How is the Luxury Accommodation Experience Created?

Case Studies from New Zealand

Tracy Harkison

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Abstract

A limited number of studies have been conducted on the subject of luxury accommodation experiences. These studies have tended to take a unidimensional perspective on the topic – focusing either on a management or a customer perspective – while other key actors in the provision of luxury accommodation experiences, namely service staff, have tended to be ignored. Few studies have been conducted on creating luxury accommodation experiences. Although the topic of creating experiences has been identified as an important issue in tourism experiences, it has been relatively ignored, especially in the accommodation sector, and in particular, in luxury hotels and lodges. Following an extensive review of the literature, no previous research on creating luxury hotel or lodge experiences in New Zealand has been located.

The aim of this study is to examine and evaluate the creation of the luxury accommodation experience, using case studies within New Zealand. The research question addressed is: what is the luxury accommodation experience, and how is it created?

This study adopted interpretivist case study methodology, utilising a multiple case study approach to the investigation and evaluation of managers', employees' and guests' perspectives on creating the luxury hotel and lodge experience in New Zealand. Six luxury properties were used as case studies, and 81 participants interviewed during their 'experience' – the participants included 27 managers, 27 employees and 27 guests. Analysis of the data resulted in two conceptual models that identified what is the luxury lodge and hotel experience, and how it is created.

The first model explains the luxury hotel and lodge experience. The model portrays the luxury hotel and lodge experience as about being in the moment; opulence; the essence of the luxury hotel or lodge; the feeling of indulgence; the location and setting of the

properties; the sensations and emotions of managers, employees and guests; the physical surroundings of the properties; delivering tailored attention; hospitableness; activities that can be undertaken at the properties; and guests' desires and expectations. Across all properties, regardless of whether they are hotels or lodges, the three strongest themes identified by research participants are being in the moment, the essence of the luxury hotel and lodge, and opulence.

The second model explains how the luxury hotel and lodge experience is created. The model identifies the luxury hotel and lodge experience as created through setting the stage; the ethos of the properties; the actors' performances; co-creation between participants; guidance; comparisons between properties; domestic and international comparisons; the brand's values and beliefs; and projecting an image. Across all properties, regardless of whether they are lodges or hotels, the four strongest themes identified by research participants are setting the stage, the ethos of the property, the actors' performances and co-creation between participants.

The research benefits are twofold. Firstly, the research contributes to the body of knowledge in hospitality and tourism management, specifically identifying what the luxury hotel and lodge experience is and how it is created. Secondly, it provides managers with practical insights into what a luxury hotel and lodge experience is, and how they can create such an experience in their own organisations.

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Attestation of authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Tracy Harkison

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As with any piece of research that results in the production of a thesis, on the cover there should be not only the name of the researcher, but also the names of all those unsung heroes, those who to varying degrees provided assistance, encouragement and guidance, and without whom I would not have succeeded. I am very grateful to all those people, my heroes, who have given me so much of their time, love and energy. In producing this thesis, I faced my final academic challenge, to gain a PhD.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1   Introduction

This research explores how the luxury hotel and lodge experience is created by exploring the perceptions of the three main participants – managers, employees and guests – using case studies from New Zealand. The creation of experiences within a hospitality context has interested researchers for more than 60 years, yet despite this, little is known about how hotel and lodge experiences are created within the luxury sector. This chapter introduces the background to the research, the research question and the aims. The significance and rationale of the study and the approach to the study are also explained. The chapter concludes with an overview of the thesis, a clarification of the terms of reference and a note on limitations.

1.2   Background of the study

It has been suggested that a company's viability in the tourism and hospitality industry depends on it recognising and managing experiences (Zouni & Kouremenos, 2008), and for many companies in the service industry, creating and managing unique experiences has become a priority (Alcántara-Alcover, Artacho-Ramírez, Martínez-Guillamón, & Campos-Soriano, 2013). Accommodation is one of the major components of tourists' experience and one of the first services that is demanded by tourists when they reach a destination (Santoro, 2015). If tourists are satisfied with their accommodation, this can put them in a positive frame of mind, but if anything goes wrong, it has the potential to ruin the entire tourist experience (Ekiz, 2009; Khoo-Lattimore & Ekiz, 2014; Kotler, Bowen, & Makens, 2010). Yet, in spite of the importance of accommodation to the tourist experience, the accommodation element has been taken for granted or completely ignored (Quan & Wang, 2004), and in terms of understanding guests' emotional triggers, the accommodation experience has remained significantly under-researched (Titz, 2008).

Hotels are one of the largest providers of accommodation for tourists, but they have not understood clearly how to create and manage the guest experience, tending to look at the guest experience as simply providing entertainment for their guests (Berry, Carbone, & Haeckel, 2002). An example of this is the hotels of Las Vegas, where guests can have the manufactured experience of being transported through Venice's canals or the streets of Paris. Yet the guest experience goes beyond costumed employees, décor and architecture (Berry et al., 2002).

The guest experience is becoming highly significant within the hotel industry, and research has shown that the involvement of frontline employees is becoming more and more important to the guest experience (Lashley, 2008; OnsØyen, Mykletun, & Steiro, 2009). In fact, it has been suggested that employees are not only critical but are central to the guest experience (Lashley, 2008; OnsØyen et al., 2009). It has also been suggested that there may be differences between what tourism and hospitality managers believe are important to customers' experiences compared with what guests say are important to them – thus, identifying any incongruence between these two perspectives may prove useful for a holistic understanding of the guest experience (Walls, Okumus, Wang, & Kwun, 2011). Overall, there is a lack of research on customer experiences in the hospitality field, and more empirical studies need to be conducted (Knutson, Beck, Kim, & Cha, 2009; Torres, Fu, & Lehto, 2014; Walls et al., 2011).

