnership with non-profit organisation Planeterra (STA Travel 2012b) has taken them on a “responsible travel journey” that has enabled them to help support worldwide community development projects through their volunteer travel programs and direct funding. Recognising the different ways that commercialisation and

¹ The term ‘commodified’ here refers to “the structural tendency in capitalism whereby matters of value are transformed into objects with a price that can potentially be sold on the market” (Jameson 2009, p.257). According to Debord (in Macey 2000, p. 84) commodification is the change, in this case of volunteering effort, from use-value to exchange-value, that is in exchange for money, which brings about profound alienation between the parties of the exchange, that is characteristic of capitalism. The development of the market trade to include the practice of volunteering during one’s holiday as a service meant for trading would be an example of commodification. The act of volunteering during one’s holiday is viewed as a commercial relationship that is included into pricing systems and market relations.

² Decommodification, in contrast, sees the conversion of exchange-value back to use-value. When referring to a ‘decommodified’ volunteer tourism project, the volunteer effort becomes less of a superficial and commercial relationship than an opportunity to achieve meaningful environmental and economical contribution and cultural immersion with the host community (Coren & Gray, 2012).

commodification may impact volunteer tourism experiences may be useful in understanding what and how learning occurs through volunteer tourism.

2.4 The volunteer tourist

Currently the literature presents an image of a stereotypical volunteer tourist as someone who is typically in their mid-20s, female, well-educated and from a developed Western country (Galley & Clifton 2004, Tourism Research & Marketing 2008, Cousins et al. 2009b). However, what has also emerged from the body of existing literature is the heterogeneity among volunteer tourists, who include not only youth and students (Callanan & Thomas 2005, Rehberg 2005) but also early retirees (Stoddart & Rogerson 2004) and families (Brown 2005). Understanding how volunteer tourists differ and how these differences shape lived-volunteer tourism experiences will have important implications for managing successful volunteer tourism projects and, in the context of this study, for how individuals learn through volunteer tourism. To date, researchers have considered volunteer tourists' development of Self (e.g. Wearing & Neil 2000, Wearing 2001, Wickens 2011), post-project experience (e.g. Mittelberg & Palgi 2011), relationships with host communities (e.g. Broad 2003, Lyons 2003, McIntosh & Zahra 2007, Clifton & Benson 2006, Raymond & Hall 2008) and specific areas of volunteer tourism such as conservation (e.g. Wearing 2001, Coghlan 2008, Cousins et al. 2009b). However, it is volunteer tourists' motivations and the differences among the motivations that have received the most attention in the literature (e.g. Caissie & Halpenny 2003, Brown 2005, Rehberg 2005, Broad & Jenkins 2008, Chen & Chen 2011, Schott 2011).

Volunteer tourists are most frequently described according to their level of commitment to a project and whether their motivations are altruistic or instrumental. Many studies suggest that volunteer tourists are driven by altruistic motivations to 'give back', 'make a difference', and/or 'make a positive change' (Wearing 2001, Caissie & Halpenny 2003, Schott 2011). Altruistic motivations as the driving force behind volunteer tourist participation are being questioned, however, as it is becoming increasingly apparent that volunteer tourists are also motivated by more instrumental reasons that benefit themselves (Mustonen 2007). These reasons include relatively superficial motivations of wanting to travel, taking a break, boosting their CV, and enhancing an individual's self-image (Uriely et al. 2003, Rehberg 2005, Söderman & Snead 2008) as well as more profound reasons of personal development (Rehberg 2005,

Schott 2011). Volunteer tourists' motivations are discussed in further detail later on in this chapter when examining how individuals may benefit from their volunteer tourism experiences.

The differences between volunteer tourists are described and categorised in the literature in a variety of ways. Terms such as 'volunteer-minded' and 'vacation-minded' (Brown & Morrison 2003) and 'VOLUNtourists' or 'volunTOURISTS' (Daldeniz & Hampton 2011) have been used to distinguish between individuals who are altruistically motivated to help others and willing to volunteer for most of their holiday time and individuals who have self-interest motives and/or volunteer for only a small portion of their overall holiday. Rather than taking a polar view of volunteer tourist motivations as either altruistic or non-altruistic, Callanan and Thomas (2005) put forward the idea that participants exist along a continuum from 'shallow', to 'intermediate', to 'deep' volunteer tourists. Callanan and Thomas (2005) also consider how the motivations of different volunteer tourist types relate to other factors such as their skills and qualifications, the extent of their involvement in a project and how much they contribute to the local community (see Table 2.3). Callanan and Thomas' shallow and deep volunteer tourists resemble Brown and Morrison's (2003) vacation-minded and volunteer-minded individuals, respectively. Intermediate volunteer tourists, however, have both altruistic and self-development motives, seeking to contribute to the host community while still able to engage in touristic activities. Acceptance is growing of the fact that most volunteer tourists are driven by a combination of altruistic and instrumental motivations (Broad & Jenkins 2008, Söderman & Snead 2008). Along similar lines Rehberg (2005) describes volunteer tourists as 'altruistic individualists' and suggests that their motivations are not singular and static but multiple and changing.

Given the potential for an individual to be driven by multiple motivations, there are concerns over how volunteer tourists reconcile their sometimes conflicting motivations. For example, an individual may be really seeking to explore the sights in their host country but their volunteer tourism activities confine them to the location of the project. Consequently, Simpson (2004, 681) questions whether volunteer tourism can successfully combine "the hedonism of tourism with the altruism of development work". This tension is reflected in Tomazos and Butler's (2012) argument that volunteer tourists must constantly, and not always successfully, try to balance their commitment as volunteers

Table 2.3: Continuum of volunteer tourist types

	Shallow	Intermediate	Deep
Importance of destination to volunteer	Destination important in decision-making	Focuses on both the project and destination	More attention given to project than destination
Duration of participation	Short-term, < 4 weeks	Medium-term, < 6 months	Medium to long-term, 6 months of intensive shorter-term projects
Focus of experience: altruistic v. self-interest	Self-interest motives more important than altruistic ones	Self-interest motives are of similar importance to altruistic ones	Altruistic motives more important than self-interest ones
Skills/qualifications	Offer minimal skills or qualifications	May offer generic skills	May offer some technical/professional skills and experience and/or time
Level of involvement in project	Tends to be more passive in nature	Mixture of passive and active participation	Tends to be more active in nature
Contribution to local community	Minimal direct contribution to local area	Moderate direct contribution to local area	High level of direct contribution to local area

Source: Based on Callanan and Thomas (2005, p. 197)

with their less altruistic desires as tourists who are pursuing the pleasures of socialising and relaxation. Investigation of learning through volunteer tourism in this research will therefore take into account the potential for volunteer tourists to demonstrate qualities of both tourists and volunteers.

2.5 Motivations and benefits of volunteer tourists

Debates surrounding who really benefits from volunteer tourism point to three potential beneficiaries: the volunteer tourist (e.g. Wearing 2001, Brown 2005), the host community (e.g. Simpson 2004, McIntosh & Zahra 2007, Guttentag 2009) and wider society, both locally and globally (e.g. McGehee 2002, McGehee & Santos 2005). However, in order to remain within the scope of the current study the following discussion focuses only on what benefits may accrue to individual volunteer tourists. The benefits of volunteer tourism to the individual has been a frequent subject of volunteer tourism studies and has typically been explored in concert with volunteer tourist motivations, given that some benefits may be understood as actualisations of volunteer tourists' motivations to participate. The following section summarises the range of commonly identified

volunteer tourist motivations and benefits into three key categories: 1) skills and experience, 2) cultural immersion, cultural competency and global awareness and 3) personal growth and development. These three categories of motivations and benefits are not necessarily mutually exclusive as aspects of each can be understood under one or more of the other headings; however, this broad clustering of motivations and benefits will be useful in later efforts to conceptualise them as expressions of volunteer tourist learning. Additionally, this research recognises that the motivations and benefits discussed here are not unique to volunteer tourists but are attributable to general volunteers as well as other types of tourists, including gap year students, backpackers and ecotourists. Relevant literature from these associated areas will therefore be used to inform the discussion of volunteer tourists' motivations and benefits.

2.5.1 Skills and experiences

Volunteer tourists may benefit from developing various practical skills and gaining new experiences as a result of carrying out their different volunteer activities and interacting with their host community and other volunteers. Although some volunteer tourism projects specifically require individuals to have relevant skills and qualifications, this is not so for many volunteer tourism projects where enthusiasm and a good attitude may be more desirable (Callanan & Thomas 2005). Particularly in the latter cases, volunteer tourists may actively seek to learn or develop certain skills relevant to the project. For example, in Stoddart and Rogerson's (2004) case study of a construction project in South Africa, some participants expressed the motivation to learn or improve their building skills. Many volunteer tourism projects also take place in countries where English is not a native language. For many international volunteers the opportunity to develop or practise one's foreign language skills by interacting with local people is a common motivation (Rehberg 2005, Söderman & Snead 2008, Schott 2011). Moreover, as Mittelberg and Palgi (2011) found of international volunteers at an Israeli kibbutz, individuals reported the successful development of these language skills. Benefits to volunteer tourists may also include the acquisition of 'soft' or social skills, which mainly refer to interpersonal, communication and teamwork capabilities that are considered beneficial in terms of personal and professional development (Jones 2005). As a result of interacting with members of the local community and/or other volunteer tourists, participants may acquire the soft skills which are more difficult to achieve through formal

education (Heath 2007). In his study of gap year volunteer tourists Jones (2005) argues that young people in particular benefit greatly from the development of these soft skills, which increase their value as potential employees.

In addition to useful practical and social skills, volunteer tourism may offer individuals the benefits of having new experiences, especially ones in an international and/or developing country setting. Specifically, individuals may benefit professionally through volunteer tourism as a form of ‘unconventional work’ (Jones 2011) as mentioned previously. For example, through their volunteer tourism activities, individuals may gain some insight or hands-on experience in their future study or career path and such motivations for career development are frequently expressed by volunteer tourists (Rehberg 2005, Broad & Jenkins 2008, Söderman & Snead 2008). Schott (2011) suggests that professional motivations of this kind may be associated with an individual’s life-stage. Schott’s research identifies that young people as volunteer tourists may have transitional and directional development needs as they seek to gain some direction or greater clarity for their next life decision through their volunteer tourism experiences. Jones (2011) further emphasises the professional value of volunteer tourism experiences for young people by suggesting they help prepare individuals for becoming part of the global labour market. To this effect, gapyear.com (2012) markets their volunteer tourism projects to potential participants as “a chance for you to gain work experience … and will look great on your CV. The skills you’ll acquire … can be used anywhere around the world.” Such intentions to include a volunteer tourism project on one’s CV reflect Uriely et al.’s (2003) argument that volunteer tourists may use their experiences as a form of social capital that promotes positive self-presentation. In the same way, volunteer tourists may feel that others, be they potential employers or friends and family, will perceive them as more exciting, interesting, capable or open-minded because of their volunteer tourism experiences.

2.5.2 Cultural immersion, cross-cultural understanding and global awareness

Travelling abroad to be immersed in a different culture is often a primary motivation for individuals to participate in volunteer tourism (Brown 2005, Rehberg 2005, McIntosh & Zahra 2007, Broad & Jenkins 2008, Sin 2009, Chen & Chen 2011, Lo & Lee 2011, Zahra 2011). Volunteer tourism is perceived as a way that individuals can be more than just normal tourists (Söderman & Snead 2008), see their host country “from within” (Stoddart

& Rogerson 2004, p. 316) and be physically and emotionally immersed in the local culture and community (Brown 2005). Volunteer tourism activities provide individuals with the opportunity to interact with local people beyond superficial customer service settings and volunteer tourists may even live with local families or within local villages for the duration of their project.

The close and frequent interactions among volunteer tourists and between volunteer tourists and the local community may lead to the desired outcome of improved cross-cultural understanding. Although there is certainly potential for cross-cultural *misunderstanding* (Raymond & Hall 2008), a number of studies demonstrate that volunteer tourists are able to gain a deeper appreciation of the local customs and practices of the host community as well as the cultural backgrounds of other volunteer tourists (McIntosh & Zahra 2007, Lepp 2008, Sin 2009, Mittelberg & Palgi 2011, Wearing & Grabowski 2011). Cross-cultural understanding can involve more than being aware of local customs and practices. Volunteer tourists may be able to realise and dispel popular cultural, ethnic and racial stereotypes associated with host communities they may have initially held (McIntosh & Zahra 2007, Lepp 2008, Wearing & Grabowski 2011). Studies tend to focus on how developed-world volunteer tourists develop more insightful views of their developing-world host communities; however, McIntosh and Zahra's (2007) findings of meaningful cultural exchange between Australian volunteer tourists and local Maori culture during a project in New Zealand indicates that cross-cultural understanding is also possible between developed-world volunteer tourists and hosts.

As volunteer tourists become more culturally competent, they may also be able to develop a global awareness or perspective (Jones 2005, McGehee & Santos 2005). This may occur when volunteer tourism experiences inspire individuals to challenge their existing attitudes and worldview and make new associations between their own lives and the lives of others. As volunteer tourists become more aware of global issues and inequalities, their experiences may even transform them into 'global citizens' who increase their participation in social movement activities (McGehee 2002). Developing cross-cultural understanding and a global perspective is considered valuable for readying an individual for "a lifetime of acting as an agent of change" (McGehee & Santos 2005, p.772), which also points to the long-term nature of volunteer tourism's benefits to individual participants. At the same time, a volunteer tourist's newfound cultural competence and global awareness can be understood in the context of the soft skills

discussed above, particularly as employers seek culturally aware employees to join their global labour market (Jones 2011).

2.5.3 Personal growth and development

Volunteer tourism experiences have been linked to notions of personal growth and development in participants since Wearing's (2001) research on young conservation volunteer tourists in Costa Rica. Becoming more self-confident and independent, coming to terms with one's strengths and weaknesses, challenging how they view themselves, greater self-awareness and developing new attitudes and approaches to life are typical examples of personal growth and development found in the literature as a motivation and/or benefit of volunteer tourism for the individual (Broad & Jenkins 2008, Lepp 2008, Sin 2009, Schott 2011, Zahra 2011). For some individuals their experiences of personal growth and development through volunteer tourism are even described as being transformative and 'life changing' (Zahra 2011). Additionally, personal growth and development can be connected with the other benefits to the volunteer tourist outlined previously. For example, improved interpersonal and communication skills are strongly related to an individual's self-confidence and developing a global awareness of social inequality may lead a volunteer tourist to re-evaluate their own values and worldviews.

In terms of personal growth and development as volunteer tourist motivations, they may be actively sought and expected by some volunteer tourists (Broad & Jenkins 2008, Schott 2011, Wickens 2011). For example, one respondent in McGehee and Santos' (2005) work on social movement in volunteer tourism anticipated "that time in this program would broaden my perspective" (p. 771). The motivations and needs of these individuals may be reflections of the directional and transitional needs that Schott (2011) attributes to volunteer tourists looking for some life direction and new perspectives as they navigate through changes in life-stages (e.g. from high school to university or childhood to adulthood). On the other hand, the benefits of personal growth and development may be unexpected positive outcomes of the volunteer tourism experience (Zahra 2011). In any case, being immersed in a foreign environment far from the influences and expectations of their usual social groups, volunteer tourists have a chance to reassess themselves and their own values and desires (Wearing 2001). It is important to note that the resulting benefits of personal enrichment are not exclusive to volunteer tourism but are comparable to the outcomes of previous research on backpackers, long-

term travellers and gap-year takers. These individuals often similarly construct their trips as a period of self-change or even as a ‘rite of passage’ that enables them to make the transition from youth into adulthood (Desforges 2000, Noy 2004, Heath 2007, Sin 2009). In this way volunteer tourism joins a range of other tourism experiences such as backpacking, long-term travel, and gap-year trips where personal enrichment and self-change are inevitable outcomes of the general travel narrative (Noy 2004).

2.6 Summary

This chapter has introduced the concept of volunteer tourism and discussed topics relevant to an exploration of learning through volunteer tourism. It is understood that volunteer tourism involves individuals who choose to participate in volunteering opportunities while they are on holiday either domestically or internationally. There is huge variety in the nature of volunteer tourism projects available but shorter-term projects appear to be one of the major trends of contemporary volunteer tourism. In a wider context volunteer tourism activities may be viewed as a form of episodic volunteering and volunteer tourists as contemporary volunteers, who typically prefer to engage in a range of short-term, well-defined projects and expect some personal benefits from their altruistic efforts. However, other volunteer tourist types such as those who prefer to commit themselves to long-term projects or the same organisation still exist. The motivations of volunteer tourists tend to be a combination of altruistic and instrumental reasons for choosing to volunteer for some or all of their holiday.

Despite differences among volunteer tourism projects and individual motivations, there appear to be commonalities in the benefits that participants gain through volunteer tourism. Individuals may benefit both personally and professionally from developing practical and soft skills that they may apply to other aspects of their lives. Volunteer tourism is also useful to participants who may approach their project as a form of practical work experience that is able to enhance their future employment prospects. Through interactions with the host community and other volunteer tourists, volunteer tourists’ experiences may enable them to reach a deeper level of cultural immersion than is typically possible through conventional tourism. If these experiences improve a volunteer tourist’s cross-cultural understanding, there may also be the development of a

global awareness or perspective and the important breakdown of cultural, social and ethnic stereotypes. As they adapt and engage with new and different cultural settings, many volunteer tourists also achieve personal growth and development, becoming more self-confident and finding out their abilities and limitations. The following chapter builds on this understanding of volunteer tourists and their motivations and benefits by bringing them into the context of learning.

3 LEARNING AND VOLUNTEER TOURISM

3.1 Introduction

This second conceptual chapter seeks to identify the linkages between the experiences of volunteer tourists and the process of learning. Beginning with an introduction to some of the key aspects of learning as a concept, this chapter discusses different approaches to learning and makes the important distinction between formal and informal learning. As this research is based on the idea of volunteer tourism as an informal learning experience, this chapter also discusses free-choice and experiential learning as ways in which individuals may be inspired to learn in a volunteer tourism setting. This overview of learning, in combination with the theoretical underpinnings of volunteer tourism, frames the subsequent discussion of what learning (if any) may occur through volunteer tourism. Specifically, this chapter discusses the potential for volunteer tourists to learn skills and knowledge, learn about the Other and learn about Self.

3.2 What is learning?

Learning is a deceptively simple term for the complexity of all that it describes. In order to discuss learning as part of volunteer tourism experiences it is important to establish a core understanding of what exactly is meant by the term ‘learning’ and how learning takes place.

3.2.1 Defining learning

There is no complete definition that is able to encompass all the complexities of learning, which can only be simplified up to a certain point before they are no longer useful. Bearing this in mind, however, learning is understood in this research as a highly individualised, life-long process that involves the accumulation of personal and social experiences that allow an individual to make sense of the world around them, their position in it, as well as themselves (Falk 2005). The learning process may be an individual’s conscious decision to do so or may occur subconsciously and be realised at a later point in time. It is also possible that what an individual learns may not even be what

they initially had aimed to learn or what the learning opportunity had sought to achieve (Ramsden 1992, Ballantyne & Packer 2002).

Perceptions of learning show varying degrees of complexity:

1. Learning as taking on information and quantitatively increasing one's knowledge.
2. Learning as memorising information, skills and methods to be reproduced when necessary.
3. Learning as making sense or drawing meaning by relating the subject matter to other topics and to the real world.
4. Learning as comprehending the world through new interpretations and understandings of reality.

(Säljö 1979, adapted from Ramsden 1992, p.26)

Thus, for some, the act of learning refers to a simple and straightforward process of memorising and accumulating facts, skills and methods that can be reproduced or regurgitated when needed. This understanding of learning reflects a relatively quantitative interpretation, in which learning is imposed onto an individual by an external force (e.g. teacher, parents) and is something that happens to the individual. A more complex perception of learning is developed when an individual begins to abstract meaning and see interrelations between not only the different parts of the subject matter but also with reality. Learning is then driven by an internal force or personal focus as the individual begins to reassess and reinterpret knowledge to understand the real world. According to Säljö (1979) these perceptions of learning are hierarchical with the more complex conceptions of learning encompassing the characteristics of those beneath them. Additionally, an individual's perception of learning is not fixed but is able to change, developing from less complex views towards learning as a means to understand reality (Ramsden 1992).

3.2.2 Approaches to learning

An overall understanding of learning must be complemented by the concept of an *approach* to learning and the recognition of different types of approaches. Importantly, this highly influential concept helps explain differences in learning outcomes among

learners both within and across disciplines as well as student misunderstandings (Ramsden 1992, Marton & Säljö 1997). An approach illustrates how an individual makes sense of and goes about the process of learning. An approach may therefore also be a reflection of how an individual relates to the actual material or subject matter to be learnt. Based on different learning content and contexts, an individual may reactively adopt, consciously or subconsciously, a particular learning approach. Approach is therefore neither static nor a characteristic of an individual. Ramsden (1992) describes the qualitative nature of approach as being “about ‘what’ and ‘how’ they [students] learn, rather than ‘how much’ they remember” (p.40). Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that a learner’s prior knowledge, interests and beliefs will also affect the approach that he or she takes.

Learning studies have established three defining approaches to learning, respectively termed ‘surface’, ‘deep and ‘strategic’ (Marton & Säljö 1997). When adopting a surface approach to learning, the learner is much less concerned with finding meaning than trying to memorise or rote-learn the subject matter in a routine way (Williams 1992). A surface learning approach is associated with situations where learners are extrinsically motivated to learn (e.g. to pass an exam, please parents, or get a good job) and they only need to regurgitate information without understanding it. An individual using a surface approach may relate to Svensson’s (1977) identification of an ‘atomistic’ approach where learners isolate individual parts of the subject matter without integrating them according to some organising principle. It is possible that adopting a surface learning approach may be required and more suitable for particular disciplines or topics within a subject (Ramsden 1992, Beattie et al. 1997). However, in terms of learning outcomes, a surface approach may prevent the learner from relating the separate parts to an overall structure (e.g. studying local deforestation without acknowledging its contribution to global biodiversity decline).

In contrast to the surface approach, a deep approach to learning may be inspired by intrinsic motivations based on the learner’s interests. Using a deep approach, an individual learns for the sake of understanding and extracting personal meaning from the material rather than aiming solely to reproduce the material for an external reward (Marton & Säljö 1997). Although learners may still be required to memorise facts or formulae, they organise the information of the subject matter in a more critical and holistic way by making links with previous knowledge and the real world. Marton and

Säljö (1997) also suggest that, in a higher education context, individuals who take a deep approach to learning may be more ‘relaxed’ compared to individuals who feel threatened, anxious and uninterested and take a surface approach to learning. Not only do deep approaches lead to higher quality learning outcomes, they may also result in greater satisfaction and enjoyment in learners (Ramsden 1992). Within a higher education context a deep approach to learning is therefore encouraged as a counterstrategy to ineffective learning resulting from surface approaches (Boud 1990). In this way educators hope that taking a deep approach will create opportunities for students to develop their intrinsic interests, and therefore motivation, in a subject, and increase their potential to achieve a holistic understanding of the subject material (Ramsden 1992).

The final approach, the strategic approach, is characterised by competitiveness and a learner who strives to get top marks but by using minimum effort (Tait & Entwistle 1996). Their studying methods are efficient and organised but the amount of effort required is carefully calculated based on the needs of assessments. The learner may therefore consider the subject matter superficially if that is sufficient to achieve the desired outcomes but assessments demanding greater engagement and evidence of understanding may still prompt a deeper approach to learning.

3.3 Ways to learn

While there are numerous types of learning, this section focuses on the differences between formal and informal learning and the processes of free-choice and experiential learning as being the most relevant to exploring what and how individuals learn through volunteer tourism.

3.3.1 Formal and informal learning

Learning is typically viewed as an activity that occurs within the school or university classroom. Indeed, the school environment is a key context for learning but there is an important distinction between learning that occurs within and beyond the confines of a classroom. The former can be understood more traditionally as the formal education system that has been socially constructed as a norm to be integrated into each individual’s life course and which is a legal requirement for children in many countries (Carr 2011). The content to be taught and learnt is highly structured, formulated as a set school

curriculum and measured through various forms of assessment such that students generally have little to no choice about what they learn or how it is communicated to them (Merriam et al. 2007). Consequently, much of the learning that occurs as part of in-school education proceeds through instruction or is instructor-induced rather than intrinsically desired by the students. Taking into account the relationship between motivations and approaches to learning outlined above, formal education may be more likely to result in students who take a surface approach. Although many teachers in fact seek the learning outcomes that result from taking a deep approach, students in formal education often end up learning to reproduce information for assessment rather than learning to understand (Ramsden 1992). Formal schooling or education, however, constitutes only one setting and stage of an individual's overall learning process.

In considering the range of learning opportunities available to people, it is important to recognise all the potential arenas of learning. The average individual spends only a small proportion of their lifetime in formal schooling, beyond which learning can continue as a lifelong process facilitated by many kinds of learning opportunities and experiences. There is increasing recognition amongst educators, governments and scientists of the educational value of learning opportunities available outside of the classroom (Falk 2005). These opportunities can be understood as 'informal learning' as they occur outside of a formal classroom setting and have significantly different characteristics to formal education including their potential to facilitate more effective, lasting learning. In his framework of lifelong learning Coombs (1985) defines 'informal learning' as "the spontaneous, unstructured learning that goes on daily in the home and neighbourhood, behind the school and on the playing field, in the workplace, marketplace, library and museum, and through the various mass media" (p. 92). In the context of the present study, the holiday environment is considered to be one of Coomb's everyday opportunities for informal learning outside of the classroom.

The very nature of informal learning as being ingrained in our everyday activities means that it is rarely labelled by individuals as learning. At its core, informal learning is characterised by less or un-structured learning activities rather than an externally imposed curriculum typically enforced through formal education (Merriam et al. 2007). Instead of passively listening to a teacher, informal learning opportunities can encourage individuals to be intrinsically motivated to learn actively outside of the classroom through

interactions with their social and physical environments (Feuer 2009). Although there are instances of volunteer tourism where an individual's participation is influenced by some degree of obligation, for example when needing to obtain academic credit, the present study considers that for the most part the qualities of informal learning also characterise the volunteer tourism experience.

3.3.2 Free-choice and experiential learning

As an informal learning experience, volunteer tourism may inspire particular ways of learning that are associated with learning unconfined by the limitations of formal education. Firstly, the unstructured and undirected nature of learning in informal learning settings generally implies the absence of an external influence or pressure (e.g. teachers, exams). Individuals therefore have the freedom to direct their own learning experience (Ballantyne & Packer 2005).

This kind of voluntary, self-directed learning is referred to by Falk (2005) as 'free-choice learning', which captures the influence of an individual's underlying motivations and interests on any given learning opportunity. In a discussion of free-choice environmental learning, Falk goes on to describe free-choice learning as generally (but not always) taking place outside of the classroom. Free-choice learning is often facilitated in informal learning settings such as zoos and aquariums, national parks, and museums, by a variety of community groups/organisations (e.g. local youth groups), as well as through print and electronic media (e.g. nature documentaries, searching the Internet). In free-choice learning, it is the individuals who have control over the learning process, including what to learn, where to learn, when they learn and with whom they want to learn (Falk 2005). Individuals engage in these free-choice learning opportunities not because they have to but because they *want* to. Rather than associating these opportunities with actual learning, individuals see free-choice learning experiences as worthwhile and able to meet their intellectual, relaxation, enjoyment and even spiritual needs (Brody & Tomkiewicz.2002). Being emotionally (Pekrun 1992) as well as actively engaged in an activity may be more likely to prompt individuals to engage in spontaneous and voluntary free-choice learning, (Carr 2011).

The overall volunteer tourism experience itself may be considered an example of engaging in free-choice learning where individuals are intrinsically motivated to

participate in a volunteer tourism project. Although not all volunteer tourists may necessarily be guided by learning motivations, they are in a position to control how this learning opportunity unfolds in their choice of destination and organisation focus and duration of project, and their responsibilities as a volunteer tourist. The various activities offered during a volunteer tourism project represent further opportunities for free-choice learning. If individuals are willing and intrinsically motivated to participate in volunteer tourism it is also likely, based on the discussion thus far, that volunteer tourists as learners may adopt a deep approach to volunteer tourism as a form of free-choice learning.

Experiential learning is another way in which volunteer tourists may engage with their experiences. Experiential learning theory proposes that “knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb 1984, p. 41) as individuals ‘re-learn’ their own beliefs and ideas as part of a process of examining and testing their previous knowledge. This style of learning contrasts with relatively linear processes of learning, such as those typically attributed to formal schooling where pre-existing knowledge is transmitted to students by teachers. Compared to extrinsically motivated learning and students being told what to do, the value of experiential learning lies in the act of ‘doing’ where a student is intrinsically motivated and actively engaged throughout the learning process. Specifically, experiential learning may be viewed as a cyclical process running through four key stages: experiencing, reflecting, thinking and acting (Kolb 1984). Experiential learning therefore begins when an individual exposes oneself to a new experience. The individual then uses his or her observational and reflective skills to consider the experience from different perspectives and comparing with previous knowledge before analysing and integrating one’s thoughts into new ideas and concepts. This new learning is then applied by the individual in actual practice, leading to new experiences that restart the experiential learning process (Kolb 1984). Away from the pre-determined and externally imposed structure of formal education, volunteer tourists may create for themselves new knowledge and understandings through the process of experiential learning.

Lastly, an important point to make here is that formal education and informal learning and the related concepts of free-choice and experiential learning should not be seen as existing along a continuum from good to bad. Instead, they should be viewed as complementary learning settings and contexts, which are part of a greater learning infrastructure (Falk 2005). For example, informal learning can create opportunities for

individuals to apply the theoretical information gained as part of their formal education to real world situations. This added dimension of reality may encourage individuals to then develop a deep learning approach and potentially acquire a more holistic understanding of the subject matter. For example, with specific reference to environmental education, Falk (2005) identifies free-choice learning as an invaluable means for students to understand subjects and issues that cannot be easily confined to the classroom or the school years and for which knowledge is always changing.

3.4 Reflection in learning

Reflection is a vital part of the learning process in any setting, formal or informal. Without reflection, some learning may go unrecognised and cannot be applied to relevant future experiences (Lowe et al. 2007). Subconscious reflection and learning undoubtedly occur among volunteer tourists but it is the moments of conscious reflection that will lead volunteer tourists to make active and aware decisions about what they learn (Boud et al. 1985). For example, a period of conscious and critical reflection may be needed to allow an individual to consider a situation of conflict from different perspectives to recognise and understand the source of the problem. To this effect, Criticos (1993, p. 162) comments that “Effective learning does not follow from a positive experience but from effective reflection.” Therefore in the context of this study it cannot be assumed that the volunteer tourism experience itself immediately leads to learning. Reflection must also take place so that an individual consciously recognises what their volunteer tourism experiences have taught them. While the reflection process may take many forms (e.g. keeping a personal diary, talking with others, sharing stories and photos, and interactive online blogs or social networking websites), it is the depth and quality of reflection that has the most influence on an individual’s learning. Certainly, not all techniques of reflection are equal in their ability to result in effective learning (Mezirow 2000). For example, a volunteer tourist may think generally about their experience as they reminisce and retell their trip to others; however, if participants are to gain a richer understanding of their experiences and benefit the most from the learning opportunities afforded through volunteer tourism, more critical reflection is needed.

Critical reflection requires individuals to examine their existing assumptions, beliefs and world views in relation to their experiences as volunteer tourists (Merriam et al. 2007). Research into study-abroad and service-learning programs, which are marketed

according to benefits and experiences similar to those of volunteer tourism, state the importance of critical reflection in helping students to achieve objectives associated with their academic learning, cross-cultural understanding and personal growth (Crabtree 2008, Forsey et al. 2011). In support of this point, Eyler (2002) argues that the positive potential of service-learning experiences for participants may be further enhanced by encouraging students to engage in more effective reflection. In the volunteer tourism literature there is similar demand from researchers for encouragement of more and deeper reflection by volunteer tourists. To this end, from their experiences with young volunteer tourists, Simpson (2004) and Dykhuis (2010) make a strong call for some kind of framework that helps volunteer tourists to reflect more deeply on questions of social justice. Importantly, this point highlights that some learning may be easier to see and reflect on than others (Ramsden 1992). For example, learning practical and linguistic skills may be more immediately apparent to volunteer tourists than recognising less tangible learning outcomes such as a changed attitude towards developing countries or social movement participation. In this case, the latter may only be recognised through critical reflection. Indeed, Bailey and Russell's (2010) research suggests that a volunteer tourist's openness, civic attitudes and wisdom increase with a greater frequency of reflection. In support of this trend, Coghlan and Gooch (2011) argue that providing and creating reflection opportunities for volunteer tourists are important for achieving the transformative learning potential of volunteer tourism. The frequency and nature of reflection opportunities must therefore also be considered in this research for how they may impact volunteer tourist learning.

3.5 Learning through tourism

In theory, tourism experiences offer ideal settings for informal learning such that the idea that 'travel broadens the mind' has become almost axiomatic. In a context of leisure, fun and enjoyment and away from the constraints of formal learning environments, learning that is active, experiential, and free-choice becomes possible (Ballantyne & Packer 2002, Tisdell & Wilson 2005, Carr 2011). The origins of the relationship between learning and tourism are often traced back to the Grand Tour of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when young affluent British aristocrats embarked on an overseas trip that would endow them with knowledge and experiences of new environments and social skills expected of their status (Brodsky-Porges 1981). That young people are still

encouraged to undertake edifying journeys that are expected to equip them with the skills and experiences they need to take on adulthood, such as through contemporary ‘gap year’ or OE experiences (Heath 2007, Jones 2011), indicates that despite the variety of tourism experiences now available, this link between learning and tourism persists within contemporary society.

The potential for learning to take place in the tourism environment is most clearly reflected in those individuals who holiday with specific motivations and intentions to learn. Although traditional ‘sun, surf and sand’ tourists may of course still experience learning while on holiday, their learning may occur at the subconscious level if their motivations relate to hedonistic pursuits rather than learning. Tourists who are intrinsically motivated to learn more about an area of interest are likely to both expect and actively seek out relevant learning opportunities while they are on holiday (Holdnak & Holland 1996). It has also been suggested that learning new skills and knowledge can be motivations and outcomes of engaging in holiday leisure activities (Roggenbuck et al. 1990). Accordingly, the tourism industry has seen the development of products and experiences with a learning focus in order to cater to tourists who value educational travel experiences (e.g. Dodgshun 2011).

The potential for experiences in a different environment to impart some learning is recognised in the internationalisation of higher education through study abroad programs which are championed for their ability to develop in students an awareness and respect for others, such as through cultural awareness and a global perspective (Forsey et al. 2011). The role of the tourism environment as an alternative and metaphorical classroom is suggested by some parents who justify taking a family holiday with the desire to provide their children with educational experiences (Rugh 2008). Even tourism activities that one would usually associate with fun and enjoyment, such as visiting a theme park (Johns & Gyimothy 2002), have been identified as potential learning opportunities. Elements of fun and enjoyment may enable tourists of all ages to learn more and in an effective way because they are not limited by the demands of formal assessment and have the free-choice to learn as they please from their experiences (Feuer 2009). Learning that is fun and enjoyable reflects the strong link between play and learning, especially for young children who learn best through experiences that are unstructured and unfettered by rules imposed by adults (Carr 2011). As a result some tourism establishments such as zoos and museums that have some kind of educational message are seeing the learning and

marketing value of creating “edutainment” (Carr 2011, p. 84) opportunities that combine education, fun and enjoyment (Price 2003). In this way learning opportunities in the tourism environment may actually be perceived and desired by the learner, be they child or adult, as opportunities for leisure or play. Learning therefore does not have to be a driving motivation for learning to occur in the holiday environment.

Although a tourism setting may offer different learning opportunities there is the question of whether learning by tourists actually does occur. This has been a question frequently discussed in the ecotourism and environmental education literature in the wider context of how these experiences can encourage visitors and tourists to support conservation efforts and management. For example, in their research at a dolphin attraction in Australia, Orams and Hill (1998) demonstrated the success of a dolphin education programme in increasing visitor awareness of human impact on the animals, which was apparent in the reduced levels of inappropriate visitor behaviour and the number of staff cautions. Through their first-hand experiences with wildlife and effective interpretation programmes, it appears that visitors to ecotourism attractions may gain a considerable amount of environmental knowledge (Tisdell & Wilson 2005, Zeppel 2010). Even in tourism attractions such as zoos and aquaria which usually attract tourists with entertainment motivations and only a minority who go specifically to learn, research has demonstrated that learning can occur for both groups (Falk & Dierking 1998, Packer & Ballantyne 2004). While there are certainly learning opportunities present in the tourism experience, it is significant that these opportunities can and often do result in effective visitor learning.

3.6 Learning through volunteer tourism

The notion of learning is evident in most volunteer tourism promotional materials. Some marketing makes abstract references to learning while others are much more direct. For example, the volunteer tourism sending organisation GoVolontouring (2012) poses the question of ‘Why Learn?’ as a main page of their website. The range of learning experiences and their impact on volunteer tourists commonly found in marketing material are summarised in GoVolontouring’s answer to this question:

Learning new skills, particularly with respect to languages is a guaranteed way towards improving your cultural and personal awareness. You will foster a better

sense of Self, and regardless of that learned skill, you will earn greater confidence.

Learning is about overcoming challenges, and taking the ‘unknown’, and making it ‘known’, something referred to as mastery.

There are many opportunities to learn while travelling abroad, and not all of them are language based, nor in a classroom, but every one of them offers cultural or social integration. You can learn with your hands, your eyes, your taste buds and your heart. You will enjoy new skills, some as practical as international cooking, or others as specialised as archaeological digs. You can learn how to be an authentic cowboy, or how to weave straw baskets. The choices are endless, and the opportunities invaluable.

GoVoluntouring’s justification of why an individual should want to learn as a volunteer tourist effectively highlights volunteer tourism as an informal setting where learning takes place outside of the classroom and occurs through opportunities for active, free-choice and experiential learning. In the fun and exciting atmosphere of volunteer tourism where individuals can direct their own learning, learning outcomes are desirable but they are in no way requisite by-products to be formally assessed by the host organisation. GoVoluntouring’s approach to learning through volunteer tourism suggests an important recognition within industry of the importance of providing volunteer tourists with an enjoyable experience in an active, free-choice and experiential learning environment. To this effect, improving the visitor experience may help create such an environment where volunteer tourist learning is encouraged in the absence of extrinsic pressures. For example, Coghlan (2008) argues that some conservation expedition leaders who perceive themselves as scientists and have a strong focus on research aspects should adapt their behaviour based on an awareness that volunteer tourists “may be more concerned with a holiday ethic...[and] see themselves as holiday-makers/clients” (p.189). As volunteer tourists, individuals can learn through their daily experiences living as part of their local host community much in the same way they would learn informally and spontaneously in their daily activities at home. As characteristic of informal learning settings, learning through volunteer tourism also tends to be unstructured. Volunteer tourism projects are not planned according to any kind of curriculum that seeks to direct what volunteer tourists learn. Nor is there any system of assessment to measure participant learning or that requires participants to demonstrate what they have learnt. The only exceptions may be some service-learning style volunteer tourism projects when

students may be required to complete assessments based on their experiences (see Parker & Dautoff 2007).

Even though learning through volunteer tourism is unstructured, volunteer tourism experiences are often perceived by educational institutions and the general public as having an educational component (Brown 2005). For example, Lyons and Wearing (2012) note the rising number of service-learning style volunteer tourism trips offered through universities that wish to provide “global experiential learning opportunities for their students” (Antipodeans Abroad 2012). Especially for subjects with an international focus or relevance, volunteer tourism experiences are seen by tertiary institutions and their students as a way to provide the latter with first-hand experiences and a practical foundation to their formal learning in the classroom (Lyons & Wearing 2012). For example, a two week intensive trip to work with grassroots communities in Tonga really “brought the concepts of sustainability and green practices alive” (Dr Linda Kerkenhoff, Taimi Media Network 2011) for a group of American university students. In this way, volunteer tourism may be valuable in itself as an informal learning experience but also as complementary to one’s formal education (see Falk 2005). The educational value of volunteer tourism is also evident from the perspective of parents, who may be motivated to volunteer with their family on holidays because they are “seeking educational bonding opportunities for children” (Brown 2005, p. 489). Rather than relating the educational value of volunteer tourism to the children’s formal learning, Brown (2005) found that parents believed the volunteer tourism experience could teach their children about important life issues such as poverty, cultural diversity, materialism and the importance of giving. The educational value that may be attributed to volunteer tourism is reflected in Brown and Morrison’s (2003) study where taking part in educational activities was the third most popular activity that interested potential participants.

However, independent of how an individual perceives his or her volunteer tourism experience, the general absence of formal teachers, curriculum and assessments suggests that volunteer tourists are not under any extrinsic pressures to learn. If volunteer tourists are consequently more ‘relaxed’ without these pressures, they may take a deeper approach to learning and view what they learn holistically, making connections with existing knowledge rather than trying to memorise unrelated facts (Marton & Säljö 1997). Some volunteer tourists may be intrinsically motivated to learn but even when they are not, volunteer tourists may still be willing or open to engaging in free-choice and

experiential learning due to the informal setting and fun and enjoyable atmosphere of volunteer tourism projects.

Indeed, there are studies that suggest learning does in fact occur for volunteer tourists. Their learning is implicit in the volunteer tourism literature where it is usually referred to indirectly by studies on volunteer tourist motivations and benefits as discussed previously. As outlined in Section 2.5, the benefits of volunteer tourism to the individual include 1) new skills and experiences, 2) cultural immersion, cross-cultural understanding and global awareness, and 3) personal growth and development. In this section these ‘benefits’ are reconceptualised as the learning that may occur through volunteer tourism given that the benefits gained by volunteer tourists must first derive from instances of learning in a related area. For example, an individual must go through the process of learning how to lay building foundations before their new building skills are considered beneficial. This section explores what volunteer tourists may learn and comprises three main categories: 1) learning skills and knowledge, 2) learning about the Other, and 3) learning about Self. In addition these categories will be examined in relation to previously discussed theories of informal, free-choice and experiential learning and reflection to provide some understanding of exactly how volunteer tourist learning may come about.

3.6.1 Learning skills and knowledge

It is not a far stretch of the imagination to see how volunteer tourists can acquire new practical skills and knowledge from carrying out their volunteer activities as well as from general social interactions they have with local people and other volunteer tourists. Consider a volunteer tourist in Costa Rica who has been taught bird-handling skills as part of her conservation-focused project and who is given an informal history lesson of the local area by a local villager she has befriended. This individual’s newfound practical conservation skills and local historical knowledge are representative of the free-choice learning opportunities that may occur in the volunteer tourism experience. To some extent volunteer tourism provides individuals with a different option to learning the same material that they may study as part of their formal education. For example, researchers (Rehberg 2005, Söderman & Snead 2008, Schott 2011) have found that developing foreign language skills motivated many of their participants to become volunteer tourists. While these participants could equally have been able to improve their language skills

through formal language lessons at school or university or by immersion in another country, they recognised that they could achieve similar or better language learning outcomes from their volunteer tourism experience. Wickens (2011) commented that participants who picked up some of the local language were better able to facilitate encounters with members of the host community, thus leading to further opportunities to learn informally and experientially through interactions with locals.

Volunteer tourists may also learn the beneficial ‘soft skills’ and gain the invaluable ‘work experience’ that are associated with taking part in a volunteer tourism project. Those communication, interpersonal and teamwork skills (i.e. ‘people’ skills) that are not so easily taught in a formal learning environment (Heath 2007) may come about as volunteer tourists learn from their experiences with local people and, in group-based projects, with other volunteer tourists. Invariably volunteer tourists must interact with others, whether as part of their planned activities or through informal interactions outside of their volunteer activities. Learning experientially, volunteer tourists may consciously reflect and analyse their interactions with local people and other volunteers and then put into practice what they learn from these experiences. Recognising and applying what they learn about how to engage positively and effectively with others, volunteer tourists may seek to improve or maintain their relationships and interactions with local people and other volunteer tourists. In this way, volunteer tourists may be able to learn the communication, interpersonal and teamwork skills that will continue to benefit them beyond their volunteer tourism experience (Coghlan & Gooch 2011).

Secondly, the professional benefits of volunteer tourism as a stint of ‘work experience’ comes from what individuals may learn about their particular career or study area. Through their learning experiences volunteer tourists may gain a different and practical insight into their proposed field that may not be possible in the classroom (Dalwai & Donegan 2012). For example, a participant in Broad and Jenkins’ study (2008) at a gibbon rehabilitation project in Thailand noted that her volunteer tourism activities provided “practical experience for my education” (Andrea, in Broad & Jenkins 2008, p. 80) and the overall study found that ‘career development’ through working with animals or wildlife was a key motivation for participants. Similarly, motivations of wanting to learn about development work (Wickens 2011) or international cooperation (Rehberg 2005) are often expressed by volunteer tourists considering a professional career in these areas. Through the reflection and analysis of experiential learning,

individuals may realise the benefits of their volunteer tourism experience not only as something to add to their CV (Galley & Clifton 2004) but also by having gained a deeper understanding of their proposed area of study or work beyond what they have already learnt or will learn through their formal studies. As suggested previously, informal learning experiences such as volunteer tourism may be viewed as complementary rather than as ‘better’ or a replacement for formal learning in schools and universities.

3.6.2 Learning about the Other

Learning about the Other is intrinsically connected to the benefits of cultural immersion, cross-cultural understanding and global awareness potentially gained by volunteer tourists. Much volunteer tourism research has focused on the Other as the host community and what volunteer tourists gain from their social interactions with local people from a different culture (see McIntosh & Zahra 2007, Lepp 2008, Wearing & Grabowski 2011). Interacting closely with the host community is one of the major drawcards used by volunteer tourism organisations to attract prospective participants. For example, prospective participants of a community project in Kenya supported by the non-profit organisation Planeterra (2012) are said to have a “cross-cultural experience [that] enables travellers to take part in the daily lives of the villagers, and gain a deeper understanding of life in rural Kenya”. However, given that volunteer tourism projects are often group-based and bring together volunteer tourists from all over the world (Callanan & Thomas 2005, McGehee & Santos 2005) participants may also benefit from learning about the cultural backgrounds of other volunteer tourists. Indeed, some volunteer tourists are motivated by the chance to meet like-minded people (Rehberg 2005, Broad & Jenkins 2008) and as volunteer tourists not only work but also often must live together, there are many opportunities to meet and learn from other individuals of different cultural, religious and socio-economic backgrounds (Wearing 2001, McGehee & Santos 2005, Mittelberg & Palgi 2011).

The benefits of being immersed in a new culture and achieving cross-cultural understanding do not come from simply living alongside the Other. Instead volunteer tourists also need to take the time to learn and apply the local customs and practices as well as understanding the historical, political and socio-cultural contexts of their host community and fellow volunteers (McIntosh & Zahra 2007). The motivation to experience and be immersed in a new culture (Brown 2005, Rehberg 2005, Söderman &

Snead 2008) and the perception that volunteer tourism can provide a more authentic or ‘real’ experience of a local community than a typical holiday (McIntosh & Zahra 2007, Sin 2009) suggests that volunteer tourists are largely open and willing to learn about the Other. Findings that suggest volunteer tourists eventually come to gain a deeper understanding about their host community and culture are not uncommon in the volunteer tourism literature. A typical example is Lepp’s (2008) finding that volunteer tourists in Kenya were successful in ‘discovering others’, with each participant demonstrating an enhanced understanding of Kenyans and African culture in general. In particular, Lepp (2008) points out that volunteer tourists were able to correct common misconceptions about Africans. Some volunteer tourists may be conscious that they have such preconceived notions that they actively wish to ‘test’ through their experiences as identified by a participant who wanted to “experience how Africa was truly like instead of all the simple stereotypes” (respondent in Sin 2009, p.489). Other studies have noted similar outcomes where volunteering with the local community was able to break down the very stereotypical impressions of the host culture that participants had held before their visit (Jones 2005, McIntosh & Zahra 2007). It is suggested that cross-cultural exposure through volunteer tourism can increase cross-cultural understanding by lessening racial, cultural and social boundaries (Brown 2005, Jones 2005, Clifton & Benson 2006, Lepp 2008, Wearing & Grabowski 2011). As volunteer tourists’ existing (and sometimes erroneous) knowledge about the Other is challenged by first-hand cross-cultural experiences, it is likely that critical reflection and experiential learning are key to helping individuals move beyond a surface learning approach and misleading stereotypes of the Other to engage in deeper learning that leads to cross-cultural understanding.