The hospitality industry is one of the world's largest industries. The word hospitality is an 'umbrella term' that encompasses many sectors, and when hospitality academics are deciding on a focus for their research, it has been proposed that they should concentrate their research on specific segments within the hospitality industry, for example, the hotel industry, as well as on the diversity within the segments, for example, luxury hotels within the hotel industry (Ottenbacher, Harrington, & Parsa, 2009). Cetin and Dincer (2014) suggest that luxury hotels can give researchers more insight into

experiences because of their demanding and experienced clientele, as well as the importance that the luxury hotel gives to their own service and products. Luxury hotels are service intensive and maintain a high ratio of staff-to-guests to ensure high interpersonal guest contact within an opulent environment (Brien, Ratna, & Boddington, 2012). Luxury hotels are part of the 'experience economy' (Gilmore & Pine, 2002; Johnston, 1999; Tosti, 2009), in which the experience is delivered by the staff as part of their relationships with each other and the guest. But creating an experience requires engagement from and some type of emotional – not only functional – involvement of the guest. This emotional engagement in experience creation relies on encounters (Snel, 2013) between the guest and the companies, which co-create experiences through two-way interactions (Sørensen & Jensen, 2015).

Research on customer engagement behaviours, such as co-creation, has become one of the top research priorities in marketing and tourism research (Marketing Science Institute, 2010; Shaw, Bailey, & Williams, 2011; Verhoef, Reinartz & Krafft, 2010). But even though it is a priority, there are few empirical studies that have examined customers' co-creation activities and their consequences for organisations within the travel and service sector (e.g. Auh, Bell, McLeod, & Shih, 2007; Carbonell, Rodríguez-Escudero, & Pujari, 2009; Li & Petrick, 2008; Prebensen, Vittersø, & Dahl, 2013; Shaw et al., 2011), and as previously stated, there is a lack of empirical research on guest experiences in the hospitality field.

1.3 Research question and aims

The aim of this study is to examine and evaluate the creation of the luxury accommodation experience using case studies within New Zealand. The research question for this study is:

What is the luxury accommodation experience, and how is it created?

The aims of this study are:

1. To examine and explain managers', employees' and guests' perceptions of what the luxury hotel and lodge experience is.

2. To identify and interpret managers', employees' and guests' perceptions of how the luxury hotel and lodge experience is created.

3. To analyse and compare managers', employees' and guests' perceptions of what the luxury hotel and lodge experience is and how it is created.

4. To propose a conceptual model that explains what the luxury hotel and lodge experience is from a guest, employee and manager perspective.

5. To propose a conceptual model that explains how the luxury hotel and lodge experience is created from a guest, employee and manager perspective.

1.4   Significance and rationale of the study

The significance of this study has arisen from consumers becoming more discerning, more demanding, more diverse and, ultimately, more hedonistic and self-indulgent (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003). This in turn has affected the hospitality industry globally, resulting in the industry undergoing a transformation from a physical-asset, product-focused intensive business to a customer-focused, experience-centric one (Knutson, Beck, Kim, & Cha, 2006), with hospitality and leisure businesses focusing more on providing their guests with individually customised travel and hospitality experiences (Erdly & Kesterson-Townes, 2003). The traditional hospitality service of offering board and lodging has now been purposefully encased in engaging experiences to create events that are memorable (Bharwani & Jauhari, 2013). A number of hotels are channelling their efforts to provide holistic experiential service offerings that connect with guests individually on an emotional and personal level to create memorable experiences (Bharwani & Jauhari, 2013). In the process of co-

creating these unique memorable experiences for hospitality guests, it has been suggested that it is important to train and develop hospitality professionals in order to be able to better anticipate and cater for the requirements and wants of the guest (Morgan, 2004, 2006). Lusch, Vargo and O'Brien (2007) suggest that using frontline employees as operant resources to co-create customer experiences will enable companies to gain a competitive advantage.

Hotel organisations need to investigate and then invest in the factors and resources they require to improve guests' experiences. It has been suggested that organisations will also need to interact more with their customers to understand what customers require (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a). The term describing this interaction is co-creation. Co-creation can be viewed as a joint process involving the customer and another party, usually a provider, in order to create an output of some value (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a). However, empirical evidence of co-creation research conducted in tourism is scarce and there are a number of research questions that remain unanswered (Grissemann & Stokburger-Sauer, 2012). For example, Shaw et al. (2011) were among the first to examine co-creation in hotels but they restricted their research to co-creation and innovation in hotel information technology (IT) systems, and while Bharwani and Jauhari (2013) wrote a paper on the competencies required by frontline employees to co-create memorable customer experiences in the hospitality industry, this was a conceptual paper.

The rationale for this study has arisen from the importance of the tourism industry to New Zealand in regard to its size and contribution to the economy. In 2014, total tourism expenditure in New Zealand was $23.8 billion, making it an important contributor to the economy, as 9% of New Zealand's total gross domestic product was directly or indirectly generated by tourism. Of this total expenditure, nearly 10% was spent on accommodation, half of which was by international visitors (Ministry of

Business, Innovation & Employment, 2014). The luxury segment of the nation's accommodation sector is an important component of the overall tourism sector. In 1999, 185,340 nights were spent in New Zealand luxury accommodation – 84.2% by domestic guests and 15.8% by international guests. By 2009, this number had increased to 710,772 nights – with 69.2% spent by domestic guests and 30.8% by international guests (Brocx & Harkison, 2009). In 2009, the recession hit, but over the past six years, the numbers of both domestic and international visitors staying in luxury accommodation have recovered. The luxury segment is slowly growing again; it now accounts for approximately 3% of the annual international tourism dollar coming into New Zealand and has an increasingly international focus in terms of its clientele (Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment, 2014).

In 2005, McIntosh and Siggs examined the experiential nature of boutique accommodation and specialist accommodation in Nelson, New Zealand. While conducting their literature review, they found that "although an increasing number of studies have examined tourism products as constructions for experience, many of these studies have been attraction focused, and as such, there has been little attention given to the experiential nature of accommodation products" (McIntosh & Siggs, 2005, p. 74). One of their main findings was that specialist accommodation establishments may be attractive to customers for the experience of luxury, history, host-guest interaction, comfort and the uniqueness they provide. McIntosh and Siggs (2005) concluded that, by evaluating the experiences provided by accommodation products, research can contribute to understanding the ways in which accommodation establishments provide intangible experiential qualities for guests, facilitating feelings, emotions, imagination, knowledge, satisfaction and beneficial experiences. They suggest that further research should be conducted on different accommodation types to identify how experiences may differ.

1.5   Approach to the study

Before the approach to study can be explained, it is necessary to recognise and clarify the position of the researcher within the context of the study (Creswell, 2009).

1.5.1   My positioning in the research

As academics, we do not just randomly choose the topic we research. I chose this topic because I had studied and worked in hospitality the northern hemisphere, and then 14 years ago found myself starting my teaching career in Invercargill, New Zealand – writing a degree in hospitality management. During my time there, I saw an increase in the number of luxury accommodation properties in the South Island, where many of my students ended up working, and where I had spent most of my career – the luxury sector.

When I started my PhD journey, I thought of where I had come from and what was happening in New Zealand in regards to luxury accommodation. I decided that I wanted to understand the luxury accommodation experience within a New Zealand context, and to be able to fill the gap in the literature relating to luxury accommodation in New Zealand, and how the luxury accommodation experience is created.

I looked at the luxury accommodation experience in the 'here and now'. Hospitality is a lived experience and I researched that. I asked people during their experience what it was and how it was created. I didn't give them time to think and reflect on it – it was about being in that moment and explaining it 'then and there'. It was about trying to understand it from the participants' perspective and their perspective only.

The choice of an interpretive research approach was influenced by the researcher's knowledge of luxury, and knowing that 'luxury' is a personal and subjective experience which everyone feels differently – the interpretative paradigm is characterised by the belief that knowledge is made up of multiple different realities, and that these realities

are shaped by context: the group; their culture; and the location (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Myers, 2010).

A consideration that must be acknowledged is that the researcher recognises that some of their background will inevitably influence their work. The idea that social researchers actually become a part of the world being investigated also contributes to these influences (Gibbs, 2007). In particular, the researcher's career and experiences in the luxury sector of the hospitality industry will not make the researcher completely objective and unbiased; however, for the same reasons, the researcher can bring sensitivity to the data.

There are many organisations and people who operate on the fringes of the luxury hotel and lodge experience that can influence that experience before it even happens or, indeed, after it has happened – for example, airport staff, airline staff and public transport drivers. These people and organisations are out of scope for the purposes of this study; instead, this study focuses on managers, employees and guests who are creating the experience in the 'here and now', or as van Manen (2009, 2014) describes it, the 'lived experience'. This research focuses on how the luxury hotel and lodge experience is created by the managers, employees and guests at the time the experience occurs. Guests were approached during their stay, while managers and employees were approached during their working day.

Previous research reviewed for this study indicates that in most cases the guest or hotel experience has been investigated retrospectively after the event, and it is rare for the experience to be looked at during the 'lived experience'. Research conducted overseas on customer experiences in the hospitality field has primarily collected data during the post-experience phase, with researchers asking research participants to remember their experiences. However, "the memories of our experiences do not represent only our

experiences, but our prior dreams of these experiences" (Suvantola, 2002, p. 248). So the limiting aspect of this approach is that participants have a tendency to turn their memories into golden moments: it is natural for people to be selective in their recollection of their past experiences and reconstruct them favourably (Curtin, 2006). It is a process that participants go through every time they have a travel experience: travel experiences are "characterised by a process in which our dreams initiate travel, travel turns into memories, and the memories transform into dreams about travel again" (Suvantola, 2002, p. 250). O'Gorman (2007) suggests that hospitality exists within the lived experience and that it is a gift shared between the 'host' and the 'guest' that turns a stranger into a 'friend' for a limited period of time. So this research was conducted as the experience was being lived, before it had time to become a memory and be transformed into a golden moment. Lincoln and Guba (1985) also recommend conducting research in hotels during or right after a guest's stay because it will create better recall of events, improve the quality of the data collected and contribute to external validity.

New Zealand was chosen as the location for this study because of the opportunities that were presented to the researcher with regard to gaining access to luxury hotels and lodges. The multiple case study approach was used as it enables the researcher to collate in-depth data from multiple sources of information that are rich in their context and content (Creswell, 1998, 2007; Stake, 2003). Luxury hotels and lodges can be found throughout New Zealand, not only in cities but also in rural areas in both islands. The criteria for inclusion in this research was that the properties were listed under the 2012 Qualmark categories of 'Exclusive' and 'Five-Star – Exceptional', where 25 properties in total are listed. Through purposive sampling, six properties took part in this study: three luxury hotels and three luxury lodges from a mixture of locations throughout New Zealand. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather the primary data, and 81

participants took part, consisting of 27 managers, 27 employees and 27 guests. In addition, an analysis of documentation (e.g. press briefings, newspaper and online sources, travel guides and brochures, archival records and photographs of physical artefacts of the properties) was used to complement the interview data, as was direct observation.

1.6   Outline of the study

This thesis consists of eight chapters. The first chapter explains the reasons for the study, and identifies the research question and aims. This chapter also presents the idea that the luxury hotel and lodge experience is more than a 'bed for a night'; it is created of tangible and intangible elements. The second chapter reviews current and historical literature relevant to the research question, providing a holistic understanding of existing knowledge of how the luxury hotel and lodge experience is created by looking at the concepts of luxury, accommodation, experience and co-creation. The chapter identifies a gap in the literature that shaped the research question and aims. The third chapter discusses the research philosophy that determined the methodology and methods that were adopted to answer the research question. The philosophical position is explained and reflected upon by the researcher, and a description of how the data were collected and then analysed is provided.