As volunteer tourists develop a cross-cultural understanding, their learning about the Other may give rise to a global awareness or perspective that is professionally desirable (Jones 2011) or contributes to an individual’s personal growth (Lepp 2008). Developing a global awareness or perspective especially highlights how individuals may take a deep and holistic approach to reflecting critically and learning experientially through volunteer tourism. Especially for volunteer tourists in developing countries, some learning about the Other may come from being confronted with global issues of poverty and international aid development (Simpson 2004, Callanan & Thomas 2005). In these instances a holistic learning approach may enable volunteer tourists to make sense of what they have learnt about the Other on a personal level as well as in wider global

contexts (Marton & Säljö 1997). For example, Jones (2005) found that as part of their cross-cultural experiences young overseas volunteers were able to make wider linkages and understand the interconnectedness between their own situation and the Other. Similarly, in a global context, McGehee and Santos (2005, p. 765) argue that volunteer tourism has potential as a “consciousness-raising experience” that can lead to a sense of global citizenship and greater involvement in social movement activities. Volunteer tourists’ engagement in social movement or demonstration of other behavioural and attitudinal changes to environmental and social issues may be reflections of deep, holistic learning where they have put into practice what they have learnt about the Other. It is therefore possible to understand how the benefits of developing a global perspective, cross-cultural understanding and cultural immersion originate from what volunteer tourists learn about the Other, whether it be their host culture or other volunteer tourists.

3.6.3 Learning about Self

Relating back to the benefits of personal growth and development, learning about Self is the final category of learning that volunteer tourists may experience. Learning about Self is an essential part of any individual’s process of lifelong learning that they need to function effectively in a constantly changing world (Rawson 2000). Learning about Self may be understood in the current research as an overarching concept that includes clearly observable behavioural or attitudinal changes to an individual and subtle but no less important changes to one’s state of mind and sense of value. Understanding these aspects of Self within research on personal development, searching for and forming identity or Self, was one of the original areas of interest in volunteer tourism research (see Wearing 2001). Learning about Self through travel is articulated in the literature through a variety of terms and expressions, including: searching for or discovering one’s Self, identity formation, self-change, self-realisation, self-awareness, personal- or self-development, and self-fulfilment (Desforges 2000, Wearing 2001, Noy 2004, Cohen 2010, Schott 2011). In his study of lifestyle travellers searching for Self, Cohen (2010) argues that while there are nuances of difference between these terms, they still share the common thread of a search for an idea of a unified and purposeful ‘true inner Self’. Within the present study, this search for one’s inner Self is considered synonymous with the process of learning about Self and the potential for personal growth and development. The present study also acknowledges the complexity of understanding the concept of Self.

However, for the purposes of this study, the researcher does not wish to focus on theoretical issues surrounding the concept of Self but seeks to focus on what aspects of learning about Self may arise from volunteer tourists' experiences. Consequently, this research is based on an open approach to how the volunteer tourists themselves define and interpret concepts of Self and learning about Self.

While volunteer tourism is not the only context for self-searching (see Noy 2004, Cohen 2010), it is often perceived as a vehicle that enables participants to search for and learn about Self. This is possible because leaving the 'safety net' of one's home environment and placing oneself in new and unfamiliar settings creates many opportunities for an individual to learn about his or her Self. Volunteer tourists who find themselves outside of their comfort zone and away from their usual spheres of influence (e.g. family, friends, work) may be able to disconnect from their daily concept of Self (Wearing 2001). Volunteer tourism experiences can lead to 'journeys of discovery' (Lyons and Wearing 2008) or 'discovering Self' (Lepp 2008) as individuals reassess through critical reflection and experiential learning who they really are. Some volunteer tourists wish to escape significant others or the home environment as part of their search for something 'to really believe in' without external influences on their self-evaluation (Schott 2011). It is possible that individuals actively seek to learn about Self during their time as volunteer tourists (Rehberg 2005, Schott 2011), which is evident in clichéd expressions such as wanting 'to find myself', 'find out about who I am', and 'learn what's inside myself'; however, learning about Self is not an initial motivation for all volunteer tourists and may instead come as an unexpected but desirable outcome of the volunteer tourism experience (Zahra 2011).

Existing research indicates that volunteer tourists' learning about Self may range from the quotidian to the profound and be constructed by multiple players. Volunteer tourists frequently speak of discovering their own personal limitations and also the depth of their abilities (Wearing 2001, Schott 2011). Finding out about one's abilities is an important means to building a volunteer tourist's self-confidence, which is a key aspect of personal growth and development (Wearing 2001). It is noteworthy that learning about Self is not mutually exclusive from the other two categories of learning discussed above. In particular, much learning about Self comes from cross-cultural interactions and learning about the host community and other volunteer tourists (Wearing 2001, McIntosh & Zahra 2007, Lepp 2008, Barbieri et al. 2011). Therefore, while some learning about

Self may be individual-led, external agents in the form of local community members and other volunteer tourists may also be constructive in both what and how volunteer tourists learn about Self. Importantly, learning about the Other may lead to the realisation of new beliefs and values that volunteer tourists may wish to apply to their own lives. For example, volunteer tourists at a wildlife project in Thailand spoke of positive attitude changes such as becoming more broad-minded and less selfish as a result of interacting with different cultures (Broad 2003). Similarly, a young volunteer tourist in Nepal felt that “experiencing a radically different culture also helped me understand better the constructed and provisional nature of my own identity (...) and that I could learn from the best traits of my Nepali friends” (Participant N in Wickens 2011, p. 49). Through conscious critical reflection and experiential learning volunteer tourists may be able to identify and reassess which personal values they wish to keep or change (Zahra 2011).

3.7 Obstacles to learning

It should not be assumed that learning always occurs through volunteer tourism. There is the possibility that volunteer tourists may experience little to no learning or that their learning can be erroneous. As is the case for general tourism and learning experiences, learning through volunteer tourism may be affected by a number of variables including participants' interests and motivations, prior knowledge, beliefs and attitudes (Falk & Storksdieck 2005). In considering the influence of motivations, hedonistic desires may prove to be obstacles to effective volunteer tourist learning. Referring back to the different types of volunteer tourists, ‘shallow’ (Callanan & Thomas 2005) or ‘vacation-minded’ (Brown & Morrison 2003) volunteer tourists who have motivations that are more focused on the ‘tourism’ rather than ‘volunteer’ aspect of their volunteer tourism project may be less inclined to engage in free-choice learning opportunities or interactions which may generate learning with the host community and other volunteer tourists. For example, Tomazos and Butler (2012) found that some volunteer tourists may succumb to the lure of more hedonistic activities, such as relaxing and partying, at the expense of their volunteer responsibilities working with the host organisation. Consequently, these individuals may not learn so much or so deeply in the areas of new skills and knowledge, the Other and/or Self.

Learning through volunteer tourism may also be influenced by an individual's prior knowledge and experiences, which limit the intensity of new learning experienced by an

individual (Sherraden et al. 2008). To borrow from Cohen's (2010) work on lifestyle travellers searching for Self, some individuals may go into their volunteer tourism experience with the perception that the bulk of their learning about Self has already occurred during their earlier travel experiences and (for older participants) transition into 'adulthood'. Cohen (2010) found that as individuals gained maturity and experience, they reported a perceived decline or absence of self-change and learning about Self, leading to the suggestion that chronological age may influence an individual's search for Self. The intensity of learning through volunteer tourism may also be reduced when individuals' previous experiences (not necessarily all tourism-related) have already given them skills and knowledge on offer in volunteer tourism experiences they undertake or taught them about the Other and Self. For example, in Stoddart and Rogerson's (2004) study of a housing project in South Africa some volunteer tourists had existing building skills that they were seeking to contribute rather than develop.

An additional obstacle to learning may be due to a combination of volunteer tourists' existing attitudes and beliefs and the lack of a framework that encourages individuals to challenge them. Sin (2009) argues that resistance to learning may occur because of how a volunteer tourist's upbringing and cultural background affects how they learn from social and physical interactions with the host community and environment. Sin (2009) suggests that it is possible for volunteer tourists to remain caught up in their own existing assumptions, negative stereotypes and privileges at the same time they are seeking to develop a sensitive, worldly and mature Self. Consequently, these volunteer tourists may be inclined to reject issues or opinions that conflict with their own original beliefs rather than reflect on and reassess them through experiential learning. The outcome is problematic, especially when cultural, racial and social misconceptions are reinforced in the minds of volunteer tourists rather than dispelled and links are drawn between volunteer tourism and the problems of neo-colonialism (Simpson 2004, Gray & Campbell 2007, Raymond & Hall 2008, Guttentag 2009). Simpson (2004) puts these issues down to the "limited stimulants or frameworks for asking *why* there are global differences, or *how* people's lives in different places intersect [emphasis in original]" (p. 690).

Although there are merits to free-choice learning in volunteer tourism, part of the solution to the problem posed by Simpson (2004) may lie in establishing learning opportunities that are a little less than completely free-choice. This may involve providing training,

support and supervision that help volunteer tourists adapt to new cultural and work settings and understand their experiences through reflective appraisal and experiential learning rather than taking them at face-value (Sherraden et al. 2008). Recent research also suggests that guided reflection and group discussion facilitated by a mentor may result in more meaningful cross-cultural understanding and minimise the potential of locking in previous beliefs and ethnocentric viewpoints as a result of unguided reflection in isolation (Forsey et al. 2011, Lough 2011). Guided reflection and group discussion in the context of volunteer tourism are also similar to the idea of guiding deep learning in the formal education sector. Here, higher levels of student performance are related to teachers who take care to explain why the material has to be learnt, foster a sense of student control over their learning and interest, and encourage cooperative learning (Ramsden 1992).

3.8 Summary

This chapter has situated the concept of volunteer tourism within the wider topic of learning rather than solely in education. In the context of learning, volunteer tourism may be understood as an opportunity for informal, free-choice and experiential learning that allows individuals the freedom to direct what and how they learn. Without the external pressures of formal learning, volunteer tourists may be intrinsically motivated to learn or at least be open to learning opportunities they encounter. Instead of memorising discrete facts because they have to, volunteer tourists may take a deep approach to learning, make wider connections between new and existing knowledge, and gaining a more holistic understanding of a particular topic. Conscious recognition of what they have learnt may be encouraged when volunteer tourists engage in critical reflection. Volunteer tourist learning can also occur experientially as they actively apply the knowledge and understanding they have gained through reflection to new experiences.

Through the lens of learning, this chapter has offered an alternative analysis of the benefits that individuals may gain from their volunteer tourism experiences. Firstly, often through free-choice learning, volunteer tourists may develop skills and knowledge that are personally and professionally beneficial and complement their formal learning. Secondly, through their social interactions in the volunteer tourism environment, individuals may learn experientially about the cultural practices of their host community and other volunteer tourists. Ideally, volunteer tourism experiences are able to break

down misleading cultural stereotypes and individuals can understand their learning about the Other at scales ranging from the personal to the global. Lastly, volunteer tourists may return home having learnt something about Self, where realisations about personal identity, limitations and capacities may culminate in the benefits of personal growth and development. However, this research also acknowledges that learning by volunteer tourists is not guaranteed and may be impeded by obstacles such as an individual's hedonistic motivations, previous experiences and deeply ingrained personal values.

It is clear that there is an opportunity to further enlighten current understanding of the connections between the concepts of volunteer tourism and learning as reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3. As volunteer tourism continues to diversify and develop, its benefits have also become associated with discourses of personal and professional development, cross-cultural understanding and social movement. Increasingly, discussions of the merits of volunteer tourism suggest that these experiences also have an educational value for the volunteer tourists. By re-aligning the volunteer tourism experience with learning theory, it may be possible to gain greater insight into the range of experiences and processes that endow volunteer tourists with the many aspects of learning that have come to be widely considered as beneficial. The research methods used to collect the information needed to examine what and how volunteer tourists learn are outlined and discussed in the following chapter.

4 METHODS

4.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters have reviewed the theoretical underpinnings directing this research. Although discussions of volunteer tourists' motivations and benefits may contribute a broad understanding of learning through volunteer tourism, this research focuses on meeting the specific objectives of finding out what and how learning occurs through volunteer tourism. This chapter provides a detailed account of the methods used to collect the material needed to address these two objectives. The chapter begins with a justification of using the qualitative approach of semi-structured interviewing, followed by an outline of the nature of the interviews and the sampling techniques used to recruit interview participants. Explanations are given for how the interviews were conducted and the consequent analysis of the interview content. This chapter also considers the role of the researcher and how her personal interests, opinions and background may have influenced this research before concluding with the presentation of participant information.

4.2 A qualitative approach

This research has adopted a qualitative rather than quantitative research approach to investigate what volunteer tourists learn and how they come to do so. A quantitative approach was not considered suitable for the present study as it is less able to facilitate in-depth exploration of more abstract variables such as participants' personal feelings or behaviours as they learn through volunteer tourism (Denzin & Lincoln 1994). This is because quantitative approaches emphasise the measurement of variables and focus on outcomes that are 'objective' and representative in order to allow statistical generalisation and predictions (Decrop 1999). By limiting research to phenomena that can only be examined in this way, Walle (1997) warns that quantitative research could lead to the "possibility of oversimplifying reality" (p. 534). On the other hand, "qualitative researchers study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln 1994, p.2), which in this case involves interpreting the learning experiences as described by

individual volunteer tourists. Qualitative research supports the idea of multiple and socially constructed realities, thus taking into account the crucial role that different volunteer tourism contexts and the volunteer tourists' interactions with their social and physical environments may have in shaping each participant's learning experiences (Riley and Love 2000).

4.3 Semi-structured interviewing

Specifically, semi-structured interviews were used to gather the information needed to examine learning through volunteer tourism. The widespread use of interviews in qualitative research points to the "ability of people to symbolise their experience through language" (Seidman 2006, p.8). Consequently, talking to returned volunteer tourists was deemed the most suitable way to gain in-depth details about the learning that they gained from their lived volunteer tourism experiences (Seidman 2006). An in-depth examination of a small number of volunteer tourists that produces rich, nuanced and detailed data was considered more useful in this research than a more surface examination of a larger sample of volunteer tourists (Buston et al. 1998).

Semi-structured interviews were preferred over unstructured interviews, which would have given participants relatively greater control of the conversation (Fossey et al. 2002), what topics they wanted to include or exclude and the level of detail they wished to go into (Corbin & Morse 2003). With the participants as the central actors, researchers may still take an active role in unstructured interviews but may be less inclined to respond or intrude into the interview so as not to potentially change its direction (Fontana & Frey 2003). On the other hand, semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to go into an interview with a number of topics, themes or issues that could be covered or used as a catalyst for discussion (Mason 2002). The semi-structured approach was able to facilitate a focused yet flexible exploration of learning through volunteer tourism. Semi-structured interviews were thus able to take into account the depth and complexity of how an individual's life history and experience may have influenced his or her learning through volunteer tourism (Veal 2006). In part, this is because the researcher had the freedom to pursue any unexpected topics that were especially relevant to a participant and their volunteer tourism experience (Mason 2002). This freedom is not possible in tightly structured interviews when researchers have a set of standardised and sequenced questions to be asked of every participant. Without the pre-scripted interactions of

structured interviews, participants also had the opportunity to elaborate on both the *whats* and *hows* of their specific volunteer tourism learning experiences (Fontana & Frey 2003).

Given the highly personal nature of an individual's learning experiences, individual semi-structured interviews were considered to be more suitable for this research than focus groups, which entail interviews conducted in a group setting. Focus groups use the group interaction between the participants to explore a particular topic or issue and are considered useful if the aim of the research is to develop an understanding of the collective views or norms of focus group participants (Buston et al. 1998). The researcher did not aim to have the participants reach a consensus regarding learning through volunteer tourism but rather sought to focus on the individual experiences and views of each volunteer tourist (Krueger & Casey 2000). Any learning that was sensitive or a minority within the group could have been potentially missed out or minimised by a focus group setting (Buston et al. 1998, Fossey et al. 2002). Moreover, focus groups may have been intimidating for shy and/or inarticulate participants, for whom the presence of others (or a single vociferous individual) could have affected their ability to feel at ease and consequently their desire to share information they might otherwise reveal in a one-to-one interview setting (Gibbs 1997, Rapley 2004).

4.3.1 The semi-structured interview

The interviews were semi-structured to the extent that the researcher was prepared with an interviewing guide comprising the following list of key topics:

- Previous and current volunteering experience
- Why engage in volunteering?
- What have you learned from volunteering?
- Previous, current and future volunteer tourism experiences and desires
- Why engage in volunteer tourism?
- What have you learned through volunteer tourism experiences?

These topics are based on the overall conceptual framework for the study (Veal 2006). The list of topics had several key functions, none of which was to determine the

absolute direction of an interview. The list served to remind the researcher to address important lines of inquiry, which had not yet been referred to during the interview. Some participants needed more prompting than others about explaining their experiences and the list of topics provided useful starting points for discussion (Mason 2002). However, the list of topics was not definitive and allowed for the development of unexpected themes as is typical of the fluid and flexible nature of semi-structured interviews. For example, in some instances the researcher wanted to know how the participant would respond to a particular issue that had been highlighted in previous interviews (Ruane 2005, Seidman 2006). Given the conversational tone of the interviews they may have easily taken on a life of their own; however, the list of topics helped ensure that the interviews for this project remained a “conversation with a purpose” (Mason 2002, p. 66), generating useful and relevant information consistent with the research questions.

4.3.2 Participant recruitment

There is no set number of participants that defines sound qualitative research but there is a need to gather sufficient depth of information to examine the research topic. The aim in this research was therefore to gather interviews until data saturation was reached. The term ‘saturation’ refers to when the researcher is no longer receiving new information about the topic because the range of ideas has been examined, patterns are recurring and further interviews would be redundant (Krueger & Casey 2000, Fossey et al. 2002). While the target population of this study are volunteer tourists in general, the actual sample population was limited to tertiary students at the University of Otago and Otago Polytechnic, both based in Dunedin, New Zealand. The interview participants were current students who at some point had previously participated in a volunteer tourism experience.

Due to practical constraints of time and money, convenience sampling was used to recruit university and polytechnic students. Participants were recruited on the basis of their availability and willingness to reply to invitation flyers (Appendix A) and a small 50-word notice (Appendix B) in a student magazine that was distributed university- and polytech-wide. In many cases convenience sampling may be biased as it misses out on those individuals who are not ‘conveniently’ located and representativeness is not a strong point for this sampling technique, with consequences for the generalisability of the findings (Ruane 2005). Nevertheless, the researcher attempted to minimise these

drawbacks by trying to select a broad cross-section of university and polytechnic students. This involved placing flyers on notice boards across a range of university and polytechnic faculties rather than in only a limited area (e.g. around the library) and approaching the widely distributed student magazine (Gravetter & Forzano 2012).

The flyers invited students with previous volunteer tourism experiences to have a short one-on-one ‘chat’ (between half an hour to an hour) with the researcher about what learning they gained as a result of these experiences. Students did not necessarily have to have had undertaken their volunteer tourism experience during their university years. Individual participation was voluntary and students were offered a complimentary cup of coffee during the interview as a “token of our appreciation” (Seidman 2006, p.73). Incentives, including financial ones, are common in research projects as they can increase response rates or participation (Krueger & Casey 2000, Perez et al. 2011). However, only a small token incentive was used in this study as anything more may have biased students’ motivations for participating in the study (Seidman 2006). Incentives may also be considered coercion when individuals feel that they must participate or reveal certain things that they felt the researcher wants to hear (Krysik & Finn 2010, Hays & Singh 2012). The interviews were conducted face-to-face and arranged for a time and place that was convenient and safe for the participants. The majority of participants opted to be interviewed in a café setting while a few interviews were conducted in similarly neutral and non-threatening locations. All interview locations were ones in which both the participant and researcher could feel relaxed and comfortable which helped facilitate the researcher’s efforts to build rapport and trust with the participant (Seidman 2006).

4.3.3 Conducting the interviews

Building trust and fostering rapport are two ideals of interviewing that are considered essential for encouraging interview participants to open up and talk freely. To this effect, although the interaction was a research interview, the researcher aimed to establish the tone of a friendly chat (Fontana & Frey 2003) and develop a relationship that was relaxed and encouraging, enabling the researcher to “communicate trust, reassurance and, even, likeableness” (Ackroyd & Hughes 1992, p.108). The researcher initiated each interview with an invitation for participants to tell her a bit about their volunteer tourism experience. The following conversation was then developed according to the different themes and issues the participants raised.

In support of Seidman (2006), the researcher adhered to a view of the interview as a social relationship in which reciprocity of perspective and essentially equal status exists between the researcher and participant. Any perceived hierarchy between the researcher and the participant may be reduced when participants feel they have choice, power and control over the information they wish to share (Campbell et al. 2010). Equal status during the interview is also encouraged when participants feel welcome to pose questions to the researcher and there is a mutual exchange of experiences (Easterby-Smith et al. 2002). Participants in the present study were therefore informed that it was their choice in deciding what they would and would not talk about during the interview and that the researcher was willing to answer any of their questions as well as she could.

During a few interviews the participants asked the researcher whether she had ever been a volunteer tourist. With her own previous volunteer tourism experiences it was more than likely that the researcher's stories would make a connection with those of the participants. Following Rapley (2004), the researcher was prepared to share her own experiences not just so that participants would be "more forthcoming" (p.25) but also as a way to encourage participants to continue talking and reconstructing *their* experiences. Seidman (2006) cautions that it is possible that by sharing his or her experiences, a researcher may distract participants from focusing on their own experiences or affect how participants shape their responses. For example, the researcher's volunteer tourism experience of monitoring sea turtles could have inspired a participant to focus more on his conservation projects rather than his community-based volunteer tourism experiences. Consequently, Seidman (2006) recommends that interviewers only share their experiences occasionally. When asked about her personal experiences during the interview, the researcher sought to strike a balance between offering her own responses and maintaining sufficient distance from the participants' own experiences. Playing down the researcher's own opinions, deflecting participants' questions (e.g. asking "...but how do *you* feel about...?") and feigning ignorance were strategies used to keep the interview focused on the purpose of the research and the participants' own experiences. Nevertheless, it should not be assumed that the researcher's experiences did not affect participants' responses. Although including the researcher's experiences in the interview may have affected participants' responses, they were still included as this potential disadvantage was considered to be outweighed by its important benefits of reducing hierarchy and building trust and rapport between the researcher and participants.

At the same time, the researcher recognised that she was positioned as an ‘outsider’ in the sense that she was not familiar with many of the volunteer tourism experiences described by the participants. Tinker and Armstrong (2008) argue that a researcher having the status of an ‘outsider’ places participants in a position of authority, which may encourage them to provide more detailed and in-depth accounts of their experiences. Rather than hide or mask her own volunteer tourism experiences, the researcher pointed out the differences between them and the nature of the participant’s experiences. This included comments such as “I’m afraid I’m not that familiar with community-based volunteer tourism experiences. Can you please explain what your responsibilities were?” Such conversation was able to stimulate participants into providing more in-depth descriptions of their particular volunteer tourism project or experience. By returning the focus to the participant, this technique also helped to minimise the potential sway of the researcher’s experiences on the direction of the interview.

All interviews were digitally recorded with the approval of the participants. However, one participant requested that she not be digitally recorded. In this case the researcher took detailed handwritten notes both during the interview and immediately at the interview’s end. Participant information sheets (Appendix C) were given to participants before the start of the interview. These sheets summarised the project, the identity of the researcher and how the research was to be carried out. Individuals were informed on what they could do if they had any concerns or future questions about their participation. It was also made clear on the sheets that all possible efforts would be made to preserve their anonymity and confidentiality of the information they provided. Considerations of security and confidentiality are essential when collecting qualitative data as part of establishing a relationship of trust between the researcher and interview participant (Veal 2006). Pseudonyms were allocated to individual participants. Knowing what they were getting themselves into, participants gave their informed consent by signing a consent form (Appendix D).

4.4 Analysis of the interviews

Once all the interviews had been conducted the researcher transcribed the recordings into electronic documents because they enable more efficient sorting and re-filing of the interview data (Seidman 2006). The interviews were converted into verbatim transcriptions because it is “important to privilege their [the participants’] voices in the

analysis and interpretation” (Fossey et al. 2002, p. 728) when seeking to understand how each individual experiences learning through volunteer tourism. By personally taking on the transcribing activities, the researcher was able to become more familiar with the content of each interview (Seidman 2006). Each interview was transcribed verbatim, including non-verbal communication (e.g. laughter, pauses, sighs) and emphasis on certain words, which may be meaningful in the analysis stage (Hays & Singh 2012).