The fourth chapter presents descriptions of the six case study properties. The fifth chapter presents the findings of the cross-case analysis for the six properties and develops the first conceptual model, what a luxury hotel and lodge experience is. The sixth chapter presents the findings of the cross-case analysis for the six properties and develops the second conceptual model, how the luxury hotel and lodge experience is created.

The seventh chapter discusses the themes that were identified in Chapters 5 and 6 and relates these to the themes identified in Chapter 2 – the literature review. The eighth

chapter concludes the thesis with a reiteration of the research question and aims, a summary of the findings and an explanation of what has been contributed to the body of knowledge. The thesis concludes with managerial recommendations and discusses the need for further research to be conducted on the luxury hotel and lodge experience internationally to develop a benchmarking system.

1.7   Scope and terms of reference

Throughout this thesis, the terms 'hospitality', 'luxury hotel', 'luxury lodge', 'experience', 'luxury' and 'co-creation' will be used. For the purpose of this study, these terms are defined as follows.

Hospitality

Hospitality is a contemporaneous human exchange that is designed to enhance the mutual well-being of the parties concerned and is entered into voluntarily. This is done through the provision of food or drink and accommodation (Brotherton, 1999).

Luxury hotel

Luxury hotels in New Zealand that have been awarded the 'Five-Star – Exceptional' rating by Qualmark are among the best available in New Zealand for tourists (Qualmark, 2012).

Luxury lodge

Luxury lodges in New Zealand that have been awarded the Exclusive rating by Qualmark must have first achieved a five-star grade with a 95% or better score, and then met additional requirements that include that the establishment is intimate, exclusive and highly individual, and offers the finest of locations, facilities, activities and service (Qualmark, 2012).

Experience

Experience can be defined as a stream of thoughts and feelings that people have during moments of consciousness (O'Sullivan & Spangler, 1998).

Luxury

Luxury is derived from the Latin word *luxus*, which signifies soft or extravagant living, opulence, sumptuousness and overindulgence (Dubois, Czellar, & Laurent, 2005).

Co-creation

Co-creation is the interaction between consumer and company to create value (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a).

1.8   Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the background to the research question and aims, the significance of and rationale for this study, and the approach to the study, and provided an outline of this thesis and the terms of reference for the thesis. Chapter 2 will now provide a comprehensive review of literature relevant for the development of the thesis: the literature on luxury, experience and co-creation.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review takes a purely hospitality and tourism perspective. There are many other discipline perspectives and areas of literature this review could have taken into consideration, for example satisfaction and quality, but this literature review's boundaries are in the disciplines of hospitality and tourism, to highlight the gaps these disciplines have which this study aims to fill by conducting the proposed research. This research will examine the nature and the creation of the luxury hotel and lodge experience. In essence, the *how*, *what* and *who* of creating the luxury hotel and lodge experience will be examined, and this will require the identification and explanation of each concept involved in this research. This chapter will explore, individually, the concepts of luxury, experience and co-creation, and while it is important to explore these concepts individually to show their significance in the overall process of creating the luxury hotel and lodge experience, it is the aim of the literature review to demonstrate that there are relationships among these concepts, and that there is a gap in knowledge in this regard that needs to be researched.

2.2 Luxury

2.2.1 Introduction

The first section of this literature review will examine luxury in hospitality, highlighting luxury hotels and lodges. Before this can be undertaken, it is important to look at the term luxury, how it is defined and why it is of interest. It will be pointed out that the meaning of various terms change when they are associated with the term luxury, and when their meanings change, this creates new topics for investigation. This is why luxury in hospitality will be examined in the second part of this section. Within the second part of this section, hospitality in ancient times, the history of luxury hotels and

lodges in New Zealand, and what luxury hotels and lodges consist of at present will be discussed.

2.2.2   Definition of luxury

First, it is important to explore the meaning of luxury. Regrettably, there is no objective or quantifiable definition of luxury or the luxury market due to their nebulous nature. The problem with trying to define luxury is in the word itself. The origin of the word luxury lies in the Latin word *luxus*, which signifies soft or extravagant living, opulence, sumptuousness and overindulgence, and its derivate *luxuria*, meaning extravagance (Dubois et al., 2005; Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2006).

Luxury was once seen as a controversial term, as people have had different impressions of what it is and what it involves, and it was often subjected to moral criticism from some people because of their ethical beliefs of what luxury encompassed (Kapferer, 1997). This negative connotation of luxury can still be found in today's marketing campaigns for products such as chocolate and cheesecake, where the consumption of luxury brands is portrayed as *naughty* or *wicked* (Low, 2010).

What may be viewed as luxury by some people could be seen as ordinary by others: half of the public may qualify some brands as luxury, while the other half may simply regard them as major brands (Kapferer, 1997). Phau and Pendergast (2000) describe the concept of luxury as something unique, rare or scarce, and claim that luxury brands must sustain a high level of awareness to enhance their exclusivity. Defining luxury is particularly elusive, but essentially, there are several key components or characteristics: recognition by others of its extra value, a strong connection of status, high quality and very limited supply (Mortelmans, 2005; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). What can be said about luxury is that, as a concept, it is fluid and dramatically changes across culture and time (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2006). So, for the purpose of this study, and as explained in the introduction, luxury is derived from the Latin word *luxus*, which

signifies soft or extravagant living, opulence, sumptuousness and overindulgence (Dubois et al., 2005).

2.2.3   Increase in interest in luxury

Over the past two decades, luxury has been subject to academic enquiry in many and varied disciplines, including economics, history, psychology, econometric modelling, marketing and consumer behaviour (Dubois et al., 2005; Kemp, 1998; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). Interestingly, Thorstein Veblen conducted a comprehensive analysis of the concept over a hundred years ago in his 1899 book *The Theory of the Leisure Class,* in which he presented a seminal model of conspicuous consumption (Mortelmans, 2005). However, it took until the 1980s for interest in the topic to resume again, when, in 1983, Sombart wrote a book about love, luxury and capitalism. The resumed interest in luxury products continued in the 1990s and a series of new studies resulted in new theories and insights: Allèrés (1990, 1992, 1995) published a number of books on marketing strategies and luxury products in the luxury sector (Mortelmans, 2005).

With this new interest in the luxury sector, research into the psychology and purchasing behaviours of luxury consumers has suggested that the concept of luxury and how it is defined has changed, firstly, because of the baby boomers coming of age – they have always been seen as a generation who challenge authority, reject the status quo and go their own way (Bernstein, 1999; Danziger, 2007), and secondly, because of extraordinary goods becoming ordinary goods and thus making it hard to determine what a luxury good is (Bernstein, 1999; Danziger, 2007). A study into the buying patterns of the Bohemian bourgeois class (a phrase coined by David Brooks in 2000, when he wrote a book about a group of people who were considered the next generation after yuppies) suggested that this group of people were in the market for luxury items, and this had resulted from the luxury phenomenon sweeping America, which had been started by social and economic forces (Silverstein, Fiske, & Butman, 2005). But this

luxury phenomenon was not only hitting America – an increased spend in the luxury sector was being fuelled by disposable incomes growing in many parts of the world, and the increase of high net worth individuals emerging in the Middle East, China, America, India, Brazil and many European countries (Husic & Cicic, 2009; Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2006). Contemporary luxury consumption in other emerging markets such as China and Russia has also been attributed to an increased interest in luxury by consumers in these markets (Atwal & Williams, 2009). These consumers were keen to trade up to products that met their aspirational needs and trade down products that they perceived as commodities (Kiessling, Balekjian, & Oehmichen, 2009; Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2006).

Today there are many societies that are characterised by widespread individual wealth that had previously been limited to the elite. As a consequence there is no longer a distinguishing factor in owning 'ordinary' physical goods. Instead, people are pursuing the 'extraordinary', examples being luxury goods, outsourcing of the preparation and cooking of their food and, in the instance of tourism and leisure, unique and unusual places to visit and activities they can undertake (Scott et al., 2009). Research exploring the luxury lifestyles of people suggests that it is not necessarily about the money, but more about the experience and feelings that having enough money can bring to those people – in essence, it is a new form of luxury (Danziger, 2005, 2007). Luxury was once seen as a differentiation between social classes and a sign of prestige, but it has changed into a concept that is forever evolving due to it no longer simply being measured by material accoutrements, such as luxury goods. Luxury is now being defined through experiences and ideal values.

2.2.4   'Luxury' changes the meaning of related terms

Not only is the word luxury a difficult word to define, but when it is used as an adjective it can change the status of other objects. "Invariably many organisations have

attempted to increase the level of added value to their product position by using the title of 'luxury', or have specifically chosen to position their products in the luxury goods niche" (Vickers & Renand, 2003, p. 460). It is interesting to realise that when consumers are discussing brands, they categorise them as brands and luxury brands, and what is even more interesting is that researchers and consumers do not deem all luxury brands to be equally luxurious (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). It has been suggested that because of the industrialisation process adopted by manufacturers and the growing purchasing power of consumers, products that were once deemed exclusive (e.g. perfumes, salmon and first-class hotel services) are now widely consumed by the public and are no longer seen as exclusive (Dubois & Duquesne, 1993).

In conclusion, although there has long been interest in luxury, academic enquiry into luxury has grown only in the past 20 years, the outcome of which has been new insights and theories. It can be seen that defining the word luxury is difficult, although there are references in the literature to key components and characteristics that imbue objects with the characteristics of luxury, and that using the term luxury as an adjective in conjunction with other words may change people's perceptions. An example of this in hospitality is the term *luxury hotel*: the word 'hotel' alone projects a relatively neutral image, but when the term 'luxury' is added, it takes on a new meaning, as will now be discussed.

2.3   Luxury in hospitality

2.3.1   Hospitality in ancient times

Throughout the ages, luxury has been closely associated with hospitality. The Romans and Greeks were famed for their lavish and luxurious lifestyles while travelling, feasting and holding banquets (O'Gorman, 2005). The creation of demand for superior levels of places to stay is said to have come from the increasing numbers of higher classes travelling (O'Gorman, 2007), and the reputation of establishments was gained through

their standard of service and the quality of their staff, and equally through the behaviour and character of their clientele (O'Gorman, 2009).

It has been claimed that commercial hospitality has developed from two roots: one being a minimum level of accommodation provided for commoners and the other being luxury accommodation for aristocrats (King, 1995). It has also been claimed that contemporary hospitality developed from four roots: the first was commercial hotels, and these can be traced back to the facilities provided to religious travellers, to expedite trade, to accommodate government staff and to mail delivery; the second root was resorts and entertainment-based facilities, and these can be traced to Roman and Greek spas; the third root was rooming houses and rental housing, which eventually led to bed and breakfast facilities, condos and timeshares; and the final root came from royal courts, which led to condominiums, castles and super-luxury hotels (Rutes & Penner, 1985).

2.3.2 The history and context of luxury accommodation in New Zealand

This overview of the history and development of luxury accommodation in New Zealand is important for the context of this research, as it demonstrates the complexity of the development of this segment of the hospitality market. Even though the concept of luxury accommodation is certainly not new, a continued market presence for luxury hotels in New Zealand has only existed since the late 1970s, and for luxury lodges since the late 1980s.

Tourism in New Zealand was stimulated by three events in the mid-19th century: the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, the Duke of Edinburgh Prince Alfred's visit to the country in 1870, and the development of ocean-going steamships (Christoffel, 2013). Wealthy tourists from the United States and Britain were among the first tourists to New Zealand; they were taking part in a six-month grand tour of the world that included a visit to New Zealand (Christoffel, 2013).