When analysing the interviews the researcher used a combination of literal, interpretive and reflexive readings to gain a round and contextual understanding of the rich and detailed information that participants had provided (Mason 2002). A literal reading meant the researcher was interested in examining the words and language of participants’ dialogues. This analysis was complemented by taking an interpretive reading when the researcher sought to ‘read’ or ‘interpret’ the interviews for what she thought the participants meant or what could be inferred from the interviews. The researcher was therefore attentive to not only how volunteer tourists consciously interpreted their learning experiences, but also their subconscious learning that was recognised by the researcher throughout the conversation. In acknowledgement of her subjective and therefore non-neutral role during the interview, the researcher also considered how her own role and perspective was linked to the creation of the data and its interpretation.

Following Seidman (2006), the researcher marked passages that she found interesting during multiple readings of the interview data. The researcher connected excerpts that were related between different participants’ experiences as well as linked excerpts with the literature reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3. When analysing the interviews the researcher did not begin with a set of categories for which she aimed to find excerpts (Seidman 2006). Marshall and Rossman (1995) caution that “Tightly structured, highly organised data gathering and analyzing schemes, however, often filter out the unusual, the serendipitous” (p. 111). Approaching the interviews without a pre-determined set of categories enabled the themes to emerge from the data itself, guided by the research objectives, an understanding of the related volunteer tourism and learning literature, and the researcher’s own views and experiences. During the analysis the researcher encountered some excerpts that were contradictory or inconsistent with the emergent themes. Rather than ignoring these contradictory passages the researcher “engage[d] in the critical act of challenging the very pattern that seems so apparent” (Marshall &

Rossman 1995, p. 116) by attempting to understand the importance of these inconsistencies in the face of the other interview data. Once the researcher had established the major themes, she then sought to interpret their significance and broader implications in relation to the key objectives of identifying what and how individuals learn through their volunteer tourism experiences.

4.5 The role of the researcher

As suggested thus far, the researcher does not claim to have taken a neutral or ‘objective’ role in carrying out this project. In considering the influence of a researcher’s subjectivity, Drapeau (2002) comments that every qualitative research project is to some degree “oriented according to important internal factors such as the researcher’s desires, interests, and preoccupations” (p. 2). Specifically, these factors of a researcher’s subjectivity may influence any stage where the process of interpretation is at play, including the questioning of participants, marking and labelling of interesting transcription excerpts, analysis and presentation of emergent themes and presentation of findings (Seidman 2006). A challenge during this study was to identify how, and to what extent, the researcher’s subjectivity should be used in investigating participants’ experiences of learning through volunteer tourism.

Mason (2002, p.93) suggests that researchers ask themselves “What kind of identity, status or role shall I try to adopt?” The status of the author as a researcher was clear to participants but she also sought to establish her status as a student via information that was included on both the invitation flyer and the participant information sheet. Rather than detract from the study, the researcher’s status as a student, as opposed to an older professional, helped to build rapport and trust with the participants, who were also students. Highlighting their common position as students may have helped reduce any perceived power differential between the researcher and the interview participants and encouraged the latter to share more in-depth accounts of their volunteer tourism experiences (Seidman 2006).

An important issue during this research was to ensure that the research was carried out in meaningful and sensitive ways, and without imposing or projecting the researcher’s own opinions inappropriately or without reason onto the research process (Mason 2002, Seidman 2006). For example, at the time of seeking ethics approval the researcher did

not foresee how her own Atheist worldviews might influence her interactions with participants with different religious views and how their interviews would be interpreted. For example, one participant indicated that she had strong Christian values and that they had been important in how she reflected on her volunteer tourism experience. In this case, the researcher was particular about keeping her personal views on religion out of the interview process and concentrating on the focus of the research. In hindsight the researcher should have expected the connection between religion and volunteer tourism given that there are a number of volunteer tourism organisations (e.g. Habitat for Humanity) with a particular religious affiliation.

The researcher was also mindful that there is an impression in the literature (see Schott 2011, Coren & Gray 2012) and the general public that there is a hierarchy of volunteer tourism experiences where longer-term projects are more ‘meaningful’ and attract only ‘truly committed’ altruistic individuals. For example, one interview participant referred to her project in Thailand as “just a stupid little voluntourism one week kind of thing”, implying that she felt longer-term volunteer tourism projects were less ‘stupid’. Another participant who had done a longer-term volunteer tourism project was of the opinion that “short-term volunteer [tourism] is one of the worst” in a discussion of how beneficial volunteer projects are to host communities. Given these types of assumptions about volunteer tourism and given that some of the researcher’s experiences would be considered long-term, she reflected on the potential implications of sharing them during interviews. In particular, the researcher was concerned that sharing her experiences could potentially discourage participants of shorter-term projects from sharing as much information should they feel their experiences are not worth describing in comparison to the researcher’s experiences. Recognising the potential for language to impact or influence the research (King & Horrocks 2010), the researcher was therefore careful to use neutral language when talking about different volunteer tourism experiences to avoid giving participants any false impressions that this research is biased by any kind of hierarchy of volunteer tourism projects.

During the course of this study the researcher has also been forced to reflect further on her own volunteer tourism experiences and what she learnt from them. During the interpretation of the research findings, the researcher was able to recognise what those particularly challenging and dramatic moments as a volunteer tourist four years earlier had taught her about her host community and herself, not least that she no longer wanted

to study Zoology! Hearing participants' stories, the researcher was also able to acknowledge misconceptions that she had held about the Tibetan culture before they were dispelled by her first-hand experiences living amongst the locals of a Tibetan village. Additionally, engaging with the literature on learning has given the researcher greater understanding of how her approach to learning from her volunteer tourism experiences has since developed and revealed new insights into old lessons.

Implications of these reflexive personal insights had some bearing on how the researcher analysed and interpreted the participants' experiences. To some extent the researcher's own experiences of both short and longer-term volunteer tourism projects gave her some deeper insight into the experiences of participants who had undertaken similar projects. However, in addition to engaging with her own position or standpoint, the researcher tried to read the interview data from different interpretive perspectives (e.g. from the perspective of a Christian, a mature-age student, a high school student) (Mason 2002), as a single situation may give rise to multiple interpretations or 'truths' and therefore different consequences (Lincoln & Guba 1985). The analysis of the data therefore attempted to represent the voices of the researcher and the participants who share experiences as volunteer tourists and no one voice was deliberately privileged (Riley & Love 2000. Reflexive reporting that combines quotations from participants with the researcher's description and interpretation was also used to help distinguish between the voice of the participants and the contribution of the researcher's own perspective (Fossey et al. 2002).

4.6 Participant information

In total, 13 semi-structured interviews were conducted over a three week period in the second semester of study and spanned September and October 2011. Participants' volunteer tourism experiences (summarised in Appendix E) reflect the huge variation in contemporary volunteer tourism experiences including how individuals become involved, as well as project duration, cost and volunteer activities. The interview participants comprised six undergraduate and seven postgraduate students. Participants consisted of eight females and five males and had an average age of 24-years, which is similar to volunteer tourist demographics of previous research (see Galley & Clifton 2004, Broad & Jenkins 2008, Cousins et al. 2009b). It is important to note that the average age calculation excluded two participants: one participant asked that she only be described as

‘mature age’; the other was aged 59 and would have skewed the average age result to 27-years, which inaccurately reflects the youth of most participants. Both the ‘mature age’ and 59 year old students highlight the fact that not all university students are chronologically young people and may be a reflection of the increasing number of retired individuals taking part in volunteer tourism (see Stoddart & Rogerson 2004).

4.7 Summary

This chapter has accounted for the methods chosen to carry out the present study. Use of a qualitative research approach was justified by its emphasis on the experiences of the individual volunteer tourist and its ability to take into account the context and processes surrounding what and how learning occurs through volunteer tourism. Semi-structured interviews were used to gain the necessary data from a sample of university students who were recruited using convenience sampling. This chapter explored the steps taken by the researcher to build rapport and trust and promote equal status with participants as a means to facilitate more effective communication. These steps involved highlighting the researcher and participants’ common status as a student and the sharing of the researcher’s own volunteer tourism experiences. The researcher’s insight into volunteer tourism was balanced by her position as an ‘outsider’, who was unfamiliar with the specific projects undertaken by the participants. In this way, participants were further encouraged to provide rich and detailed information about their learning experiences.

The analysis of the interviews was also discussed, with a particular focus on the researcher’s literal, interpretive and reflexive readings of the interview data. The analysis of what and how individuals learn through volunteer tourism is therefore based on the participants’ own words as well as the researcher’s own views of what was meant or could be inferred from the interviews. The role of the researcher was also considered in light of the researcher’s subjectivity, including a discussion of the potential influence of the researcher’s own experiences, interests and preoccupations on different stages of the research process. Nevertheless, the voice of the researcher shared equal status with the participants’ and no interpretation was privileged in the analysis of the data. This chapter also considered the notion that there is no singular truth and highlighted that the outcomes of this research may be viewed as the result of having considered the data from multiple perspectives.

5 WHAT DO INDIVIDUALS LEARN THROUGH VOLUNTEER TOURISM?

5.1 Introduction

The following two chapters present key findings that emerged from the participant interviews where learning appeared to be an inherent part of the volunteer tourism experience. This chapter focuses on an analysis of what the participants learnt from their social and physical interactions with members of their host community, other volunteer tourists and the surrounding environment. These interactions led to repeated mentions by participants of having gained new practical and social skills, a better understanding of their host community's culture and also some insight into their own ideas of Self and identity. Such learning was actively sought by some individuals whereas for others their learning was an unexpected outcome of their volunteer tourism experience. In many cases participants' learning was evident in answers to specific questions about what they had learnt from a particular situation or the overall experience. However, the researcher also noted less explicit learning as well as unexpected learning about the volunteer tourism industry during general discussion about participants' volunteer tourism experiences. Overall, the learning described and demonstrated by participants was consistent with earlier reviews of the potential learning that may occur through volunteer tourism. The researcher chose to use the three widely used categories of 1) learning skills and knowledge, 2) learning about the Other, and 3) learning about Self established in Chapter 3 in order to investigate more subtle and less familiar processes of learning in the informal setting of volunteer tourism.

5.2 Learning skills and knowledge

Volunteer tourism introduced many participants to new and improved skills and knowledge (information and theories). The skills and knowledge that interview participants talked about were broadly relevant to the particular volunteer tourism project and host country. However, the specific skills and knowledge varied widely, encompassing linguistic and practical skills such as cooking a new cuisine, cutting down corn stalks, and teaching skills, as well as general knowledge about the host country and

organisation, and social and environmental issues. These findings draw strong similarities with the learning demonstrated by volunteer tourists in previous studies (Stoddart & Rogerson 2004, Lepp 2008, Mittelberg & Palgi 2011, Wearing & Grabowski 2011). The present study, however, goes further in exploring this learning by also situating participants' development of skills and knowledge in the context of learning opportunities ranging from structured lessons to serendipitous free-choice and deep experiential learning.

Learning skills and knowledge in these ways supports the idea that volunteer tourism may offer participants learning experiences that remove some of the difficulties associated with formal education. As an informal learning setting in which learning is disconnected from the stresses and pressures of predetermined curricula, teachers and assessments, volunteer tourism may inspire participants to approach learning experiences openly, willingly and deeply rather than superficially because they feel they must (Ramsden 1992, Marton & Säljö 1997, Merriam et al. 2007). Therefore, even if some informal learning may be structured insofar as the learning material is pre-planned and aimed at achieving certain objectives, participants may still be open and keen and able to learn effectively (Feuer 2009). Indeed, some participants' volunteer tourism projects were actively focused on helping them to develop certain skills and knowledge and created various learning opportunities that individuals could participate in if they were motivated to do so. For example, Naomi signed up to her project knowing that she would be trained by her host organisation in the specific field skills she would need to fulfil her conservation-based volunteer role. Similarly, Emma talked about volunteering at a horse safari in Africa where the host organisation aimed to help participants:

to learn horsemanship, to learn to ride, to learn to how to care for the horses and
(...) they would basically teach you about the bush, about bush safari that sort of
thing. (Emma)

Even when the volunteer tourism activities were not aimed at teaching participants certain skills, participants' learning was encouraged by the overall active and experiential nature of their volunteer tourism activities. For example Josh's project asked volunteer tourists to help lay the foundations for a new building. Although Josh' farming background meant that he was "used to doing a bit of hard work" and took easily to the physical demands of construction work, he recognised that other volunteer tourists who

“hadn’t ever done hard work” actually “learnt pretty quick”. Participants also picked up a variety of other skills and knowledge through spontaneous and serendipitous learning opportunities. For example, Emma recalled that she had jumped at the chance of learning some Indian cooking when offered by a local ‘Aunty’. Martin admitted that his local volunteer counterpart “instilled a bit of African rhythm in me” by teaching him some dancing skills that they consequently used as part of their volunteer teaching activities.

Of the skills and knowledge gained by participants, learning some of the local language was one of the most frequently mentioned. This is not surprising given that the majority of participants had chosen volunteer tourism projects in host countries where English is not a native language and having some basic native language skills is helpful (see Rehberg 2005, Söderman & Snead 2008, Mittelberg & Palgi 2011). Many participants learnt the local language through language lessons offered by their host organisations. Within the informal learning setting of volunteer tourism, these language lessons represented a structured but nonetheless free-choice learning opportunity that was taken up by participants when it was available. For example, in Argentina Jess participated in week-long Spanish lessons that alternated with weeks of volunteering. Josh also described how he had specifically chosen the option within his volunteer tourism program to spend the first week doing language training, which included classroom style lessons as well as a homestay with a local family. Learning and practising the language experientially in a homestay setting was similar to how other interview participants came to learn the local language informally through close and intense interactions with local people. Martin recalled that in addition to the five-day introductory course that international volunteers were given to learn the local language in Zambia, his Zambian volunteer counterpart “taught me the local language the whole time” they volunteered and lived together. Whether the participants learnt informally through interactions with local people or through structured language lessons (or both), the majority of participants stated that they had been able to improve or learn new language skills during their time as volunteer tourists. Incidentally, participants’ ability to better communicate using the local language facilitated further opportunities for participants to learn from interactions with members of their host community (see Wickens 2011).

In addition to practical skills and knowledge, interview participants indicated that they had been able to develop their ‘soft skills’, which are viewed as beneficial components of

an individual's professional skill-set and sought after by potential employers (Jones 2011). Participants spoke specifically about this learning in terms of having improved their communication and interpersonal capabilities. Almost all of the participants had headed off to their volunteer tourism projects alone, which appeared to encourage them to push their own boundaries and develop their social skills as part of meeting and interacting with new people. For example, Emma talked about "learning to interact with a new group of people who I didn't know every month" across her four months of being a volunteer tourist. The intense levels of social interaction with individuals from many different backgrounds appeared to develop participants' tolerance and understanding of other people and cultures. As Scott learnt, "it's also better not to judge straight away. You have to take your time" when meeting people for the first time. The interrelatedness between different areas of learning is evident in how Laura's improved communication and interpersonal skills impacted positively on other areas of learning. Namely, Laura's newfound 'people' skills facilitated her ability to learn new skills and knowledge as she could interact more effectively with other people, gaining answers to her many questions about India.

And like two days before [leaving Iceland for India] I almost like chickened out of going. Like, I was like, 'no, what am I doing, going on my own to India?', like. But I found that it was so easy to like get to know people. That was probably the best part because I had no idea how India worked and like there was just so much, so many things you had to learn. (Laura)

It became apparent from the participant interviews that developing communication skills was a learning outcome especially associated with volunteer teacher roles. Reflecting global trends in volunteer tourism projects (see Callanan & Thomas 2005, Tomazos & Butler 2009), over half of the 13 interview participants had chosen a volunteer teaching project. Participants were responsible for communicating content on various subjects to children ranging from pre-school to high-school ages. The absence of any guidance from the host organisation meant that participants often had to develop their own lesson plans and deliver them in a way they believed was effective. For example, during Laura's experience of teaching primary school children in India:

Like we had to like make all our [teaching] material on our own, like, we had to do our own research and (...) we could kind of decide what we were going to teach,

like we were just told you were supposed to teach English and Maths and that's it.
(Laura)

That none of the participants had previous teaching experience may have provided suitable base conditions on which some were able to successfully build their communication skills. For example, Laura was pleased that she and the other volunteer teachers eventually “were making like their homework and putting [*sic*] assignments for them [the students]”. Similarly, Scott admitted that his teaching role was “a bit intimidating at first” but his teaching achievements during the project demonstrated the significant improvement in his skills in communicating as well as his views on teaching.

Coaching rowing was pretty awesome. Um, my rowing crew, they ended up in the South African champs getting gold, bronze and silver and that had never been done at the school. And that helped my coaching incredibly. (Scott)

Interestingly, Martin was the only participant who reported being trained specifically in how the host organisation wanted volunteer tourists to communicate the learning material to students. Martin recalled of his teaching training that “that was our mandate really, using non-formal education so a lot of, um, group work and um yeah, plays and drama and singing, that sort of thing.” Ironically, as part of his own informal learning through volunteer tourism Martin learnt how to create and deliver informal learning opportunities for others, teaching Zambian high school boys about sexual health and life skills. As a result of his newly developed communication skills Martin felt that he had successfully been “able to stand up and, and impart something useful to other people.”

It has been suggested that the level of interaction and communication required from volunteer tourists may depend on the nature of the specific volunteer tourism project (Lepp 2008). Development of volunteer tourists’ soft skills may likewise be influenced by the type of project. Volunteer tourism projects with a strong focus on participants interacting and communicating effectively with people, such as volunteer teaching projects, may be better contexts for helping participants improve their communication skills. This is in contrast to projects with less human interaction, such as animal- or environment-based volunteer tourism projects. In these cases, according to Lepp (2008), there is less emphasis on volunteer tourists’ communication skills because participants have to worry less about getting to know the local people and living in the local

community. The different levels of engagement required by volunteer tourists are evident in Emma's reflections on her volunteer work on a horse safari compared to her volunteer teaching positions.

So it's a mixture of physicalness [sic], which I liked about South Africa, but also that chance to relax, it was a much more relaxed, because we *weren't* with people, because we weren't having the stresses, and the horses were pretty easy to get along with, whereas everywhere else was learning, and then you have the language barrier as well. (Emma)

5.3 Learning about the Other

Consistent with previous studies (Jones 2005, McIntosh & Zahra 2007) the majority of participants admitted to having had little to no travel experience in developing countries and had known nothing or relatively little about their host country before their in-country arrival. Gaining a deeper understanding of the Other, referring usually to the host community but inclusive here of other volunteer tourists, is widely considered to be a favourable outcome of volunteer tourism (Wearing 2001, McIntosh & Zahra 2007, Lepp 2008, Guttentag 2009, Wearing & Grabowski 2011, Dalwai & Donegan 2012). Although learning about the Other is commonly reported by volunteer tourists, it is rarely mentioned as a primary motivation (Wearing & Grabowski 2011). For most participants in the present study broader desires to visit a new country and be immersed in a different culture were primary motivations for them to become volunteer tourists. Josh stated that he wanted to do a volunteer tourism project rather than just take a conventional trip because "You get to see the *real* culture, which is a kind of a little bit more preferable in my case than seeing the tourist side of stuff." Similarly, Martin believed that through his volunteering in Zambia he would get "the *real* experience". Although these motivations presuppose a participant's willingness to understand and learn about that culture, only Luke had specifically expressed a desire of "getting a better understanding of like an Asian, an Asian culture" through his volunteer tourism experience. Aside from Naomi, who completed a project domestically in New Zealand, the majority of participants chose a volunteer tourism project in a country that is culturally and/or environmentally different to their own. It is through this cross-cultural nature of most volunteer tourism experiences that regardless of their motivations volunteer tourists usually come to learn something about the Other (Wearing & Grabowski 2011). Indeed, analysis of the

interview data indicated that as a result of their volunteer tourism experiences intercultural learning was a goal achieved by all participants, albeit to different extents. This current section focuses on those participants who demonstrated deeper learning about the Other while participants who developed only a relatively shallow understanding are found in later discussions of potential obstacles to learning through volunteer tourism.

Volunteer tourists' learning about their host country, host community and project typically began while they were still at home. Confirming recent research by Grimm and Needham (2012) on volunteer tourism promotional material, the Internet was the most popular source of information for participants when they had first decided to find out some general knowledge and facts (including geographical location) about their project and host country before their departure. Other sources of initial information included friends and family, travel agents, information brochures, movies and even a friend's Facebook photos. The handful of participants who reported having prior knowledge about their host destination had previously studied their host country as part of their formal education, usually at high school or university level.

A host country's local 'rules' and social mores constituted a large part of what participants learnt about the Other. Much of this learning took place in-country and experientially for participants rather than back at home when they had been looking on the Internet or at promotional brochures. Participants spoke frequently about the specific social and cultural traits and 'do's and don'ts' that they encountered on a daily basis while carrying out their volunteer tourism activities or during their free time. Participants repeatedly pointed out aspects of their host culture that they found different rather than similar to corresponding situations in their home culture.

Oh and at first I thought they were, I'd met a, I'd just happened to meet a whole lot of rude people but they're all just so um, like they don't mean it badly, it's because they care when they say things. They're just really really blunt and by the end I'd learnt to just know that that was their way. (Jess)

[I learnt] just things that you don't really do, and things that you don't do with respect to cultures and you know 'cause there's, [there are things] you should always know before you go in there. There are certain rules, like in Costa Rica they don't flush toilet paper, which I learnt pretty quickly. Like ah you don't walk

around without a shirt on, it's rude. Things like that you know, you learnt pretty quick. (Josh)

And we wouldn't be allowed to wear like tight clothes and when I did the volunteering, girls were not allowed to buy alcohol in town or like cigarettes and we weren't allowed to smoke in the street or anything, so we had to like, if we were smoking, smoke inside like the building we lived in, like, and you had to be behind like the bars kind of, like, so like in the corner where no one from this village would see you. (Laura)

Previous studies on volunteer tourists point out that much of volunteer tourists' learning derives from their social interactions with the host community, during both their volunteer tourism activities and free-time outside of these activities (Wearing 2001, McIntosh & Zahra 2007, Lepp 2008, Sin 2009, Mittelberg & Palgi 2011). In some cases participants' learning about the local customs and social mores of the host community was delivered in a relatively structured way by the host organisation. In this way, the host organisation sought to help the volunteers understand why they needed to behave in a safe and respectful manner appropriate to the local culture. The following quote by Laura demonstrates her understanding of why her host organisation in India imposed the rules she mentioned above. Moreover, the quote illustrates the experiential learning that enabled Laura to not just take in the 'rules' as facts about the Other but understand their significance in the contexts of her volunteer tourism project and the Indian culture.

So they [host organisation] had to like protect the [school's] image so if they [members of the public] would like see the teachers, the girls like walking down the street like dressing inappropriately, smoking and drinking, like obviously they [members of the public] wouldn't send their kids to this school. So it's kind of like, and they [the host organisation] explained that part to us, that it was just so wrong in their culture and it would ruin the school's reputation. (Laura)

At other times, learning about the host culture was unstructured, occurring serendipitously and experientially as participants discovered new things about their host culture through informal interactions with the local people and their personal observations of everyday life. For example, Josh stated that he learnt many of the Costa Rican culture's idiosyncrasies by "being told by my host family" and learning experientially as he recalled that he had "read quite a bit before I went [to Costa Rica] I guess but there was yeah, there were some things that weren't mentioned that once I got there I, yeah,

picked up pretty quick.” Similarly, Scott’s knowledge about the ‘dos and don’ts’ of living in South Africa came from his local South African flatmates.

All my flatmates that were tutors with me, they were all South African. I was the only international. And so, they’d also been at the school for two years so they kind of knew the ins and outs and I slowly learnt about it from them. (Scott)

Gmelch (1997) identified learning about the host culture as a significant contributor to his students’ travel experiences abroad, helping them with good-decision making and knowing how to get by safely and economically in an unfamiliar place. Similarly, participants in the current study often related their learning of local behaviour and social mores to showing their respect for the local culture as well as to personal health and safety issues during their volunteer tourism project and any travelling afterwards. In particular, knowing the ‘ins and outs’ of the host destination contributed to participants’ self-confidence in their ability to travel independently, which will be explored in greater detail when discussing learning about Self.

So just following rules, not necessarily rules but um, cultural things like that.
Making sure that you pay attention, that sort of stuff so you’re not disrespectful.
(Josh)

And so, it kind of like prepared for, prepared me for further in travelling (...) So like, going through the sickness in the camp was like good for them [the volunteer tourists] because then [after the volunteer tourism project] we kept on travelling and we knew like what to stay away from and we learnt it in Hindi as well, so yeah.
(Laura)

That was in the first weeks where you don’t really know the place and then you start to learn, oh you don’t go into the middle of Pretoria at this time of night and so, you stick to the right suburbs and yeah (...) Like for the first couple of months I wouldn’t drive a car around in case someone came up at the lights and tried to get me out. But then once I got used to it, I knew where to drive and what to do. And then I was fine. (Scott)

Through their experiential learning experiences participants were able to also see beyond their preconceived notions to learn the ‘truth’ about their host country. As mentioned previously, participants’ knowledge of their host country often stemmed from what they had initially found through the Internet and other sources of learning, both

formal and informal, while still at home. However, the interviews suggest that what volunteer tourists initially learn about their host country may include popular but misleading cultural and ethnic stereotypes that tend to be associated with mass tourism (Wearing & Grabowski 2011). For example, participants in McIntosh and Zahra's study (2007) had very stereotypical impressions of the Maori culture in New Zealand. As a result of such misconceptions Mittelberg and Palgi (2011) found that the "idealistic pre-trip image is not always realised in the practice" that volunteer tourists encounter. Indeed, some participants described how they came to realise the differences between their preconceived notions of their host country and what they were seeing and experiencing first-hand.

All the tourism advertisements about Sri Lanka always say it's the country of smiles, and everyone's happy and there's this like deep-rooted belief in Buddhism, inner happiness and that. I didn't see any of that (...) um, you really don't observe what you're promised. (Luke)

I'd always seen the women out working in the field in Thailand and all over South East Asia as well. It's always, well, usually women and they're out working in the fields. And to me I kind of had this um really like romanticised vision of that in my head. Like, I was like, oh you know [it's] so peaceful and beautiful working out in the field and then I was nothing like [how] they were doing it! I was like oh my [she grimaces, makes cutting corn action and laughs]; it was really hard, like the hardest work ever! So now I don't have this sort of rosy glow about it anymore. (Colleen)

The value of experiential learning through volunteer tourism is suggested in the scale of difference in the accuracy and amount between what participants learnt first-hand about their host country and the second-hand information they had acquired at home. Indeed, participants' in-country experiential learning led to profound changes in how they viewed their knowledge of their host country.

Well, when I arrived I found out that I didn't really know anything about India.
(Laura)

I thought I did [know about Africa]. Like when I did my exchange in Denmark I focused on African politics and conflicts in Africa. But I didn't, I didn't know anything really about the people and the cultures, especially Zambia. (Martin)

Learning the truth about the Other appeared to be an enlightening but sobering experience for some interview participants. Just as Luke was expecting Sri Lanka to be the “country of smiles”, volunteer tourists may readily believe the misconceptions that paint happy and idealistic images of a host country. However, common to all the participants’ experiences was that they often had close encounters with the economic, political and social hardships faced by their host community. Jess’ admission that “it was a bit of a shock” reflects how most interview participants responded to seeing these realities of their host countries. It has been argued that volunteer tourists do not engage critically with their experiences and a deeper understanding of their host community is therefore limited (Simpson 2004). The following quotes suggest, however, that despite the shock, trying to rationalise the gaps between their expectations, misconceptions and ignorance encouraged some participants to reflect and try taking a holistic approach to understanding the social, political, and economic issues underlying their first-hand experiences in their host country. Reasons that may explain why some participants were more successful than others in achieving this level of intercultural learning are explored in Chapter 6.

I think um I hadn’t really thought about a lot of the issues before in such detail ‘cause I think a lot about social justice issues. But I hadn’t thought so much about [animal] abuse. I wasn’t as conscious about the environmental issues that are happening in Thailand and the kind of role that the government plays or doesn’t play, and um, and the ways in which tourism can kind of lead into quite abusive situations and quite negative situations so it was kind of, it made me more conscious in my travelling after that to not be engaging with um industries that are harmful, well, you know, of course I still did because you can’t avoid it but I tried to lessen you know the damage. (Colleen)

I never had any idea of, like, what the schools were like over there and what the, like the government and stuff like that and kind of how tough it was to actually get into school and stay in school. ‘Cause it wasn’t about behaviour, it was about money. It was just all about money. (Amber)

There’s like a, in Sri Lanka there’s like an obvious culture, which is all the happy smiles and there’s this second culture, which is really this, yeah, extreme, this willingness to out-, outcompete others by being very very mean and kind of forming these, kind of, yeah, forming these kind of, what do you call it, alliances with other people and yeah, inventing stories that that are so unbelievably silly just to make

other people look bad. (...) Our like society with all our opportunities allows us to be more honest in that pursuit of acting in our interests whereas there [in Sri Lanka] the opportunities are so scarce, especially their financial means are so scarce that they just have to, they can't be so honest, otherwise they are not going to get anywhere. (Luke)

It is important to note that participants' intercultural learning was not limited to the host culture but also extended to learning about the cultures of their fellow volunteer tourists. Group-based volunteer tourism projects made up the majority of participants' experiences, with only a handful of participants on solo 'placements' at an organisation. McGehee and Santos (2005) emphasise the group-nature of volunteer tourism projects, which can bring together like-minded individuals from all over the world to work together towards a common goal. Not only did participants work closely with other volunteer tourists to carry out their volunteer responsibilities, a few participants also described experiences living with other volunteer tourists. These frequent and close social interactions that occurred between volunteer tourists with different cultural, religious and socio-economic backgrounds provided opportunities for participants to learn about additional Others beyond the host culture. Amber's quote below about learning to understand her classmates' different viewpoints on religion demonstrates that volunteer tourists may also have the opportunity to learn about Others within their own home society, not necessarily from another country.

Yeah, well, you do spend your whole time with them [the other volunteer tourists].

Well, while you're volunteering, the actual work, yeah you're with them the whole time but [at the day's end] we all went back to our own houses. (Josh)

I mean like even hanging out with them [other volunteer tourists] was a lesson into their culture so, especially the two, well in the flat I lived in, it ended up being five French girls and me. So that was, it was kind of like living in France. (Jess)

Um yeah, it was interesting to hear how they [her classmates], like when we talked about it [what happened each day] at the end of the day, how they saw some things, 'cause some girls were very far from Christian so when we went to like the [host] school's, you know, church service or something they would, they would say how they felt about it, because it was sometimes quite intense. And so some of us were Christian and some of the girls weren't and so it would be quite interesting to hear how they viewed that kind of thing, and just how they felt. Like, how they looked,

'cause we were all seeing it slightly differently so how they saw it was quite interesting as well, cause, yeah. 'Cause some of the girls that I went with were, come from very very very privileged families so they were very shocked. (Amber)

Two participants noted that the majority of the other volunteer tourists on their group project were Australians, which may reflect the countries targeted by the specific volunteer tourism sending organisation both participants went through. Ann was the only volunteer from New Zealand in a group of 20, while Josh stated that “there were about 40 of us altogether I think and there was three kiwis, maybe four kiwis, all the rest [were] Australians”. As a result of having lived and worked closely alongside Australian volunteers during the project, Ann and Josh were able to gain a better understanding of Australians and their culture.

We had Australia Day while we were there and so they were all really patriotic and obviously they were, it's huge. I hadn't realised that it was that big. They all had their flags, they had everything. They were pretty organised. (Josh)

I did learn a lot about them like, Australians are pretty similar to New Zealanders I guess. Um, but I learned more about their culture, like Australian culture as well. The lingo, like, the slang and stuff like that. (Ann)

Josh also stated, laughingly, that his experiences had made him better at “tolerating Aussies!”. Although Josh’s comment may be viewed in the spirit of the longstanding rivalry between Australia and New Zealand (see IOL Sport 2012), it also supports arguments that intercultural learning through volunteer tourism (and other such cross-cultural experiences) may be effective in promoting cross-cultural understanding and dispelling misleading cultural stereotypes even between neighbouring countries such as Australia and New Zealand. Ann’s and Josh’s intercultural learning about Australians contributed to the establishment of close and enduring friendships with their fellow Australian volunteer tourists. For example, Ann expressed that she is keen to visit her friends in Australia and Josh commented that,

I'm still really good friends with the whole group [of Australian volunteer tourists] really, I see them quite frequently. I saw three of them; three of them flew over [to New Zealand] for the 21st [birthday party] of the other kiwi girl last weekend. That was real cool. (Josh)

5.4 Learning about Self

Learning about Self was frequently expressed by the majority of interview participants. Their experiences revealed two sub-themes within the overall topic of learning about Self. The first relates to learning about one's own capacities and limitations during the course of the volunteer tourism experience. The second sub-theme builds on this learning about personal capacities and limitations and explores how volunteer tourists discover and learn to be comfortable with Self.

5.4.1 Learning about one's own capacities and limitations

The notion of challenge has often been associated with volunteer tourists' experiences (see Sin 2009, Schott 2011) and whether they are able to overcome the challenges they encounter. Consistent with Wearing's (2001) cluster of 'personal awareness and learning' within the broader notion of self-development, participants discovered more about their personal capacities and limitations which ranged from the broad to the specific, and from the quotidian to the profound. A small number of participants recalled that they had doubted their own ability to face some of their perceived challenges or perceived risks of volunteer tourism. For example, Laura admitted that "I was actually really stressed going on my own" while Emma had been "nervous" about how her relatively older age might affect the way that younger volunteer tourists would perceive or interact with her. That Laura and Emma still chose to become volunteer tourists despite these fears suggests that they both had latent desires to test their sense of Self and learn whether they had the capacity to overcome perceived limitations.

On the other hand, Colleen reported a very clear desire to learn about her personal capacities and limitations. Colleen had felt that because she had always volunteered in "social justice stuff", she thought "it'd be cool to kinda, you know, push my own boundaries" by doing something totally different – so she chose an environmental volunteer tourism project. By testing themselves with risks and challenges such as can be found in volunteer tourism, individuals are able to construct the Self that they wish to be (Elsrud 2001). However, common across participants, whether they subconsciously or consciously wanted to learn about their own capacities and limitations, is that they had taken an "I want to see if I can do this" approach to their experience (Sin 2009, p. 490).

Indeed most participants realised that they *could* do it.

And it's probably also helped me, well, helped me meet new people as well. Like not feeling intimidated and just being able to go up and talk to someone a lot more.
(Scott)

It's kinda good to know that you can go somewhere else and make friends with people and get along fine without too much, too much drama yeah. Like um, yeah so it's nice to know that you, that I am capable of doing those kinds of things. I think I also learnt that I'm maybe a wee bit more introverted than I thought. Because at one stage I was sharing a room with five people and I was pretty ready to get out of that by the end. Which I hadn't, I, I hadn't really realised how much it would bother me. (Jess)

It was like a lot of the world had opened up to me, things where I thought I can't do this, I can't do that because I'm too old or I'm too... It didn't matter anymore and that has stayed with me, that's been one of the longer term kind of benefits that it wound the clock back a little bit and in terms of, certainly mentally, sort of how I thought about myself, that I wasn't quite as old as I thought, very selfish, very vain but it was very beneficial in that way. (Emma)

Participants described a range of events or situations, which led to learning about their personal abilities or limitations. Adapting to the local culture and conditions provided many of these lessons about Self. For example, Emma stated that "food was sometimes an issue" she had to overcome as the type of food served at her host organisation "doesn't do you a lot of good if you're not used to it" and she had lost a lot of weight during her time volunteering. Ann remembered "not having a flushing toilet and a bucket shower", which was a lesson in becoming adaptable for someone who admitted that "I'm well known in my flat for my long showers". Jess spoke about coping with a lack of Internet access at her accommodation. Laura also took some time adapting to the social interaction of haggling that characterised much of her interactions with the local people in India, where she recalled even having to bargain for a bottle of water. A few participants described particularly dramatic and dangerous events, which will be considered in more specific detail in the following chapter on how volunteer tourists learn.

Much of participants' learning about Self by overcoming challenges such as those mentioned above increased their self-confidence (see Wearing 2001, Jones 2005, Schott 2011). This process can be linked to individuals leaving behind their support and control

networks (Noy 2004, Jones 2005), which may have been especially relevant to younger participants who were reaching the end of their youth life stage and for whom the experience may have acted as a kind of ‘rite of passage’ into adulthood (Schott 2011). Without their familiar support and communication networks, participants had to navigate and overcome these new challenges by themselves, leading to a greater sense of self-achievement and confidence. In some cases, it is possible that one’s *existing* sense of Self is the obstacle to be overcome. For example, Emma’s comment above illustrates how volunteer tourism may offer participants the opportunity to challenge an existing perceived view of the Self (Schott 2011). Initially, Emma said that before she had set off abroad she had thought ‘I can’t do this, I can’t do that because I’m too old’, but realised during her experiences that what she was doing was actually “invigorating” and her perceived limitations “didn’t matter anymore” because she “suddenly had freedom”.

5.4.2 Learning about and being comfortable with Self

A positive connection between volunteer tourism, personal growth and a transformational effect on the individual has emerged from the literature (Hudson & Inkson 2006, McIntosh & Zahra 2007, Coghlan & Gooch 2011, Zahra 2011). In line with the idea that some volunteer tourists are on a ‘quest for Self’ (Rehberg 2005), ‘journey of discovery’ (Lyons & Wearing 2008), or ‘journey of self-discovery’ (Wickens 2011), volunteer tourism enabled many participants in the present study to realise and begin to ‘transform’ into the person they believe they would like to be. As found by Schott (2011), many of the participants had been volunteer tourists when they were at a transitional stage in life, either finishing or having just finished high school or their undergraduate degree but not knowing what to do next, or thinking about changing careers. Although Schott’s findings were focused on young volunteer tourists much like the undergraduate participants in the present study, they may be applied to the older postgraduate participants who had also been facing an important juncture in their lives (e.g. Emma’s career break). Schott argues that volunteer tourism may give these individuals greater clarity and readiness for their ‘next step’ in life as well as giving them time to think about their current and future life direction. Accordingly, many participants talked about developing the values that they want to guide their lives and discovering a new direction for their future career, which mirrors findings in Brown’s (2005) work on volunteer tourists’ motives and benefits. In support of Mittelberg and Palgi’s (2011) 30-year retrospective analysis of volunteer

tourist self-development, participants' learning about Self is strongly future-focused with long-term implications and impacts on the individual.

In contrast to previous research where the motive of personal development among volunteer tourists was a common finding (see Broad & Jenkins 2008, Schott 2011), only a small number of participants in this research had set off on their volunteer tourism experience hoping they would learn more about Self. Among these few, Martin had viewed his eight month project in Zambia "as a way to get some perspective on where I want to, you know, where I want to go and what I want to focus on." This emphasis on the future Self is echoed in Amber's statement that she chose to take part in the volunteer tourism project because she had thought "alright, this is gonna help me decide who I am". Amber had even hoped expressly for some kind of personal transformation when she said that she "wanted to you know, become, do what they had talked about", referring to the life-changing experience described by other students from her school who had done the same trip previously. Like Schott's (2011) respondents, Martin and Amber had actively sought and expected to learn something about their selves from their volunteer tourism experience. However, the majority of participants in this study lend support to Zahra's (2011) findings where learning about Self and identity tended to be a serendipitous and unexpected outcome for many participants.

The popular perception that volunteer tourism is a life-changing experience held true for participants whose experiences were like an epiphany, revealing for the first time the person they had not known they wanted to be and how to become that person. Importantly, participants did not necessarily have to be motivated by a search for Self in order for such moments to occur.

When I went over [to Vanuatu] and like I heard their [students at the local school] ideas and I just, we talked through it, how they were brought up and how they saw all these things and how they saw life and I was like, I want to, I want to live like that, like, just be thankful for everything that we have. (Amber)

It's kind of when I decided I wanted to study Tourism as well. So, it was quite cool to learn that I wanted to do that after school. (Scott)

Well, I really want to volunteer, like, and I like volunteering here in Dunedin as well. After going there [Thailand] it just made realise that I want to do something [along] that like, pathway, like maybe with the United Nations or something like

that. So it's something I want to actually do with my life as well. So I guess I learnt that about myself. (Ann)

Ann's desire to work for the United Nations, an international organisation that seeks to maintain international peace and security, reflects how learning about one's future Self may be related to a heightened awareness of global issues and learning about the Other (McGehee & Santos 2005). Through experiential learning, many participants were able to make connections between the lives of local people in their host community and their own lives by reflecting and comparing one's own attitudes to life with those of others. For example, compared to what she had seen in Vietnam, Lucy recognised of herself and her society that "we worry about things that really don't matter that much." Importantly, participants' interactions with their host community and other volunteer tourists challenged their existing attitudes and taught them new values and how to see life from a different and more holistic perspective.

During the school holidays, I did some travelling (...) with the other international volunteers. It was a bit weird you know, like, reality hit in that we were, we were different. We could just, they [the Zambian volunteers] went home and, and, um worked in the garden, like the Zambians, and we went off gallivanting around the countryside and spending as much money in like one or two days at a bar as we were given [as a stipend], you know, for a month to spend on food so, that was just weird and uncomfortable at times. (Martin)

Yeah, well, they [the students at the school] gave us insight on how we can actually, like they definitely introduced us to a whole new, like, [way of] knowing yourself kind of, if that makes sense (...) They taught us how to be happy with everything that we have and how to be so peaceful I guess, like not make, get upset with things. Like I tend to not be as dramatic and I used to be for instance, 'cause I'm just like ok, like, [you should] appreciate everything that you have (...) We all kind of like matured a lot more because we realised, I don't know, that there is so much more to our little catty school problems and yeah, it was definitely, we all grew up. (Amber)

That's maybe the reason why I'm doing philosophy and physical geography [at university] because I realise how incredibly important it is in a real life working challenge like there [in Sri Lanka], that you need this, you need this holistic view on things and you need to know a lot of all different fields of like construction and weather, and um, and soils, and everything, to really maybe help people and

understand people, and maybe finding out who is the best person to help me with this and this and this in this problem, you know, to solve the biggest problem.
(Luke)

This holistic approach to learning where participants looked beyond their own personal sphere is suggestive of deep transformational learning when individuals experience a shift in how they see their place in the world, their assumptions and world beliefs (Leigh 2006, Coghlan & Gooch 2011). This outcome supports the argument that deep transformational learning is possible in cross-cultural experiences such as volunteer tourism where individuals can engage meaningfully with the Other (Jones 2005, Coghlan & Gooch 2011, Morgan 2011, Zahra 2011), and according to the learning theory, with a (conscious or subconscious) willingness to be open to learning (Ramsden 1992).

Furthermore, two interview participants articulated that their transformational learning about Self (but interrelated with other areas of learning) actually manifested in self-change. Both Emma and Amber reported that when they had returned home from their volunteer tourism projects their friends commented on different ways they had changed. Rather than specific little differences in personal habits or behaviour, their friends noticed changes that reflected a shift in more holistic aspects of Emma's and Amber's values and overall approach to life suggesting that their learning about Self had led to more profound and long-lasting personal changes.

Definitely I think they've seen me change and I've had that comment actually back from certainly close friends, that when I came back I was quite a different person. Um, still the same character, but just outlook and attitude had changed. I'm *much* more relaxed now. [I was a] very uptight person before I went and strangely quieter as well [but] nowadays I can talk the hind legs off a donkey, as they say! (Emma)

Everyone could see how much it had changed me, like everyone saw that I was just so, I'd just kind of morphed into some sort of grown up, thankful person and I, you know, we all get a little bit childish and spoilt and they could all see that I'd just like grown from it. (Amber)

Significantly, the popular life-changing ideal of volunteer tourism was not relevant to all participants. In contrast, some participants had set off as volunteer tourists already having a firm idea on those aspects of Self that other participants were discovering for the

first time. These latter participants were to some extent re-learning or reinforcing what they had previously learnt or confirming what they had believed about themselves.

Um, I had it before I went there but just simplicity. Um, simplicity in living, not buying all the fancy things that you might not need, um, they [Costa Ricans] don't have much and they're all pretty happy. Wholesome activities, wholesome family life, all that sort of stuff, I plan on, I guess, I kinda knew before I went there obviously but seeing it in action's always good. Um, seeing it yeah, you definitely can be very happy with not much. I knew before I went but I guess it just reiterates it. (Josh)

I think it just consolidated what I want to do with, like which direction I want to go with my life (...) I think I learnt sort of where I want to go in life, like, what sort of um, sort of, values I aspire to have. Yeah, I knew um, I learnt that I wanted to focus on conflict studies, obviously, and um, yeah. I think I got some more perspectives on yeah, what's important and, to me, I think. (Martin)

Finally, apparent in many participants' interviews was their learning to accept and be comfortable with Self, whether 'newfound' or 'old'. As Martin stated, "it was probably one of the best, the biggest things I got out of it [the volunteer tourism experience] was just self-awareness". Such learning about Self conforms to Wearing's (2001) notion of 'self-contentment', including an individual's development of a firmer belief in one's Self, abilities and skills. Importantly, none of the participants expressed rejection of what they had learnt or, for those who had affirmed their sense of Self, what they had *not* learnt about themselves. Even when Emma, who had wanted to gain some teaching experience from her volunteer tourism projects, ended up gaining "a good insight that I probably wasn't a very good teacher", she still described the experience as "great fun" and "loved it". Emma was able to accept that aspect of her Self that was not a great teacher. In this respect, volunteer tourism does not simply represent an opportunity for personal transformation or discovery, but operates as a way in which volunteer tourists can affirm prevailing notions of Self.

5.5 Seeing volunteer tourism beyond the brochures

Unexpectedly, the volunteer tourism industry itself became an emergent topic of learning new knowledge that was mentioned during the interviews. As a result of their experiences, some participants recognised and questioned the implications of the

increasing commodification and commercialisation of volunteer tourism (Guttentag 2009, Tomazos & Butler 2009). For example, although Colleen was supportive of the efforts of her host organisation, she was sceptical about the way in which the host organisation had attempted to meet some of the individualistic desires and expectations of the volunteer tourists rather than organising an experience that would genuinely benefit the local community.

And I thought was kind of a stupid day actually because it is like you go in[to a local school] for like half an hour and you know it's more for like the volunteers to kind of have the experience of going into a Thai school and seeing how cute the Thai children are because they're adorable and you know like, but it's like, I don't know, I found that a bit, you know, a bit hammy (...) just a bit contrived, you know, like a bit superficial. It was part of the week that they'd kind of arranged for the volunteers and I can see why they do it but I just thought it felt a bit tokenistic.
(Colleen)

Through their experiences a few participants gained clearer insight into how volunteer tourism projects are organised, run and marketed. This finding mirrors recent discussion in Dalwai and Donegan's (2012) research into the international volunteer program, of which they were the founders. Dalwai and Donegan (2012) commented that, like the volunteer tourists in the present study, "our participants were starting to do what we wanted them to do: to question and to critique. What we had not anticipated was that the target of their critique would be us" (p. 15). Comments made by participants in the present student on this topic were particularly directed at uncertainties about the distribution of the fees paid by volunteer tourists. For example, on this topic, Emma stated that she still finds herself "being a bit cynical" about the cost of participating in some volunteer tourism projects". She went on to explain how she came to this realisation:

I went thinking, not thinking of myself as a tourist but thinking of myself as a volunteer, [who was] there to help and I don't know, do good or whatever (...) And I think I came away feeling slightly kind of, realising later on that it's not (...) my previous idea of volunteer[ing], volunteering for charities and abroad and that sort of thing, it wasn't where you go for free and you give your services (...) this [the volunteer tourism industry] is all about us paying (...) they were actually getting volunteers as the way of sustaining economically what they were doing. (Emma)

Participants reflected frequently on issues relating to money, tying into current questions of whether some volunteer tourism organisations (whether sending or host) are prioritising money-making for themselves and attracting more volunteer tourists over addressing needs identified by host communities (see Guttentag 2009, Fraser 2012, Guttentag 2011). The high cost of their volunteer tourism experience and being unsure about where their money went was often noted by participants who had organised their experience through a volunteer tourism sending organisation. It appeared that some participants felt that the high cost of their project was somehow justified because it was their first volunteer tourism experience. However, when talking about taking part in future volunteer tourism projects, some participants stated that they were not prepared to pay similar amounts for their next volunteer tourism experience.

The volunteering through the organisation was quite expensive. That was kinda part of it. You accepted that. Um, I definitely felt that it was completely worth it. It *was* expensive but it was totally worth it. I liked doing it that way but yeah, this time [when volunteering in Cambodia] I will, I won't be doing it that way. (Josh)

I kinda learnt from this experience that you shouldn't pay for it. But it was good to pay for the first kind of time. (Laura)

While there may a host of reasons (e.g. wanting to save money, believing that volunteering should be 'free') explaining why participants did not feel that they should have to pay such high fees for their next volunteer tourism, exploring this question is beyond the scope of the present study. However, it may be useful for volunteer tourism organisations and volunteer coordinators to consider how and based on what reasons do individuals' initial volunteer tourism projects influence their subsequent experiences.