New Zealand hotels in the 19th century were fairly modest enterprises. But as cities grew larger, more grand establishments were being built which were often financed by profits from the breweries. Some of these grand establishments were built in Hokitika during the height of the gold rushes, and these hotels were admired for their luxury. Perhaps one of the grandest hotels of that era was Warner's Hotel in Christchurch's Cathedral Square – it was described as "one of the finest hotels in the Australasian colonies" (Christoffel, 2013, p. 3). It had to be rebuilt in 1901 after a fire destroyed it in 1900, and possessed over 120 rooms, including "one of the largest and handsomest [dining rooms] in the colony with private and public bars fitted with handsome cedar fittings and beveled plate glass mirrors … furnished with numerous luxurious couches, upholstered in crimson velvet … and well supplied with … choice wines, liquors and cigars" (Christoffel, 2013, p. 3).

Even though tourism was growing and hotels were being built, from 1881 onwards the New Zealand Parliament approved a series of laws that unfortunately steered the hotel industry towards domination by liquor interests, because the government did not believe that accommodation alone was profitable. This lasted well into the 20th century. As a result, many hotel rooms were left empty, but this did not concern hotel proprietors who did not see themselves as being in the business of selling rooms, but in the business of selling liquor. It was not until 1945 that a Royal Commission on Licensing learnt that some hotels had not had any guests for many years and that in other parts of the country there was a shortage of hotels. Adding to this was the Commission's criticism that the grand hotels built in the 1920s and 1930s were now old and cramped, with minimal facilities. To improve the standards of hotels, the Licensing Control Commission was set up by the government in 1949 (Christoffel, 2013).

Six years later, in the 1955 annual report for the Tourist Hotel Corporation, the Commission reported that they doubted New Zealand would ever need or would ever

have luxury hotels in the true meaning of the word. But finally, in 1963, the government introduced a tourist accommodation development scheme that enabled them to give considerable assistance to new hotels, and the result of this scheme was international chains opening up large four-star, five-star and luxury hotels in Dunedin, Queenstown, Christchurch, Wellington and Auckland. For example, during the 1960s, the Intercontinental, the South Pacific and the Gateway were opened, and in the 1970s, the James Cook Hotel was opened (Christoffel, 2013).

However, it was not until the 1980s that luxury lodges started to appear in New Zealand. For example, one of New Zealand's most iconic retreats, Huka Lodge, was turned into a luxury lodge in 1984, even though this retreat had been founded nearly 65 years earlier, in 1920 (Christoffel, 2013). In the 1990s, large modern luxury hotels, bearing the names of international hotel brands such as Rydges, Hyatt and Copthorne, were opening in every major city, and by 2000, the growth of luxury lodges had begun.

2.3.3   Luxury hotels

In the past, luxury hotels were renowned for their prime location, large size, high-quality food, cleanliness, tasteful aesthetics, and provision of guests with privacy and security and highly customised services (Kucukusta et al., 2014; Sherman, 2007). But then, 25 years ago, mid-priced and luxury-level accommodation operators began to feel it was essential for them to add more and more amenities to their rooms (e.g. well-known brand soap, shampoos, conditioners and hand/body lotions), and this trend, which was fuelled by highly competitive market environments, was given the name 'the amenities creep of the 80s' (Bell, 1989; Bernstein, 1999). However, within 11 years, the usage of hotel facilities, for example restaurants, bars, rooms, and nightclubs were no longer considered by guests as luxury – for many people, these facilities had become a vital component of their lifestyle (Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2000).

This increase in competition in the luxury hotel segment has compelled managers to pay increased attention to customer satisfaction (Mattila, 1999a). Looking at customer satisfaction from the perspective of the customer has highlighted how customers form linkages between luxury hotels as a product and the relevant role that it plays in their lives (Jones & Sasser, 1995; Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2006). Hotel firms, specifically upscale or luxury hotels, are providing strong emotional experiences for their guests, and these guests are willing to pay more for these emotional experiences (Barsky & Nash, 2002; Han & Back, 2007). But luxury hotels also need to take on board whether guests are staying for business or pleasure, as the reason for their stay could affect their perceptions (Griffin, Shea, & Weaver, 1996). Research into how business travellers discriminate between luxury and mid-price hotels shows that there is no clear definition of what a luxury hotel is, with the only rough indication being the number of amenities and services offered to guests: bathrobes, hairdryers, gourmet restaurants, concierge and bellman services discriminated luxury hotel properties from mid-priced properties (Griffin et al., 1996). Further research has revealed how business travellers evaluate the services of luxury hotels, and again found that there was no real clear definition of a luxury hotel – the only distinction is that, in general, luxury hotels are different from business hotels due to their personalised services and elaborate physical surroundings (Mattila, 1999b). And according to Cetin and Dincer (2014), it would be unrealistic to assume business travellers would display the same level of interest in hotel experiences as leisure tourists.

Walls et al. (2011) suggested that as well as trip-related factors (for example the actual purpose of their trip and why guests were going to the hotel in the first place, either travelling for business or leisure), human interactions significantly impact the guest experience in luxury hotels. Guests want employees to have a good attitude, professional behaviour and nice appearance, and to be proactive in service (Walls et al.,

2011). As the lodging industry consists of a high degree of interaction between consumers and employees, customer emotions are often influenced by the services and actions of frontline employees (Han & Back, 2007; Lewis & McCann, 2004; Mattila & Enz, 2002).

Baum (2006) recommended the requirement that service staff within luxury hotels have the ability to converse with their guests about music, sport, politics and any other relevant topic with an international understanding.   But this requirement does rely on a degree of international exposure and a level of prior education in service staff, and a commitment from them to remain current in these areas (Baum, 2006). It has also been suggested that luxury hotels need to maintain a high staff-to-guest ratio to ensure that they can continue a high degree of interpersonal customer contact in what is seen as an opulent environment (Brien et al., 2012). Bharwani and Jauhari (2013) suggested that it is this human interaction component that has arisen within the hospitality industry as an essential dimension influencing the experiences of guests.