In addition to questions about fees in volunteer tourism, a few participants wondered that perhaps their volunteer tourism efforts were not as helpful to the host community as they had initially believed. While these concerns have been raised by academics (Simpson 2004, Raymond & Hall 2008, Guttentag 2009) and journalists (Fraser 2012, Stein 2012), the participants themselves were also able to reflect on their own roles as volunteer tourists and question the ethics and effectiveness of what they, and what many others like them, were doing.

It suddenly made me think that um, is our volunteering a bit futile, is it actually a bit, I mean it's a bit of a presumption that we're doing the right thing, is it really about feel good tourism? (Emma)

I see a huge problem with Westerners going into um into countries, er, third world countries and then, coming with these like supposedly idealist aims of helping the country and then, but then forming these expatriate clusters in which they replicate their lifestyles from back home and that really, and that being so inappropriate with like a total lack of like cultural sensitivity (...) These kinds of problems I see [have to do] with a lack of cultural sensitivity with sending out I think inexperienced people into third world countries. (Luke)

Is it sort of neo-colonialism in a way, making them [the host community] be like the West [?], but um yeah. I sort of, I s'pose I just ignored it a bit then [during the project] but I've been thinking about it a lot more now. (Martin)

These quotes also illustrate additional aspects of participants' holistic reflection and experiential learning about Self. Specifically, participants were able to consider Self in the wider context of their collective identity as Westerners coming from a developed country. Reflecting on the effectiveness and genuineness of this identity in volunteer tourism demonstrates participants' development of a 'global consciousness' (Jones 2011), in which participants were able to develop a new understanding of how they as individuals may be affecting global society and an awareness of the connections between human interactions.

Despite their concerns about the volunteer tourism industry, interview participants were not deterred from wanting to have another experience of volunteering in another country. In an extension of participants' sentiments towards the cost of volunteer tourism projects, many participants realised or learnt that going through a sending organisation is not the only way to become a volunteer tourist. A few participants stated that they intended to find alternative means to organise their next volunteer tourism project. These alternative means aimed to bypass some of the problems (e.g. of cost, commodification) participants had identified in what they had learnt about volunteer tourism beyond promotional brochures. Participants' intentions are summarised in Emma's following response to the question of whether her volunteer tourism experience has affected her attitude to volunteer tourism and her potential future participation.

It wouldn't put me off, it wouldn't, I wouldn't not go back and volunteer but I wouldn't ever do is be a volunteer *tourist* again. I would actually go and stay in probably one organisation. I'd do my homework on that organisation as well to make sure they were, shall we say bona fide in my eyes. It's very perceptual but certainly that I would see that they are a genuine and worthwhile, (...) that they were able to raise funds independently not just through volunteer tourists but also that they provided volunteers with some basic training that equipped them in a much more longer term way to actually really help, that whether it's children, whether it's adults, whoever their focus is. (Emma)

Basically, for their next overseas volunteering experiences participants hoped to keep costs down, skip the sending organisation and directly contact the host organisation, which they would research beforehand. These actions would help maximise benefits to the host organisation and make certain that the participants, as volunteers, were well informed and prepared for their experience. Interestingly, the alternative means proposed by participants hark back to more conventional and informal volunteering when individuals independently approach another party and offer their help with no exchange of money. However, it is important to note that it is unlikely that the participants would have come to express such intentions for their next volunteer tourism experience without having first learnt about volunteer tourism beyond the superficial and filtered information provided in promotional brochures and realising their capacity to organise a volunteer tourism project through different means.

5.6 Summary

What volunteer tourists come to learn can be broadly divided into three categories: 1) skills and knowledge, 2) the Other, and 3) Self. In the informal learning setting of volunteer tourism, participants encountered free-choice learning opportunities that ranged from structured language and cultural lessons to more unstructured, serendipitous learning experiences. From these learning opportunities that arose during volunteer tourism activities and other social interactions, volunteer tourists gained new practical skills and information as well as useful social skills of communication and interpersonal awareness. Participants' experiences also suggest that human- and environment-focused volunteer tourism projects may require and encourage the development of different types of learning.

Learning about the Other included new understandings about the host country as well as about volunteer tourists from different cultural, religious and socio-economic backgrounds. Learning the local customs and adapting to the local way of life was common among the participants, who thought it was not only respectful to do so but helped them make safe and economical travel decisions. Initial learning about the host country occurred back at home where individuals developed misconceptions about their host country and their volunteer tourism experience. Only after participants had arrived in-country and through experiential learning were they able to learn the ‘truth’ about the Other and dispel their previous misconceptions. Volunteer tourists’ attempts to understand the wider social and political issues facing their host country at personal and global levels demonstrated their deep approach to learning about their host country.

Learning about Self consisted of two themes. Firstly, participants learnt about their own personal capacities and limitations, both specific and general, as they overcame their perceived challenges of volunteer tourism. Secondly, a number of participants experienced the transformational potential of volunteer tourism. They discovered for the first time the Self that they would like to be, including learning about their own personal values and future career direction. On the other hand, volunteer tourism may help consolidate a participant’s existing idea of Self. Overall, participants’ experiences indicated development of self-awareness as well as learning to accept the Self they were discovering or re-affirming.

Lastly, a few participants gained insight into the issues and problems associated with the organisation of, running and marketing of volunteer tourism projects. Through their experiences, participants were discovering first-hand the reasons for the concerns voiced in the media and academia about the commercialisation of volunteer tourism projects, the high costs of participation and the usefulness of this participation. Participants’ learning about the volunteer tourism industry had implications for their desire for future similar experiences of volunteering away from home. Participants were still keen to do another project but rather than use an international sending organisation, the participants intended to use their knowledge, confidence and travel savvy learnt from their first experience to find an alternative, cheaper, and more direct means to organise a period of volunteering at a host organisation.

6 HOW DO INDIVIDUALS LEARN THROUGH VOLUNTEER TOURISM?

6.1 Introduction

The nature of the learning that occurs informally through volunteer tourism is typically unstructured. Although in the previous chapter participants described instances of structured learning (i.e. language and cultural lessons), for the most part volunteer tourism projects are not guided by lesson plans, set curricula, or assessments. Thus, it is difficult to determine or measure exactly what is actually learnt by volunteer tourists and how they come to learn. However, this chapter explores potential relationships between certain types of volunteer tourism experiences and learning outcomes. Based on the examination in Chapter 5 of what participants learnt through their volunteer tourism experiences, this chapter examines in greater detail the ways in which interview participants' learning came about.

Among the participants, three individuals – Emma, Laura and Luke – each described dramatic incidents that particularly stood out to the researcher. Seidman (2006) cautions that researchers should be careful with such dramatic passages and determine whether they are idiosyncratic or typical. The particular incidents described by Emma, Laura and Luke were inconsistent with the experiences of other participants because of their dangerous and potentially life-threatening nature. Rather than putting Emma's, Laura's and Luke's dangerous incidents aside, the researcher has brought them to the foreground in this chapter to try and understand their significance in the face of other emergent themes and alongside the experiences of the remaining participants (Seidman 2006). This analysis of the participants' learning experiences resulted in three key themes that are discussed with respect to how each impacts what volunteer tourists learn and their overall volunteer tourism experience. The chapter first considers the potential for volunteer tourists to learn through challenging and dangerous situations before discussing the importance of the reflection process in volunteer tourist learning. The third theme then examines certain qualities and characteristics of volunteer tourism projects that may

enhance individual learning experiences. A discussion of the potential obstacles that may inhibit learning through volunteer tourism concludes this chapter.

6.2 Learning the hard way

In the same way that volunteer tourists on an African conservation project showed emotional responses ranging from exhilaration, awe and compassion to anguish, disappointment and frustration (Cousins et al. 2009b), not all learning by the participants in the present study occurred through easy experiences and positive relationships with their host community and other volunteer tourists. When asked to describe any ‘challenges’ or ‘obstacles’ they had encountered as volunteer tourists most interview participants mentioned they had expected and encountered challenges mostly to do with language and cultural barriers and difficulties of living without the creature comforts of home. These included problems with communicating, lack of Internet, hard physical work and coping with new foods. While culture shock is often part of the volunteer tourism experience (Wickens 2011), being able to overcome these challenges added to participants’ overall sense of satisfaction with themselves and their ability to successfully complete their volunteer tourism project.

Given that sending organisations had pre-planned and booked the participants’ itineraries and “everything was pretty much done for us” (Josh), it is unlikely that any participants had signed up expecting any major challenges exceeding those they mentioned. In fact participants expressed that they had felt volunteer tourism was a relatively safe and easy way to travel. For example, Jess said that she “didn’t really want to travel by myself ‘cause that’s a bit scary. So I sort of found something to do” and Ann recalled that because it was her first time travelling alone without her family, it was “a big thing, like having like a company, um [a] well-known company like doing everything for you type of thing” otherwise “I don’t think she [Ann’s mother] would have let me go over [to Thailand] by myself”.

Despite participants’ initial impressions about the safety and convenience of volunteer tourism, some of the most significant learning experienced by a few participants was the result of especially challenging and sometimes dangerous experiences. For example, volunteer tourists have been found to encounter first-hand socially contentious issues such as racism (see Mittelberg & Palgi 2011). Among the

participants in the present study, Emma, Laura and Luke described dramatic and dangerous incidents, which included encounters with physical violence, being in physical danger and feeling emotional stress. It is significant that Emma, Laura and Luke each attributed important learning outcomes to these challenging events. This supports previous work (Kealey 1989, Cousins et al. 2009b) that suggests that severe stress and culture shock when adapting to the host culture may be effective in enhancing volunteer tourist learning and intercultural competence. Such challenges may therefore result in ‘positive’ outcomes because learning still occurs, but at the same time it is possible that learning through dangerous events may have a negative impact on individuals and how they view their overall volunteer tourism experience. An analysis of the violence, physical danger and emotional stress on the learning experiences by Emma, Laura and Luke is presented below.

6.2.1 Physical violence

Emma, Laura and Luke each described distressing situations during which they witnessed physical violence between members of the local community. While Luke observed some violence from afar between locals on the street, Emma and Laura each described a serious incident of physical violence that they had experienced at very close quarters. For example, at one point during her volunteer tourism project in Zambia Emma and some other volunteers were trying to stop members of the local community from beating a young local male accused of stealing one of the volunteers’ bags.

Basically what happened was, the local people just all filled into this garden, started beating up this guy, literally, physically and we’re standing there, everyone’s in shock [...] Anyway, this other girl, we looked at each other, it was the most instinctive thing and we waded, never in my life have I ever done this before, waded in, stood in front of the guy, we didn’t know him, he could be guilty [...] Um but there were people with guns in there, pointing and I’m thinking, can’t we just try to calm down. (Emma)

Laura then described being kidnapped in India by taxi drivers who refused to take her and another volunteer home and instead drove them around for six to seven hours in the middle of the night. The evening ended violently when the taxi drivers were taken to the police station.

So going through that, and the police like, and their way of like doing this stuff was like, it was so *shocking*. So like, they like hit the guys in front of us. So they made the guys strip in front of us, like doing the police report and charging them. They made them take all their clothes off and then they hit them, like they came in with like whips and stuff and they were just hitting them and beating them and making them like do stuff, like kissing our feet and making them like jump up and down, like and constantly like. (Laura)

Both Emma and Laura had been indirectly related to the events they described and the guilt from feeling that they were in some way responsible for the violence perpetrated on another added to their distress. Witnessing such physical violence appeared to ‘shock’ and challenge how Emma and Laura understood their host community. In the nature of deep and experiential learning, their experiences prompted Emma and Laura to reassess what they previously believed about their host community and realise the ‘real’ or ‘true’ nature of Zambia and India, respectively. Emma said that until that whole event she realised she had only been seeing the ‘polished’ Zambian volunteer tourism environment in which they had been relatively protected from seeing the reality of where they were.

You suddenly realise that that was probably more the real society that we’d been working in [rather] than this slightly ‘other’, tourist presented society that we thought we were living in (...) It opened up my eyes for the first time to what I was actually seeing around me. Um, and not judging but just trying to become aware that there’s so much more going on in these countries. (Emma)

Within Emma’s quote lies a suggestion that she would not have achieved this level of understanding about her host community without having endured the violent and dangerous episode in the garden. What and how Emma and Laura learnt about their host communities is starkly different to the local customs and social behaviours that the rest of the interview participants picked up from everyday observations and social interactions with local people. As part of their ordeals Emma and Laura had been confronted with the reality of how certain situations are handled by foreign cultures, and in their cases the reality of how their host community deals with social crimes in more brutal and atypical ways than in their own home environments. From their personal encounters with violence as volunteer tourists, Emma and Laura developed a greater awareness and more holistic understanding of the scale of the social and cultural differences between their host communities and their own developed, Western world culture.

6.2.2 Being in physical danger

During Emma's and Laura's experiences described above and a separate incident in Luke's project, each participant had found themselves in situations where they were personally in danger of physical harm by others. Luke, as a volunteer school principal in Sri Lanka, had been threatened by a teacher whom he had dismissed from employment. This teacher warned Luke against walking alone through the village, with the implication that something negative or dangerous may happen to him. Both Emma and Laura expressed that at the time of their respective incidents they had feared for their lives. Laura remembered being “so like afraid in the car [the taxi in which she was kidnapped] that I would just never like see anyone again.”

Enduring the fear and uncertainty of their relatively extreme situations revealed to the participants significant aspects of Self.

We got home that night and we all just sat there absolutely shell-shocked, because one of us could've gotten [killed], one of us could've been injured (...) And it just, it was both a high and a low, ‘cause it’s probably the bravest thing I’ve ever done, um in any way just to do that, and it still stays with me, the experience, but at the same time it was probably one of the stupidest things. (Emma)

But yeah, and then, like bouncing back from this, something that I don’t know maybe back home it would take me weeks to be recovering (...) I would be so fragile but it took me like an amazing[ly] short amount of time to like just go back out there. (Laura)

In addition to learning about the Other, Emma and Laura were able to realise their personal capacities for courage and self-resilience as a result of enduring and recovering from being in physical danger. Emma's description of the incident in Zambia as “the bravest thing I’ve ever done” suggests that this event became a benchmark that she used to consolidate or compare with other lessons of learning independence, courage and emotional survival she mentioned throughout the interview.

6.2.3 Emotional stress

The ability of a volunteer tourist' emotional journey to shape their overall experience is a key point made by Cousins et al. (2009b). Notwithstanding the presence and influence of positive emotions, volunteer tourists in their study identified feelings of anguish,

frustration and disappointment. Given some of the dramatic and dangerous situations described above by Emma, Laura and Luke, it is not a far stretch to imagine the role that emotional stress may take in prompting some of the participants' learning. In addition to feelings of fear and uncertainty from seeing violence and being in physical danger, stresses of isolation and loneliness also emerged as influences on how learning may occur through volunteer tourism. For example, when speaking generally about challenging moments in her volunteer tourism experience, Emma recalled that,

Oh I think, um, sometimes it was the loneliness, from a purely personal perspective, um even when you're, that great thing when you're with a few thousand people and still feel lonely and depressed, but [it's worse] when you don't know anybody and you have no real conception of what you're doing, so you're learning. Everything's about learning; it's about survival, not, not in a dramatic way but just in the everyday, emotional survival. (Emma)

Emma's quote shows that emotional stress may also occur in the absence of any particularly dramatic or dangerous events. However, Laura's quote below about coping with her kidnapping demonstrates how feeling isolated and lonely can further compound the distress of an already challenging situation.

I guess it's probably because I was on my own and I kinda like had to, had to bounce back. You know when you're back home you have your safety net. You have your friends to like go back to and rely on. You can cry on their shoulders or like your family and stuff. Well I had a lot of friends but obviously, I don't know, I just had to like deal with it. Like, I closed myself off for like a day and I just cried everything out and after that I just went out and like just talked about it and like yeah. (Laura)

Being away from familiar home settings and close support networks highlighted Laura's feelings of isolation and loneliness, but contributed to her realisation of her own independence and self-resilience. Separation from familiar settings and support networks may be a more pertinent issue for learning among individual-based volunteer tourists who may not have the opportunities to establish friendships as easily as group-based volunteer tourists. Although discussion of learning between group-based and individual-based volunteer tourists is beyond the scope of the present study, this is an issue that warrants future research because of its potential implications for the well-being of volunteer tourists and their ability to carry out their volunteer responsibilities.

Emotional stress may also result from incidents of culture shock, conflict or misunderstanding between volunteer tourists and their host communities (Raymond & Hall 2008) or between volunteers from diverse cultural, religious or socio-economic backgrounds. For some participants culture shock and navigating through the cultural particularities were all part of the excitement of exploring and learning about their host destination. Participants were also generally very positive in their comments about making friends with and learning from other volunteer tourists. Luke, however, described some learning that resulted from difficulties with adapting to the local culture and conflicting values with other volunteer tourists on similar teaching placements elsewhere in Sri Lanka.

No, I actually avoided [the other volunteer tourists], due, due, because I saw that they just continued, tried to replicate their lifestyle from back home in this country.

I was so disgusted that I actually avoided them. And they actually wanted to have a party, to celebrate their birthday at my school. Um... and I said, and this really was like the final bit that broke kind of the friendship that I'd start[ed] to develop with them, um, that I said 'no I don't want you to party here, I think it's wrong'. (Luke)

Although Luke lost friendships as a result of the conflict and misunderstanding with the other volunteer tourists, the incident reinforced his own social values that shaped his identity as a Western volunteer in a conservative and developing country such as Sri Lanka. Throughout his interview Luke commented frequently on the emotional stress that came with his role as the volunteer principal of a primary girls' school in rural Sri Lanka, at the age of 19. In particular Luke pointed out the difficulties of trying to engage with the other teachers at his school and to understand their social dynamics, which he saw as petty and immature, while juggling serious responsibilities of being the school principal.

And so I'd have one of the teachers actually recording the meetings and then going to the principal of the other school, which is quite a very very nasty person, who is always like kind of forming these bonds with the other teachers and then playing out against each other, which is incredible, like er, just like out of a really bad movie. (Luke)

And there's so much of that happening, so much talking behind the back, even among adults, which you, and this really made me quite often think that...that a lot of, this this culture is so childish. Um, yeah, and that really, it annoyed me and in

the end it just really, it really stressed me out cause I was trying to do a good job managing the school and these unnecessary fights and huge dramas were constantly getting in the way of that. (Luke)

When asked what he had learnt from his time as the principal of the school and his interactions with the other teachers, Luke's responses do not carry the same associations of optimistic learning commonly found in the responses of other participants. For example, Laura described being able to "bounce back" and "deal" with hard times and Emma developed the ability for "emotional survival". However, the following quotes from Luke illustrate how realising the reality of his situation and his inability to overcome the obstacles of cultural misunderstanding led to his disillusionment with his host country, host organisation and his own ability as a volunteer.

Personal expectations and hopes would've been um, mainly getting, getting a better understanding of like an Asian, an Asian culture. And I've definitely got a really close look at that. And um... but, what I wouldn't have expected to, [I didn't expect] to get such a like a close at it, at the abyss of like human, human rivalry. (Luke)

And then, and I really thought I made a very positive start and I really thought I could kind of, like, ignite this new attitude in people and then I realised soon after that, that there's something I was up against that I could not defeat at all, which was probably like a very deep-rooted cultural thing. (Luke)

The biggest and um, the biggest thing is really sadly enough, a rather cynical one is that don't trust 99% of the people you work with. And never ever open up yourself entirely to people you can't trust. (Luke)

It would be impossible to completely prevent culture shock, conflict and cultural misunderstanding in the volunteer tourism experience, not least because individuals have varying levels of tolerance to different situations and because of the uncontrollable nature of many external factors and situations. Emma, Laura and Luke found themselves in (often happenstance) situations involving violence, physical danger and emotional stress. While it is unlikely that such dramatic and dangerous situations would be actively sought by individuals, it is important to recognise that they offered Emma, Laura and Luke valuable lessons for learning about the Other and Self they may otherwise not have achieved during their volunteer tourism experience. These findings are not unlike

Kealey's (1989) arguments that individuals who experience severe stress as part of adjusting to culture shock may become more competent in cross-cultural learning than individuals who do not. Learning experientially from their physical, emotional and mental challenges, Emma, Laura and Luke were able to both relate the significance of their dramatic and dangerous experiences at levels ranging from the personal to global and apply their learning to future experiences.

6.3 Taking your time – reflecting on the volunteer tourism experience

Volunteer tourists are promised and often anticipate a once-in-a-lifetime learning experience but it is unclear at what point in their own lifetimes do they recognise what they have learnt. Put another way, the question becomes 'How much time do volunteer tourists need to reflect and then recognise their learning?' As the findings have indicated thus far, volunteer tourists may encounter different realities of their host community and other volunteer tourists that contradict and challenge their existing beliefs and attitudes. Theories of experiential (Kolb & Kolb 2005) and transformative learning (Mezirow 2000) suggest that individuals must critically reflect on these different experiences if they are to learn how to accommodate them into a new set of beliefs and attitudes. Previous studies (e.g. Coghlan & Gooch 2011, Zahra 2011) have highlighted the importance of reflection in volunteer tourism experiences that lead to reassessment of Self and one's core values. Moreover, learning is not always a consciously sought after activity or perceived as strictly learning (see Packer 2006, Packer & Ballantyne 2010) and so volunteer tourists need to actively reflect on their experiences if they are to consciously realise what they have learnt.

However, individuals vary in their tendency and capacity to reflect (Boud et al. 1985) and not surprisingly reflection is not always an immediate process that occurs during or right after a volunteer tourism experience. As Schott (2011) noted in his study of young volunteer tourists, some interview participants were more conscious and reflective of their experiences than others. When participants in the present study spoke about reflecting and realising what they had learnt from their volunteer tourism experiences, they reported varied timing patterns ranging from during the project to long after they had returned home. A few participants spoke about reflecting while they were 'on the job', consciously thinking about their experience and what they were learning from it while they were still actually completing their project. During the volunteer

tourism experience active reflection may occur individually (e.g. by keeping a daily diary) as well as in a group setting with other volunteer tourists and project leaders. As a result of reflection in either scenario, participants were able to consciously recognise and think about what they were in the process of learning from their volunteer tourism experiences.

I thought about it [the political nature of elephant conservation efforts] pretty quickly because I was writing an article about it for the Critic [a student-run Otago University magazine], so I kind of had to tie together my thoughts and so yeah. Um, no I was thinking about it, I was thinking about it quite consciously and basically, just, I hadn't been aware of [the fact that] pretty much any time, any time in South East Asia you see someone riding an elephant there's abuse happening. (Colleen)

It [his volunteer tourism experience] gave me so much time to think. Like, after the day was finished we didn't have anything to do apart from read and write. So I read a hell of a lot and I sat down with my journal and wrote a lot, um. So that was, it was probably one of the best, the biggest thing I got out of it was just self-awareness (...) I think I learnt sort of where I want to go in life, like, what sort of um, sort of, values I aspire to have. Yeah, I knew um, I learnt that I wanted to focus on conflict studies, obviously, and um yeah. I think I got some more perspective on yeah what's important and, to me, I think. (Martin)

In addition to the time he had to reflect alone Martin recalled opportunities that he had to discuss his experiences with other volunteer tourists. Reflection in this group context enabled volunteer tourists to learn from each other and seemed to be an effective means for helping them cope and learn experientially from the obstacles and challenges of their volunteer tourism experience.

I can't really remember much but once we were in-country we'd meet up maybe every, every two months or so or just text each other and um it was a good opportunity for us to talk about you know how, our different views on what we're doing and you know the country and the people and what we're learning and stuff like that. So we definitely, it was really valuable having someone that was doing the same thing we were doing, just going through, bounce ideas off and cope really. It was really handy actually to um talk about the struggles and what we were having difficulty with. (Martin)

The reflection process may also extend for periods of time long after the volunteer tourism project. Specifically, some reflection and learning may only occur years after the volunteer tourism experience or may occur continuously over time. For example, Luke recollects that “It’s [his project in Sri Lanka] now three years ago, and I’ve yeah, like, I think of this almost every day ‘cause it’s been such a, it’s been such a series of like huge experiences.” Luke indicated that it was only recently because of these daily reflections that he came to realise that his cultural misunderstanding with the local teachers happened because he “was imposing my idealism on, on their culture, which was probably a mistake. I should’ve just played along and just understood their way of living better and just [kept] going with that.” Luke’s experiential learning is clear not only in his continuous analysis of his volunteer tourism experiences in Sri Lanka but also in his ability to relate and apply his learning about the Other and Self to new experiences as part of his daily life.

‘Cause I think the more I study or the more I like learn and maybe the more, the more of an adult I’ve become, the more I kind of see these things in context and um, can maybe explain why they happened in a certain way. (Luke)

It’s maybe because I’m also getting a little bit older, getting a little bit more experience of...more a bit of an understanding in general that people just act on their own interests. (Luke)

The further it goes the further away in time it goes the more positive I feel about it. If you would have asked me a year after that I would’ve said definitely negative ‘cause that, yeah that, that pain from like all of the very hard experiences is still so present that I would’ve said um yeah, it’s maybe a little bit too much. (Luke)

Just as Luke reflects daily on his project, Emma also articulated the potential for continuous learning from the volunteer tourism experience. In particular, Emma’s periods of active reflection about her volunteer tourism experiences serve to reinforce the learning that she gained as a volunteer tourist.

When you remember it, it does change you and I find when I talk about the stories and different things I re-engage with those feelings and those memories and those values as well. (Emma)

There appears to be no particular way or time that is ‘right’ for reflection to occur. Some individuals will be more likely to consciously evaluate their experiences and do so sooner

than later. The above quotes from Luke and Emma emphasise how the processes of learning and reflection may differ for every volunteer tourist and the possibility for the reflection period to extend far beyond the volunteer tourism experience.

6.4 The place of formal learning in volunteer tourism

It is a somewhat ironic finding that integrating aspects of *formal* learning into projects may improve individuals' informal learning through volunteer tourism. Although volunteer tourism projects may be organised and structured in the sense that participants' days follow a predetermined itinerary (e.g. Volunteer Eco Students Abroad 2010), Simpson (2004) objects to the lack of structure or guidance for how and what volunteer tourists learn because of negative implications for how deeply participants understand social justice issues. Similarly, the findings of this study suggest that the uncertainty of unstructured learning in volunteer tourism may result in learning that is misguided or only superficially engaged, as in the manner of surface learning approaches.

Consequently, this study argues that volunteer tourist learning may be enhanced by putting in place measures borrowed from effective formal learning, such that volunteer tourists take a deep-holistic approach to learning that incorporates structured and unstructured learning opportunities. There have been similar suggestions from previous volunteer tourism studies (Simpson 2004, Jones 2005, Raymond & Hall 2008) that including a stronger educational component in projects may be more successful in encouraging participants to reflect and engage critically with their experiences. There is also evidence in the learning and volunteer tourism literature (e.g. Ballantyne & Packer 2002, Broad & Jenkins 2008) of the complementary relationship between formal and informal learning, particularly where the latter provides opportunities for students to practise or see in reality what they have learnt in theory through the former. Granted, teaching strategies (e.g. lectures, seminars) in formal education have been criticised for fostering surface learning approaches that fail to encourage students to relate to the learning material; but when formal learning is facilitated well and in ways that discourage surface learning, it is possible for students to be actively engaged with the learning material (Ramsden 1992). In the context of volunteer tourism, the inclusion of formal learning strategies may be effective in communicating important information and concepts to individuals because this learning still occurs without the usual extrinsic pressures of formal education. The findings in this study illustrate examples where

combining elements of well-facilitated formal learning with the informal learning setting of volunteer tourism can successfully inspire individuals towards experiential learning through deep approaches.

Many of the interview participants reported aspects of their volunteer tourism experiences that correspond with elements more typical of formal education. Most commonly, participants referred to structured orientation/information/training sessions (henceforth referred to collectively as ‘orientation sessions’) and the presence of an ‘educator’ who was usually an in-country project leader. The following section argues that orientation sessions and educators, as features of formal learning, can work in concert with unstructured and informal volunteer tourism learning opportunities to encourage participants to purposefully engage with their experiences at personal, local and global levels. As a result volunteer tourists may be less likely to miss out on key information and concepts that will help them navigate and process new experiences. Adequately informing and preparing volunteer tourists for their experiences appears especially important given that the majority of participants in this study had little knowledge about their host country before their arrival and just as limited travel experience in countries termed ‘developing’ or that are culturally different to their own. Deeper and holistic understandings of their experiences based on a complementary mix of formal and informal learning experiences may better prepare volunteer tourists for the cultural differences they will encounter, potentially reducing negative impacts of culture shock as well as the possibility of cultural misunderstanding.

6.4.1 Orientation sessions

Orientation sessions resembled formal classroom lessons in that they were led by ‘educators’ or ‘teachers’ who had pre-planned information and concepts that they wanted to convey to the volunteer tourists. The possibility that participants may have viewed these orientation sessions as somewhat formal lessons is suggested by Colleen’s use of the term ‘seminar’, which is typically attributed to teaching strategies in formal education (see Ramsden 1992). Orientation sessions usually took place when the participants first arrived in their volunteer tourism destination but a few participants also had similar sessions while still in their home country. Through these orientations sessions the participants not only had the chance to meet other volunteer tourists who would be working on the same project but they were also given an introduction to their host

destination, culture and language and made aware of what was expected from them in terms of behaviour and volunteering efforts. Learning about the host country and host organisation was specifically linked to these orientation sessions by a few of the participants. As mentioned in a previous quote (see page 69), Laura's orientation session at her project in India was specific in not only outlining but also justifying what was considered appropriate behaviour from the volunteers while they were teaching at the school. The aim of these orientation sessions appeared to be to equip the volunteer tourists with the information and know-how they needed to understand and live safely in the host destination. In some cases, orientation sessions were effective in helping participants to understand the local and global significance of their volunteer tourism host organisation and project. For example, upon her arrival at her conservation project in Thailand, Colleen recalled that,

I knew that there were [conservation] issues, you know, but I wasn't very sure on what those issues were and I wasn't aware to what extent there'd been huge decreases in the numbers of wild south east Asian elephants...um, so I've kind of, like a lot of it, and we were definitely that education factor was huge, like um we actually got, it was, when we first arrived we get a like a seminar on it you know, showing a lot of information about what's been going on, (...) so you know the context in kind of which it's all happening. (Colleen)

The orientation sessions described by interview participants varied noticeably in duration, apparently according to the length of volunteer tourism project and the depth of information the participants needed to learn. For example, for Josh's two weeks of building some school foundations in Costa Rica,

Um, they [the host organisation] did, yeah, they had a training afternoon where they talked about anything that people [the volunteers] wanted to talk about, went through all this stuff about volunteering, rules, etcetera. (Josh)

In contrast, Martin had a longer introductory period of a month to prepare him for the coming eight months of teaching sexual health and life skills to teenage boys in Zambia. While other participants in volunteer teacher roles were dealing with school subjects they were already familiar with, Martin had to first learn the content he was supposed to teach. The structured nature of the learning that took place during Martin's orientation period is clear in his recollections of what he learnt during that time.

That month we [both the international and Zambian volunteers] were just trained on, on um, on what we were going to do, so basically sexual health and life skills and just the facts basically. And then um, slowly we learnt techniques or how we were going to deliver the information. (Martin)

Based upon participants' reflections, this research highlights the positive potential of orientation sessions as a feature of formal learning that can communicate key information to volunteer tourists about their host country and project within the informal learning context of volunteer tourism.

6.4.2 Presence of an educator

Coghlan (2008) highlighted that expedition staff, project leaders and other such in-country organisers in volunteer tourism have multiple roles, including an educational one. In certain volunteer tourism experiences, such as school-led trips, the educator role may be assumed by an actual teacher or some other suitable person. In other cases, in-country organisers and project leaders often spend long periods of time working alongside and interacting closely with volunteer tourists and are consequently in a valuable position to assume the role of educator (Coghlan 2008). Following Forsey et. al's (2011) argument for structured opportunities for reflection to enhance learning in study-abroad experiences, the present study points to the educator as an effective means through which sessions of critical reflection may be encouraged and facilitated.

Every day we [the volunteers] would come back after the day and we'd talk about everything (...) because one of the teachers had done the trip beforehand as well so she knew a lot about the country. We had a lot of questions. She would, yeah, she knew quite a lot so she always explained it to us. 'Cause we always asked like 'how come?', yeah 'cause their government doesn't pay for schooling. They don't give any sort of subsidy. So that's why when we were like, we just want to like sell our iPod and give this money to this girl and she'll have an education for a year, how come it's not so easy for the government? So she would always help us understand that kind of thing. (Amber)

I know that ISV [International Student Volunteers] try to include...I remember we were, the one guy who was in charge of us the whole time kind of while we were doing the volunteering and um he was a Costa Rican guy and he also had to, had to have, we had little like, I can't remember how many we had, maybe three or four

learning kinda sessions where other ideas were brought up. Environmental ideas, we'd talk about environmental issues within Costa Rica, within the world, um, so they did try approach it with more than just, I guess they tried to put that in there as well which was good. (Josh)

Although reflection in isolation may be useful for volunteer tourists, Amber's and Josh's quotes reinforce the potential for group reflection opportunities, which were mentioned in an earlier quote by Martin (see page 96). Unlike Martin's experiences of informally organised group reflection that took place when the volunteer tourists came together socially, Amber's and Josh's quotes illustrate the value of an educator in purposefully creating opportunities for group reflection. Reflecting alone may sometimes confirm rather than challenge an individual's existing beliefs and stereotypes of host communities (Simpson 2004) whereas guided group reflection can facilitate a greater exposure of participants to different opinions and ideas (Lough 2011). The above quotes raise questions of whether Amber and Josh would have taken the same amount of time to reflect on their daily experiences alone or with others, or been able to gain the same level of understanding about different issues facing their respective host communities without the presence of an educator. Or how long would it have taken Amber and Josh to realise and understand certain information and ideas? Educators may therefore be important in encouraging not only the practice but also the frequency and depth of critical reflection during the volunteer tourism project.

Educators are ideally well-informed about the facts and issues surrounding the host country, local community, and organisation (Coghlan 2008). This is important for ensuring that volunteer tourists' learning, especially about the Other, is not misled, potentially getting a volunteer tourist into trouble or reinforcing superficial racial and ethnic cultural stereotypes of host countries. In particular, culturally competent and well-informed educators can go a long way in helping to direct the learning of younger volunteer tourists, who tend to have less travel and life experiences than older volunteer tourists (Jones 2005). Additionally, the presence of an educator may help participants to maintain a better balance between fulfilling their volunteering responsibilities and the distractions of socialising and other obstacles that may inhibit their engagement in meaningful learning opportunities (Tomazos & Butler 2012).

So they [her teachers] were just there for like support and to make sure that we [girls from Amber's high school] were all learning what we were supposed to be learning. (Amber)

A lot of the other volunteers were 18 to 17, you know, 19 years old so I think they needed a bit of an adult figure or a parent figure around making sure they weren't you know going out and partying and all that sort of rubbish. But for us, for me anyway, I'd been out of home, living out of home for four years or so and I didn't really need someone watching me all the time and keeping me in line. (Martin)

It is possible that including aspects of formal learning may bring some of the pressures and stresses of formal education into the volunteer tourism experience, albeit in slightly different ways than in the classroom, with potentially negative impacts on an individual's motivations and approach to learning. For example, Martin's comment that he felt he "didn't really need someone watching me all the time and keeping me in line" suggests that the presence of an educator may re-create the extrinsic pressures of formal education. It is therefore important to recognise that some individuals may resent and rebel against formal learning in volunteer tourism to the detriment of their learning experiences. In this way, the present study draws strong similarities to Dalwai and Donegan's (2012) research of university students taking part in a 'summer school' volunteer tourism experience that the authors had organised in India. Dalwai and Donegan realised that they were unable to engage their participants meaningfully with development issues because their participants had come to view their volunteer tourism experience as "a set of structured learning activities recognisable as almost identical to those of Northern universities" (p. 16). By imposing the structure and pressures of formal learning, Dalwai and Donegan limited the informal learning opportunities that would have allowed participants to gradually decipher their unknown and strange volunteer tourism environment for themselves. However, at the same time it is important to point out that for the two school-led volunteer tourism trips (i.e. for Amber and Lucy) the presence of the school-teachers as features of formal education was not considered an extrinsic pressure or resented by the participants as would be expected in a formal classroom setting. Instead, Amber's quotes (see page 101) highlight the helpfulness and guidance of having her teacher present as an educator during her volunteer tourism project. Consequently, this research demonstrates the different responses that volunteer tourists may have to elements of formal learning in their experiences as well as the

difficulty of balancing the amount of formal learning without detracting from the positive impacts of volunteer tourism's informal setting on participants' motivations and approach to learning.

6.4.3 In the absence of formal learning

Not all interview participants reported having some aspect of formal learning as part of their volunteer tourism experience. Emma in particular was very conscious of not being given any kind of formal training or orientation sessions, which she felt should have been included into her volunteer tourism projects. Emma's feelings are echoed by Andereck et al.'s (2012) findings that prospective volunteer tourists expect organisations to provide them with "a great deal of information and instruction" (p. 9). McGehee and Santos (2005) make calls for similar support from organisations to successfully create opportunities for consciousness-raising among participants so that they would be, in Amber's words, "learning what we were supposed to be learning." Emma also reflected that the lack of any relevant training and support from her host organisations impacted adversely not only on her own personal experiences but also how much the host organisation and community could benefit from her volunteer efforts.

I think the underlying thread was the fact that through my lack of training and most of the other volunteers' [lack of training] we weren't really giving the best service and the best quality of care to those we were entrusted to care for, especially in teaching. (Emma)

Reiman et al. (1997) found in their study of volunteer tourists undertaking a service-learning trip that a lack of guided reflection and discussion limited the development of their intercultural competency. The negative impacts that not including orientation sessions, an educator and other elements of more formal learning may have on volunteer tourists' learning experiences are most clearly illustrated when comparing Luke's role as a volunteer school principal in Sri Lanka with Martin's project as a peer-educator in Zambia. Among the interview participants Luke and Martin had some of the longest volunteer tourism projects at eight and nine months respectively and both were involved in teaching roles. Emotional stress and interpersonal conflict characterised Luke's experience while Martin described overall positive interactions with locals and other volunteer tourists.

Perhaps the main contributing factor to these contrasting experiences is that Luke had neither an orientation or training session nor anyone in an educator role to help guide his learning. On the other hand Martin had a full month of formal training at the start of his project. It may be possible that Luke, a relatively young volunteer tourist at 19 with no previous travel experiences in developing countries who admitted having difficulty engaging with Asian cultures, could have benefitted from having a training session similar to Martin's. According to Taylor (1994) guided reflection by a mentor or educator could have been beneficial in helping Luke to handle the strong emotions and stress that resulted from his experiences. With the assistance of an educator and sessions of guided reflection, Luke may have been able to learn sooner some of what has taken him three years to understand in relation to how his volunteer tourism experience unfolded. Significantly, this comparison suggests that elements of formal learning such as orientation sessions and educators who can facilitate guided reflection and group discussion may be able to effectively communicate to volunteer tourists the knowledge they need to avoid 'learning the hard way' and/or only realising their learning long after their project has ended. At the same time, finding oneself in a dangerous situation remains a very real possibility in volunteer tourism and those same elements of formal learning, particularly the presence of an educator and guided reflection, may be crucial in shaping the way an individual approaches 'learning the hard way'.

Whether structured learning opportunities form part of a volunteer tourism experience may ultimately depend on which sending and host organisation an individual chooses to go with. Raymond and Hall (2008) highlight the influence of volunteer tourism sending organisations on whether participants engage in positive intercultural learning or wind up in instances of cultural misunderstanding. Similarly, Sherraden et al. (2008) point out that in addition to the individual characteristics of volunteer tourists there are institutional determinants relating to volunteer tourism organisations and projects that affect how volunteer tourism experiences play out. The various projects undertaken by participants in the present study reflect Sherraden et al.'s (2008) argument that organisations vary in their institutional capacity, including in the level of training, support and supervision they are able to provide to participants. For example, Martin's project was organised through International Student Volunteers (ISV), an international, non-profit volunteer tourism sending organisation, which has a strong educational component (ISV 2011). In addition to leading orientation sessions, ISV requires project

leaders to facilitate group discussions among participants. Luke's project on the other hand was set up by a private small-scale organisation based in the host country. Smaller, grassroots organisations that offer volunteer tourism experiences may not have the financial means or other resources to set up orientation sessions or provide an educator (Sherraden et al. 2008). For example, Jess chose to go with a "really small tiny private Argentinean" organisation that she described as "a wee bit unorganised" when it came to the running of their volunteer tourism projects. However, generalisations are easy to attach to different kinds of volunteer tourism organisations and do not accurately describe the range of possible circumstances. Not all organisations with an educational agenda may necessarily have well-structured orientation sessions or well-informed educators. Similarly, some commercial organisations do include some aspects of formal learning in their volunteer tourism experiences. For example, on the website of the international student travel agency STA Travel (2012a) it states that if you choose to volunteer abroad "In-country project coordinators will welcome you to the project and give you all the need to know information on arrival."

6.5 Potential obstacles to learning through volunteer tourism

Raymond and Hall (2008) warn that cross-cultural knowledge and understanding should not be viewed as inherent outcomes of volunteer tourism but rather as goals. Merely completing the volunteer tourism project does not automatically lead to meaningful learning because there may be obstacles to learning through volunteer tourism that prevent individuals from actively relating to their experiences. A volunteer tourism host organisation may have the institutional capacity to provide adequate training, support and supervision but individual determinants of individual volunteer tourists may create obstacles to their learning (Sherraden et al. 2008). Within the present study it appears that lack of life and travel experience of younger participants and the previous life and travel experience of other participants may have limited what and how they were able to learn through volunteer tourism.

6.5.1 Youth and inexperience

The youth and inexperience of some participants may have accounted for their more superficial engagement and learning about the host culture. Of the 13 interview participants, over half were volunteer tourists during their late teens or early twenties: two

participants were high school students when they undertook school-organised volunteer tourism trips under the supervision of accompanying teachers; three participants chose to volunteer for their gap year straight after high school and two participants were volunteer tourists in the first year of their undergraduate degree at university. Like younger volunteer tourists in other studies (see Jones 2005, Dalwai & Donegan 2012), these participants were engaging in volunteer tourism for the first time. While a few of them had some travel experience to countries culturally or socio-economically similar to their own, none of them had previous travel experience in a developing country. Emma captured the ways that differences in age and life experience may affect the experiences of younger and older volunteer tourists in a developing country setting in an insightful comment about what she observed during her experiences.

I think the younger, the 18 to 25 year old volunteers just simply hadn't seen enough of life to recognise a lot of these issues. Me being older (...) I really could actually see a lot more. I think I could see a lot more deeply and a lot more of the conflicts and the areas that really were very grey and muddy areas. (Emma)

Luke also commented that “it’s hard whether I would say that, this may be a mistake of doing this with so little knowledge” when reflecting on his time as a school principal at the age of 19 and the emotional stress and conflict with locals that came with his lack of relevant experience, training and understanding of his host community.

A lack of general knowledge and life and travel experience may have meant that younger participants were less able to process what they were experiencing and therefore only related superficially to their host community. For example, Lucy, the youngest interview participant, when asked to describe her interactions with the local community in Vietnam, she spoke of being “too scared to wander around by myself” and so went “shopping and just walking around the street trying not to get lost”. When asked what she thought she had learnt about the Vietnamese culture by the end of her school-led volunteer tourism experience, Lucy’s answer below suggests only a superficial understanding of the host culture.

I think, well I guess, order beneath the chaos probably. Like we managed to navigate the area around our hotel pretty good without getting lost and people were, yeah, they were mostly friendly and pretty willing to help. And yeah, it’s a pretty vibrant culture and actually I like the food. It’s really light. (Lucy)

Lucy's response is typical of those expressed by students in previous studies (e.g. Feinberg 2002, Forsey et al. 2011) of learning in study-abroad experiences. Although Lucy mentioned that her school encouraged students to volunteer generally because it "puts things in perspective" and because her school "just wanted to teach you to give back and consider, I don't know, like ethics and morals and stuff", Lucy did not appear to achieve a level of intercultural learning that enabled her to relate to the poverty and inequalities of her host country. Lucy reported that her teacher had "organised" the trip and accompanied the students but she made no mention of whether her teacher played the role of educator in the sense of helping the high school students to reflect on or understand their volunteer tourism experiences. Forsey et al. (2011) would suggest that Lucy only reported relatively trivial and superficial learning about her host country because the complex and intangible nature of some learning that occurs through volunteer tourism makes it difficult for participants to "speak eloquently about what they learnt" (p. 9). If so, having a specifically-appointed educator and creating opportunities for participants to reflect alone and in group settings may be especially important for helping less-experienced younger volunteer tourists to articulate both their surface and deep learning experiences.

Nevertheless it is still noteworthy that Lucy demonstrated learning about Self, including discovering her self-confidence to explore an exotic and unknown destination and approach local people for directions. It may have been her youth and inexperience that inhibited Lucy's ability to move beyond a self-focused evaluation to consider her own personal experiences in the wider context of global issues. However, that Lucy's learning outcomes in Vietnam were more about Self is not unexpected when considering the characteristics of young people as volunteer tourists. For example, Lucy's experience reflects findings in the previous chapter that younger volunteer tourists with transitional and directional development needs (Schott 2011) may seek learning that has an emphasis on Self and personal development as they desire clarity and readiness for their next phase in life. Additionally, as characteristic of 'new volunteers', it is not unusual for younger volunteer tourists like Lucy, who have an inherent desire to form one's self-identity along the path to adulthood, to be equally as focused on learning about and helping Others as developing and affirming themselves (Hustinx 2001).

6.5.2 Previous learning experiences

It is possible that some individuals may have already learnt what other volunteer tourists are in the process of discovering in terms of skills and knowledge, the Other, and Self. How and what an individual may learn through volunteer tourism is invariably influenced by their prior learning (Ramsden 1992). If, for example, a volunteer tourist has already experienced important lessons about Self through some other means, then he or she may perceive less personal development than an individual whose sense of Self and identity has not yet been challenged (see Cohen 2010). Individuals may have had their views and attitudes challenged previously through other ‘once in a lifetime’ tourism opportunities such as backpacking (e.g. Pearce & Foster 2007), study-abroad/service-learning trips (e.g. Forsey et al. 2011), gap-years (e.g. King 2011) and lifestyle travel (e.g. Cohen 2010) as well as domestic experiences like outdoor or adventure education (e.g. Paisley et al. 2008). Sherraden et al. (2008) also point out that individuals’ previous volunteering and international experience may affect the outcomes of their volunteer tourism project, including how and what they learn.

Although only a few participants in this study mentioned having such previous experiences, it is worth considering the implications of their prior learning on their learning through volunteer tourism. For example, Josh’s prior knowledge gained through Outward Bound, a short-term outdoor adventure education course, appeared to limit certain areas of learning during his volunteer tourism project. When asked how his time in Costa Rica had affected him personally, Josh responded,

It’s hard to say cause it wasn’t that much earlier that I went to Outward Bound for a month and I guess [it had] similar teachings, um that I maybe get them confused sometimes for what I was learning from each one. (Josh)

Josh also recalled that during one of the discussion sessions facilitated by the project leader the topic of the environment was raised but,

It wasn’t anything particularly new for me. I’m inclined to environmental issues and so, but for a lot of other people it was pretty eye-opening I imagine. Yep, I guess, the whole experience would be totally different between me and then some of the other people who were in my group. (Josh)

However, it is important that having previously achieved some of the learning outcomes often associated with volunteer tourism does not appear to preclude all learning. Instead, an individual's prior learning experiences may (consciously or subconsciously) redirect the focus and nature of his or her learning experiences through volunteer tourism. For example, although Josh's prior learning may have limited his perceptions of how much more he had learnt about himself or environmental issues, he still reported improvements in his Spanish language and interpersonal skills as a result of his experiences with the local people and other volunteer tourists. When asked why he chose to do a volunteer tourism project, Josh answered with "I love adventure", suggesting that perhaps he was looking for a more challenging or exciting experience having already successfully completed an Outward Bound course. In this way, Josh is not unlike participants in Lepp's (2008) study who had previous international travel and volunteering experiences and consequently "were looking for greater challenges and more novel experiences" that would lead to new learning. Previous learning experiences may therefore be an obstacle to some areas of a volunteer tourist's learning but at the same time encourage an individual to pursue different ways and topics of learning.