The hotel brand is also seen as an implied promise of what service guests can expect (Xu & Chan, 2010). Brands are also seen as a way for hotel organisations to differentiate and distinguish themselves in their customers minds, as the brand serves as a signature of the hotel chain and its products and services (Mohsin, Hussain, & Khan, 2011; So & King, 2010; Xu & Chan, 2010). But even though some hotel brands see themselves as luxury hotels (e.g. the Ritz Carlton and Four Seasons), when O'Neill (2004) wrote about luxury hotel brand values and how they were changing, he could find no clear definition of what a luxury hotel was. The only way he could explain the difference was by providing a retail comparison – "Luxury hotels are about as different from the average hotel as a Prada bag is from a duffel bag" (O'Neill, 2004, p. 30). For luxury hotels to be seen as different from average hotels, their managers need to be able to identify the distinctive features, services, competencies and strengths that they can

consistently deliver to their customers in order to be seen as a luxury hotel (Presbury, Fitzgerald, & Chapman, 2005).

But what is a luxury hotel?

The market dynamics of the European luxury hotel sector were examined by PricewaterhouseCoopers in 2007 in order to identify the key drivers of the demand for luxury accommodation, the leading players, changes in segmentation and new brands coming into the market (Milburn & Hill, 2007). While this market was examined thoroughly, a definition of what a luxury hotel is was still seen as the first challenge. At present, there is no clear definition of a luxury hotel, although there is an implication that a hotel's accommodation will be of a high standard and that there will be 24-hour room service, fine dining, dry cleaning, business facilities and valet parking, and that staff will be well trained (Davidson, Guilding, & Timo, 2006; Kucukusta et al., 2014).

Although there is no clear definition of a luxury hotel, within the past four years, two definitions of a luxury hotel have been established by the Indian and Malaysian tourism industries. The Ministry of Tourism in India and the Malaysian Tourism Board have stated that four-star, five-star and five-star deluxe hotels are classed as luxury hotels (Ekiz, Khoo-Lattimore, & Memarzadeh, 2012; Mohsin & Lockyer, 2010). Walls et al. (2011) used a similar definition in their study, defining a luxury hotel as a *deluxe, four to five-star rated and full-service hotel.*

Star ratings have always influenced guests' expectations of what level of hospitality they should receive at an establishment, as guests surmise that the higher the star rating of an establishment, the higher the levels of hospitality that should be provided (Ariffin & Maghzi, 2012).

A possible reason for not having a definition of luxury hotels is that many operators have developed their own self-styled luxury product with their own definitions, and that

some have added additional luxury services to existing lower grade hotels, leading to confusion in the market (Milburn & Hill, 2007). An example of this is the new category of hotel in Paris – Palace: this was an initiative of the government department for tourism, who were approached with the new category name by Atout France (which promotes French Tourism) in the hope that this would make France stand out from its rivals (Paris Convention and Visitors Bureau, 2010). The objective of creating the Palace category was to pick 20 out of 100 five-star establishments that symbolise excellence and perfection, luxury and timelessness in order to highlight them as something unique (Paris Convention and Visitors Bureau, 2010).

Another reason for not having a definition of luxury hotels is the overuse of the word luxury. This concern has been verbalised by various representatives of the industry who feel that the term luxury has become one of the most overused words in the English language (Greenwood, 2007; Kerr, 2007). Customers' expectations of luxury have also changed because of other luxury experiences they have had, and the more luxury experiences a customer gains and integrates with, the more emotional and productive their evaluation of future experiences becomes (Johnson, Olsen, & Andreassen, 2009). The hospitality industry has had to constantly change and challenge itself to create luxury experiences for its guests by providing what the guests are looking for. Kiessling et al. (2009) give examples of what hotels are doing in order to provide their guests with a luxury experience, including offering cooking classes with celebrity chefs and providing private shopping with personal shoppers. The standard of luxury is now being defined by the guests' expectations and experiences (Gumbel & Levenson, 2007; Milburn & Hill, 2007). This will be discussed in the next section of this review.

2.3.4   Conclusion

Recently, there has been a renewed interest in the concept of luxury due to the changing nature and fluidity of its definition, and despite the lack of clear definition, there is some

agreement on the key components of luxury, these being the recognition by others of extra value, strong involvement by craftsmen and being in very limited supply. Adding the term 'luxury' to other words has the ability to change peoples' perceptions – for example, adding the word 'luxury' to hotel changes how people perceive a hotel. Historically, luxury has been associated with hospitality since Roman and Greek times, and luxury hotels have been in existence for nearly 200 years. However, trying to determine what a 'luxury hotel' is becomes difficult because the word 'luxury' is overused, and the hospitality industry developing self-styled luxury products has itself caused further confusion in the market place. But, as previously discussed in the introduction chapter, research into luxury hotels can give researchers rich insight into guests' hotel experiences due to the importance they give to their services and products (as this is what defines them as a luxury hotel), and the experience they can give their guests. The next section explores the concept of experience.

2.4   Experience

2.4.1   Introduction

The second section of this literature review examines the topic of experience. Research suggests there has been a shift in consumer demand from the consumption of goods to the experience of services (Holbrook, 2006; Pine & Gilmore, 1998). To gain a clear understanding of this topic, it is important to investigate how experience is defined, explain why a relative shift from the consumption of goods to the consumption of experiences has occurred, explain the importance of experience, define what tourism and hospitality experiences are and finally, identify how experience may be co-created.

2.4.2   Definition of experience

For many years, the research community has been interested in experiences. Professionals and scholars hailing from different disciplines, for example marketing, human factors and psychology, have researched people's experiences from varying

lenses and viewpoints (Abrahams, 1986; Alcántara-Alcover et al., 2013; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Maslow, 1964). But trying to determine exactly what an experience is remains a difficult yet important task. Experience is difficult to define, because of its multifaceted and personal nature (Knutson & Beck, 2004). Experiences vary greatly, thus it is difficult to identify the parameters of experiences. Whether it is prior to, during or after the event, experience is a difficult concept to grasp (O'Sullivan & Spangler, 1998).