6.5.3 Hedonistic motivations

Throughout this study motivations have been critical in discussions of whether volunteer tourists are willing or at least open to learning through their experiences. The learning literature suggests that when volunteer tourists' learning motivations are not influenced by extrinsic pressures, they may be more inclined towards taking a deep approach to learning rather than a surface approach that limits them to a superficial understanding of their experiences (Marton & Säljo 1997). Thus deep-holistic learning by volunteer tourists may still occur in formal/structured learning opportunities when the individual is appropriately motivated. Just as volunteer tourists with different motivations may achieve different learning outcomes (Pearce & Foster 2007), the findings of this study suggest that the positive potential of a volunteer tourist's willingness or openness to learn may be reduced by the distractions of hedonistic motivations. Similarly, Tomazos and Butler (2012) argue that volunteer tourists may struggle to find a balance between the lure of fulfilling their hedonistic tourist motivations and their motivations and responsibilities as a volunteer. This tension is evident in one young volunteer tourist's blog about his teaching project in Cambodia that "didn't give me any time to look around the city, never

mind the country. I only had my weekends and I didn't like it" (Bielas 2012). The present research suggests that when the balance between being a tourist and a volunteer is tipped towards fulfilling hedonistic motivations of the former, volunteer tourists may be less able or willing to engage in deep and experiential learning from their interactions with the Other. This lack of deeper experiential learning was evident in Luke's following description of the social behaviour of other volunteer tourists he knew in Sri Lanka.

They, um, they would like on the weekends they'd say like, oh I need to party and you know, and then they'd go to these touristy places, like notorious ones being like Hikkaduwa for example. They'd go to Hikkaduwa and yeah, just party like crazy, get drunk and everything and this [is] in a country where in terms of like Buddhist culture, it's not appropriate to drink and get drunk. (Luke)

Similar accounts of excessive partying were reported by Jess who said some of her fellow volunteer tourists were often too hung-over to carry out their responsibilities and ended up leaving their project early. This behaviour mirrors some individuals in Tomazos and Butler's (2012) study who could not fulfil their volunteer duties the morning after a night of partying and alcohol. When volunteer tourists prioritise fulfilling hedonistic motivations over their volunteer responsibilities, they may not only limit the depth of their learning but also forfeit important learning opportunities in meaningful interactions with the host community and other volunteer tourists during the course of the project (e.g. Wearing 2001, Stoddart & Rogerson 2004, McIntosh & Zahra 2007, Raymond & Hall 2008). These findings would therefore suggest that there may be a possible relationship between the motivations of certain volunteer tourist types and their learning outcomes. Shallow (Callanan & Thomas 2005) and vacation-minded (Brown 2005) volunteer tourists and volunTOURISTS (Daldeniz & Hampton 2011) who tend to be focused on fulfilling hedonistic tourism-related motivations may have different learning experiences to deep (Callanan & Thomas 2005) and volunteer-minded (Brown 2005) volunteer tourists and VOLUNtourists (Daldeniz & Hampton 2011) who are associated with more altruistic motivations and greater commitment to helping the host community. Although informal learning may overcome some difficulties of formal education and encourage individuals to be intrinsically motivated or open to learning (Ramsden 1992), these results indicate that informal learning may be less effective when volunteer tourists are distracted by more hedonistic motivations. Basically, individuals

may have more free-choice in their learning as volunteer tourists but at the same time they are also free to choose *not* to learn and pursue more hedonistic activities.

6.6 Summary

This section has identified some of the realities associated with how individuals learn (or not) through volunteer tourism. Firstly, a small number of participants encountered particularly challenging and dangerous experiences involving violence, physical danger and emotional stress. Although these participants came to ‘learn the hard way’, some of their most significant learning resulted from these major events. The second finding suggests that the process of learning through volunteer tourism is not necessarily quick but can span a prolonged period of time. Engaging in critical reflection is not limited to the duration of the volunteer tourism project, with some participants unable to realise and more deeply understand their learning until years after their project had finished. Finally, in support of previous calls for increased and improved educational components in volunteer tourism, integrating elements of formal learning such as orientation or training sessions and educators may assist volunteer tourists in acquiring the knowledge they need to better navigate and process their experiences. With the knowledge they acquire from more structured learning opportunities and guided reflection, volunteer tourists may be less likely to have to ‘learn the hard way’ and be able to realise sooner what they have learnt from their experiences. Where volunteer tourists do encounter challenging and dangerous experiences, the same features of formal learning may be useful in helping individuals to cope with their strong emotions and understand the event in the context of socio-cultural and socio-political issues facing their host country.

However, volunteer tourists’ experiences and their learning are ultimately shaped by both institutional and individual factors. Whether or not training, supervision and support are provided to volunteer tourists is strongly dependent on the institutional capacity and attributes of a volunteer tourism organisation or programme. Individually, volunteer tourists may have different tendencies and capacities to reflect. It is also possible that volunteer tourists’ learning may be limited by obstacles such as their youth and inexperience, their previous experiences and hedonistic motivations. Such obstacles may prevent volunteer tourists from engaging in deep learning and only encourage them to adopt surface learning approaches that result in superficial understandings of host communities and the issues they face. Hedonistic motivations may also reduce the

likelihood of meaningful interactions between volunteer tourists and the local people and consequently limit opportunities to learn about the Other and Self.

7 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Introduction

This thesis has recast the concept of volunteer tourism in the context of learning. Specifically, this research questioned both *what* and *how* do individuals learn through the informal and (mostly) unstructured learning experience of volunteer tourism. In Chapter 3 it was proposed that away from the extrinsic pressures of formal education volunteer tourists may be intrinsically motivated to learn. Even when volunteer tourists do not actively seek learning they may at least be open to learning as they interact with their host community and other volunteer tourists. In part, individuals' willingness or openness to learning may stem from their ability to direct their own learning experiences in volunteer tourism as they are not bound by the rigidity of timetables and the set curricula of formal schooling. As a free-choice and informal learning experience, volunteer tourism may consequently encourage deep and experiential learning that allows individuals to recognise and understand their learning of skills and knowledge, the Other and Self across local, national and global scales.

Guided by this theoretical understanding of learning through volunteer tourism, semi-structured interviews were conducted with returned volunteer tourists to explore the research questions of what and how do individuals learn through volunteer tourism. This final chapter brings together the conclusions that may be drawn from the findings and shows how the key research questions were met. This chapter considers how this thesis has contributed to academic discussion of volunteer tourism, especially in bringing to the foreground the concept of learning as an integral part of the volunteer tourism experience. The implications of the findings for the volunteer tourism industry in its management and development of projects will also be discussed. Finally, this chapter brings attention to issues raised during this research that may provide new directions for future research.

7.2 Key findings

This research confirms suggestions in the literature that volunteer tourism is an important learning opportunity that can benefit volunteer tourists both personally and

professionally. However, by taking a new look at the benefits of volunteer tourism through the lens of learning this research brings new insights into the way individuals may experience learning ranging from practical and social skills to more profound learning about personal development and one's relationship with the world around them. As a result of their volunteer tourism experiences all interview participants demonstrated learning in at least one of three interrelated areas: 1) skills and knowledge, 2) the Other, and 3) Self. The participants' experiences indicated that learning through volunteer tourism may occur in a range of situations, including structured free-choice learning opportunities as well as experiential learning from individuals' social interactions with the host community and other volunteer tourists.

In terms of skills and knowledge, volunteer tourists in this research most frequently highlighted their development of foreign language skills and their interpersonal or 'soft' skills. In particular, language skills gained through structured lessons and/or experiential learning may be especially important in facilitating meaningful interactions and learning opportunities between volunteer tourists and the local community. From having to build relationships and work closely with people they were meeting for the first time, participants in this research also developed their communication and interpersonal skills. The results build on Lepp's (2008) comparison of community and conservation volunteer tourism experiences to suggest that the kinds of skills and knowledge volunteer tourists eventually come to learn may depend to some degree on the focus and nature of a volunteer tourism project.

The results demonstrated volunteer tourism's potential to promote intercultural learning. Participants mostly referred to intercultural learning on a local scale by observing and abiding by the local customs of their particular host community. In some cases learning about the Other also extended to the cultures of other volunteer tourists. It was suggested that through deep and holistic learning about the economic, environmental and socio-political issues of their host country, participants were able to make both personal and wider, global connections to their volunteer tourism experience. This research supports arguments (e.g. McIntosh & Zahra 2007) that volunteer tourism may be effective in dispelling popular misconceptions about host countries (Raymond & Hall 2008).

Participants' experiences in regards to learning about Self indicated that volunteer tourism allowed them to test and find out their own personal limitations and capabilities. The results conveyed that volunteer tourists may discover new aspects of Self as well as confirm those they had already known such that volunteer tourism may have both life-changing and life-affirming effects on an individual. Following Schott (2011), learning about Self through volunteer tourism may help meet the needs of individuals at a transitional stage in life by providing clarity and direction at both personal and professional levels. The results also support recent work on the potential for transformational learning through volunteer tourism (Coghlan & Gooch 2011) by arguing that interactions with the Other through volunteer tourism may successfully challenge individuals to reflect on one's attitudes and worldviews and gain a more holistic understanding of how their own lives intersect with the experiences of others.

In terms of *how* individuals learn, three key findings emerged from this research to bring new insight into the ways volunteer tourists come to learn what they do. Firstly, the results highlighted the very real possibility that some volunteer tourist learning may stem from particularly challenging and often dangerous physical and emotional events. Despite these challenging experiences described by some interview participants, this research does not intend to imply that all volunteer tourism projects are necessarily dangerous and therefore should be stopped. Rather, this research emphasises the range of learning experiences (including the more extreme) that volunteer tourists may encounter. Although undesirable experiences in themselves, the challenging and/or dangerous events still led to participants' experiential learning about their host culture and Self at a depth of understanding they otherwise may not have achieved.

The second finding related to the patterns of active and critical reflection in volunteer tourists' experiential learning experiences. Participants in this study varied in their reflective tendency and capacity, so while reflection and learning was relatively immediate for some, other individuals were only able to successfully process and understand their experiences years after their project. Participants conveyed that during their project they often reflected alone but also had opportunities to reflect in a group setting with other volunteer tourists. It was suggested that as a result of deep and critical reflection, experiential learning may encourage volunteer tourists to not only become aware of their learning but also apply their learning to future experiences.

Lastly, this research argues that what volunteer tourists learn informally may be complemented by the inclusion of some formal learning opportunities. Participants highlighted the presence of orientation sessions and educators that provided their learning experiences with some structure and guidance during their volunteer tourism projects. Away from the extrinsic pressures of formal learning, participants indicated a willingness and openness to engage in the structured learning opportunities facilitated by orientation sessions and educators. These features of formal learning were effective in communicating key information about the host country and organisation to participants, guiding group discussion and encouraging more frequent and deeper reflection during the project. Consequently, a combination of informal and formal learning may better prepare volunteer tourists to navigate and process their experiences, not least by reducing the potential for cultural misunderstanding and encouraging more immediate learning about the Other and Self. Where volunteer tourists do find themselves in an especially challenging and/or dangerous situation, it was suggested that guided reflection with an educator may help individuals to cope with their strong emotions and understand their experiences in appropriate contexts.

7.3 Management implications

The research findings indicate that learning has important implications for how volunteer tourism projects should be managed in order to provide participants with safe and satisfying experiences that meet (and even surpass) their expectations, especially for learning and personal and professional development. In turn, projects may benefit from having participants who are actively engaged in their volunteer tourism activities and are open and willing to learn from others. Volunteer tourism host and sending organisations may benefit from developing a positive reputation as a provider of meaningful volunteer tourism experiences and consequently attract greater numbers of participants.

In order to achieve these outcomes, volunteer tourism managers (and in-country project leaders) may consider including formal orientation sessions and educators in projects because of their ability to effectively communicate key information about the local culture and language, provide opportunities for participants to ask questions, and facilitate more critical reflection. These orientation sessions and educators may be especially useful for overcoming the obstacles that an individual's youth or inexperience in life and travel may have on his/her learning as a volunteer tourist. By enhancing

volunteer tourist learning in these ways, it may be possible to reduce the risk of cultural misunderstanding and situations that may compromise both the safety of volunteer tourists and the reputation of the volunteer tourism organisation. Managers and project leaders should seek to facilitate meaningful interactions between individuals and the local people (Coghlan 2008) that may in turn lead to important learning outcomes. Such interactions may be encouraged if managers could find some way to help individuals to balance their hedonistic motivations as tourists with their responsibilities as volunteers. As Tomazos and Butler (2012) suggest, this may include the increased presence of staff, setting rules and parameters for volunteer tourist behaviour or allocating ‘vacation days’ to be used at an individual’s discretion. Volunteer tourism managers consequently face the difficulty of incorporating meaningful learning opportunities into participants’ experiences without turning otherwise fun and enjoyable projects into rigidly structured experiences that fail to engage their participants.

This research recognises that not all volunteer tourism organisations necessarily prioritise meaningful learning by participants. While the management implications arising from this research may be most useful for volunteer tourism organisations that have a strong educational focus or aim to promote intercultural learning, they may still be considered relevant to all variations of volunteer tourism organisations and projects in terms of satisfying participants’ expectations, participant safety and maintaining an organisation’s reputation. With respect to a volunteer tourism organisation’s reputation, managers may take additional steps to avoid having their organisation become the subject of critique by their participants following their experience. Based on what participants in this study discovered about volunteer tourism beyond the glossy brochure, managers should seek to address concerns about transparency in the distribution of a volunteer tourist’s fees, whether there is a genuine need for volunteer tourists and providing genuinely useful volunteer tourist activities. However, the huge variety of projects and the current lack of regulation in the volunteer tourism industry mean that management of volunteer tourism projects is highly variable in quality and focus. It is, however, hoped that the findings of this research may be adapted and developed further in the creation of guidelines (e.g. the International Voluntourism Guidelines project between the International Ecotourism Society and Planeterra) or standards that may help regulate the currently huge range of volunteer tourism experiences.

7.4 Future research and concluding comments

The author acknowledges that this thesis is a case study that is representative of university students as a specific example. As a Master's thesis, this research is also necessarily limited in its scope and depth and cannot explore completely all facets relevant to learning through volunteer tourism. For example, while there is some literature on the potential of tour/project leaders/guides as a means to create learning (e.g. Weiler 1996), the limitations of a Master's thesis precluded in-depth exploration of this topic. Nevertheless, the development of ideas in learning and volunteer tourism that have arisen from this case study of university students suggest that the research highlighted in this thesis may provide a useful platform for future studies into learning as a lifelong process and volunteer tourism.

Future studies may include paying greater attention to what individuals learn about the actual volunteer tourism industry and whether this may help determine some of the factors of an individual's first project experience that influence their subsequent choice (if any) of volunteer tourism experience. Building on the notion that some participants wanted to undertake their next volunteer tourism experience independent of a sending organisation, there is an opportunity to differentiate between learning that occurs through formal and informal volunteer tourism experiences. Given the heterogeneity of volunteer tourists and projects, there is also room to explore the learning experiences of different volunteer tourist profiles. For example, studies may consider whether learning differs between solo-based and group-based volunteer tourism projects. Studies could also focus on the increasing numbers of early retirees and families participating in volunteer tourism who may have distinctly different motivations and learning needs to the sample in this research. The bias found in this and many other studies towards more female volunteer tourists may warrant future research on the influence of gender on volunteer tourism learning experiences. Furthermore, the majority of participants in this research were Caucasian, living in a westernised country (New Zealand) and had travelled abroad to a developing country to undertake their volunteer tourism project. It may be time to widen scholarly understanding of the volunteer tourist beyond this set of limited conditions, which in fact characterise most of the volunteer tourism literature. Studies such as those by Lo and Lee (2011) and Shao et al. (2012) that consider participants who are non-Westernised and/or volunteering in a domestic setting may potentially reveal alternative

relationships between participants and the learning opportunities they encounter through volunteer tourism. In line with the ideal of volunteer tourism as a mutually beneficial experience, additional research may take a community-based perspective on learning through volunteer tourism to understand what and how local hosts learn from their experiences with volunteer tourists.

To conclude, this research has offered a particular perspective on volunteer tourism by examining it as a context for informal learning. While other authors have touched on *what* volunteer tourists learn, this thesis has provided one of the first attempts to link these learning outcomes with a deeper look at the processes that show *how* volunteer tourists learn. As a result, it has been possible to conceptualise the frequently-discussed benefits of volunteer tourism as outcomes of participants' willingness and openness to reflect and learn during their project. This approach to volunteer tourism highlighted the role of active, free-choice and experiential learning in determining how volunteer tourists develop skills and knowledge and gain a deeper understanding of their host countries, other volunteer tourists and Self. Importantly, individuals may also be open to opportunities of more structured formal learning that complement their informal learning experiences, including helping individuals to process and understand particularly challenging or dangerous experiences. These findings have led to useful suggestions for volunteer tourism management in terms of how to facilitate more effective learning and safer experiences for participants. Taking into account the complexities of learning and volunteer tourism, this research has provided an improved understanding of how learning occurs in contemporary volunteer tourism experiences. However, it is hoped that the suggestions made for future research will further this understanding against the backdrop of an increasingly diverse volunteer tourist market and growing volunteer tourism industry.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Invitation flyer to recruit interview participants

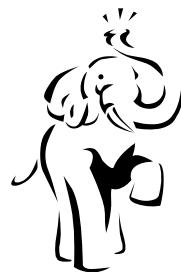
Have you ever been a VOLUNTEER TOURIST?

As part of my Masters degree I am looking for university students (undergrad or postgrad) who are willing to have a chat about what they may have learnt from their volunteer tourism experience.

You may have volunteered while on holiday or during your OE or been part of a domestic or international volunteer tourism program.

You may have volunteered for 1 day or more...

- Caring for **animals** e.g elephant conservation
 - **Building houses** and schools
 - Teaching English to **children**
 - Working with **local communities**
 - Preserving **heritage sites** or **natural landscapes**
 - **Or just about anything else!!!**



If you have time for a quick chat (between 30 and 60mins) it would be greatly appreciated!!! We'll shout you the coffee and a treat ☺

Please email sze-en.lau@otago.ac.nz or call (03)479 5398

If you have time for a quick chat (between 30 and 60mins) it would be greatly appreciated!!! We'll shout you the coffee and a treat ☺

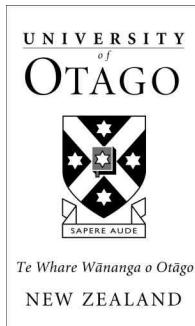
Please email sze-en.lau@otago.ac.nz or call (03)479 5398

Appendix B: Notice to recruit interview participants from University of Otago Critic magazine

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Ever volunteered away from home?? Masters student needs keenbeans for chat about learning through volunteer tourism. Whether domestic or overseas, working with kids, animals, building houses, teaching English, 1 day, 8 months, whatever - I would love to hear about it! Will shout you coffee + treat. sze-en.lau@otago.ac.nz

Appendix C: Interview participant information sheet



LEARNING THROUGH VOLUNTEER TOURISM: THE EXPERIENCES OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

INFORMATION SHEET FOR INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate I thank you. If you decide not to take part there will be no disadvantage to you and I thank you for considering my request.

What is the aim of the project?

This project is being undertaken as part of the requirements for a Masters of Tourism at the University of Otago, New Zealand. The aim of the project is to investigate the learning experiences of university students through volunteer tourism. Understanding what learning (if any) may occur through volunteer tourism will improve our understanding of contemporary volunteer tourism experiences.

What will participants be asked to do?

Should you agree to take part in this project, you will be asked to participate in a face-to-face interview. I will ask you questions regarding your volunteer tourism experience(s) with a specific focus on what you may have learnt during your time as a volunteer tourist. The interview may take up to an hour. Please be aware that you may decide not to take part in the project without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

Can participants change their mind and withdraw from the project?

You may choose to withdraw from the project at any point and without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

What data or information will be collected and what use will be made of it?

The interview discussion will be digitally recorded to be transcribed at a later date. Your learning experiences as a volunteer tourist will help contribute to a greater understanding of contemporary volunteer tourism. In particular your learning experiences may shed some light on the personal, social and global value of volunteer tourism. Basic socio-demographic information (age, gender, level of education) will also be recorded for each participant.

The interview will employ an open-questioning technique. The general line of questioning includes what you may or may not have learnt as a volunteer tourist, your motivations to participate, and your previous

volunteer and volunteer tourism experiences. The precise nature of the questions which will be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops. The University of Otago Human Ethics Committee has therefore not been able to review the precise questions to be asked but is aware of the general topics that may be explored during the interview.

In the event that the line of questioning does develop in such a way that you feel hesitant or uncomfortable you are reminded of your right to decline to answer any particular question(s) and also that you may withdraw from the project at any stage without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

The interview data collected will be securely stored in such a way that it will be accessible to only those mentioned below. The results of the project may be published and will be available in the University of Otago Library (Dunedin, New Zealand) but every attempt will be made to preserve your anonymity. If you wish you are welcome to request a copy of the research results. At the end of the project any personal information will be destroyed immediately except that, as required by the University's research policy, any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which it will be destroyed.

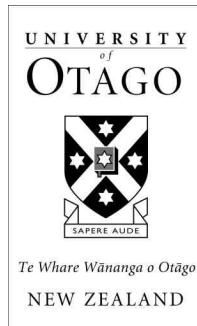
What if participants have any questions?

If you have any questions about our project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:-

Sze-En Lau	Supervisor – Associate Professor Neil Carr
Department of Tourism	Department of Tourism
University of Otago	University of Otago
PO Box 56	PO Box 56
DUNEDIN	DUNEDIN
NEW ZEALAND	NEW ZEALAND
Phone: 0064 (0)3 4795398	Phone: 0064 (0)3 4795048
Email: sze-en.lau@otago.ac.nz	Email: neil.carr@otago.ac.nz

This study has been approved by the Department stated above. If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Committee through the Human Ethics Committee Administrator (ph 03 479-8256). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.

Appendix D: Interview participant consent form



LEARNING THROUGH TOURISM: THE EXPERIENCES OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

I have read the Information Sheet concerning this project and understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

I know that:-

1. My participation in the project is entirely voluntary;
2. I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without any disadvantage;
3. The digital recording of the interview will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project but any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for at least five years after which it will be destroyed;
4. This project involves an open-questioning technique. The precise nature of the questions to be asked has not been determined in advance but will depend on how the interview develops. In the event that the line of questioning develops in such a way that I feel hesitant or uncomfortable I may decline to answer any particular question(s) and/or may withdraw from the project without any disadvantage of any kind;
5. My position within this project and general details (age, level of study, short- or long-term volunteer tourism project) may be used but my name will not;
6. The results of the project may be published and available in the University of Otago Library (Dunedin, New Zealand) and/or presented at conferences but every attempt will be made to preserve my anonymity.

I agree to take part in this project.

.....
(Signature)

.....
(Name)

.....
(Date)

Please tick if appropriate:

I would like to receive the results of this study

Email:

Appendix E: Details of participants and their volunteer tourism projects

Name	Age as volunteer tourist	Current age	Current level of study*	Means of coordinating project	Host Country	Duration	Volunteer activity
Lucy	17	19	U	School-led trip	Vietnam	2 days	Teaching at a local school
Amber	17	20	U	School-led trip	Vanuatu	9 days	Teaching at a local school
Ann	19	21	U	International sending organisation	Thailand	1 week	Building
						1 week	Animal conservation (elephants)
Josh	19	21	U	International sending organisation	Costa Rica	3 weeks	Building
Scott	19	21	U	Personal contact	South Africa	12 months	Teaching at a local school; rowing coach
Luke	19	23	P	Personal contact	Sri Lanka	12 months	Teaching at a local school; school principal
Jess	21	23	P	Direct contact with small, private host organisation	Argentina	1 month	Childcare
Marty	23	24	P	International sending organisation	Zambia	8 months	Teaching at a local school
Laura	22	25	U	International sending organisation	India	2 months	Teaching at a local school
Colleen	24	27	P	Direct contact with small, private host organisation	Thailand	1 week	Animal conservation (elephants)
				Personal contact	Cambodia	4 weeks	Teaching orphans
Emma	39	42	P	International sending organisation	Zambia	1 month	Teaching assistant
					South Africa	1 month	Animal care (horses)
					India	1 month	Childcare for disabled
					Nepal	1 month	Teaching assistant
Naomi	57	59	P	Direct contact with host organisation	New Zealand	2 weeks	Animal conservation (kakapo parrot)
Kate	15 years ago	'Mature age' (self-defined)	P	Personal contact	Vietnam	2 weeks	Translating

* U= undergraduate, P= postgraduate