Experience can be defined as a stream of thoughts and feelings that people have during moments of consciousness (O'Sullivan & Spangler, 1998). Experiences can require participation or involvement by a person, and they are internal in nature and therefore individualised (Knutson & Beck, 2004). Mossberg (2007) suggested that an experience may involve a person emotionally, physically and intellectually.

There are many definitions and explanations as to what an experience is, but what can be said about an experience is that it is a multi-layered phenomenon: individuals make sense of experience through cognitive, subconscious, cultural and personal interpretive layers; by discussing standards and major values attending to direct human relationships (Butler & Scott, 1992; Fox, 2008; Narayan, 1997; Warren, 2000).

2.4.3 History of experience (a shift from consumption to experience)

Experience is certainly not a new phenomenon, having been the focus of research for more than 60 years. In 1955, Abbott noted that "what people really desire are not products, but satisfying experiences … People want products because they want the experience which they hope the products will render" (Holbrook, 2006, p. 40). Dewey (1963) suggested that engaging in experiences consists of four components: (1) it involves progression over time; (2) there is anticipation; (3) there is a uniqueness that will make it stand out from the ordinary; and (4) it reaches some sort of completion. In 1970, Toffler predicted that in the future there would be a shift in how people viewed

goods and services, and that there would be a new sector called the experience industry (Toffler, 1970). In 1998, Pine and Gilmore suggested that this shift – from goods and services to experiences – was one of the reasons why tourism and hospitality providers had to produce successful experiences in order to remain competitive (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). It was also suggested that these tourism and hospitality providers would have to learn not only how to produce experiences but also how to stage them, the rationale being that goods and services were no longer good enough and there was an increasingly competitive environment, where experience would be the differentiator (Pine & Gilmore, 1999).

By the 2000s, more researchers were agreeing with Pine and Gilmore (1999). For example, Shaw and Ivens (2002) stated that there had been a move away from delivering services and a move towards creating experiences for customers, and that an outcome of this shift towards customer experience is that organisations may gain a competitive advantage. Williams (2006) stated that tourism and hospitality organisations now had to stage experiences like acts of 'theatre' and that modern economies have transitioned, resulting in a move from the marketing of services to marketing experiences.

Even though there has been a shift from consumption to experience when people buy a service, they are purchasing a set of intangible activities carried out on their behalf (Atwal & Williams, 2009). When people buy an experience, they want to enjoy a sequence of memorable events that they pay for that engage them in a personal way (Atwal & Williams, 2009).

2.4.4   Importance of experience

The most important aspect of an experience is a successful outcome, and this would be that both the instigator and the customer are satisfied (Pine & Gilmore, 1998, 1999). Experiences that are both satisfying and successful are those that the customer would

want enthusiastically recreated again, and promote via word of mouth, which is what instigators want in order to gain more interest in their business (Pine & Gilmore, 1998, 1999). But before making a judgement about certain experiences and forming a holistic impression, customers mentally combine numerous factors – including, ambience and the space in which they can move, and its functionality – and these are all important factors for organisations to remember so that they can give their customers a good experience (Mattila, 1999b).

There is great importance in the images that customers are left with after an experience because these images, when combined with the effects of their experience with the goods and services, advertising, public relations, physical image and word of mouth, have a large influence in the customer's mind (Normann, 1991). Brunner-Sperdin and Peters (2009) suggested that the most important characteristic of an experience is the memory. Such memories, feedback and images are now being posted on the Internet via review platforms such as TripAdvisor and Facebook; recently, these online platforms have been emerging as some of the most preferred outlets for the posting of comments and sharing of experiences by guests (Ekiz et al., 2012).

2.4.5 Tourist experience

When relating experience to hospitality and tourism, researching the concept of tourist experience is certainly not new – the psychologist Csikszentmihalyi first started studying experience in the context of leisure and play in 1975 (Ritchie & Hudson, 2009). Forty years later, the subject of the tourist experience is still being researched, and as Cetin and Dincer (2014) suggested, tourists continue to seek experiences that are in direct contrast to their day to day lives, in new and interesting locations.

In 1997 Sternberg succinctly stated that, "tourism primarily sells a 'staged' experience … tourism's central productive activity [is] the creation of the touristic experience" (Sternberg, 1997, p. 952). On the other hand, Richards (2001) suggested that it was the

tourist destinations themselves that were being positioned as experiences due to tourists seeking to consume experiences at destinations. Tourism has been at the forefront of staging experience; but interestingly, when looking at the tourism setting, essentially everything that a tourist encounters at any particular destination is said to be an experience, be it perceptual or behavioural, emotional or cognitive, implied or expressed (Oh, Fiore, & Jeoung, 2007). The tourists' overall experience is made up of a number of small encounters, for example, with taxi drivers, waiters and hoteliers, and other related elements such as the experiencing of local attractions, theatres, museums, beaches and theme parks (Zouni & Kouremenos, 2008). Hospitality has realised the part they play in the tourists' overall experience; thus the industry has seen that more and more hotels over the years have shifted from delivering services to their guest to creating experiences for guests (Alcántara-Alcover et al., 2013; Ariffin & Maghzi, 2012; Pizam, 1993; Wang, Chen, & Chen, 2012).

2.4.6 Hospitality and experience

In hospitality, a priority is the guest experience, creating the perception of hospitableness and hosting. In the modern sense of hospitality, Hepple, Kipps and Thomson (1990) identified four characteristics of hospitality. The first characteristic being that it is an act by a host that is bestowed upon to a guest who is presently away from their home; the second characteristic is that the transmission of hospitality is interactive; the third characteristic is that it comprises a blend of both intangible and tangible factors; and the fourth characteristic of hospitality is that the host provides for the guests' security and their psychological and physiological comfort (Ariffin & Maghzi, 2012).

Hospitality exists within the lived experience; it is an experience that is lived by the people who partake in it – the 'host' and the 'guest' – and it has been described as a gift that is given and shared (O'Gorman, 2007). The truest gift of hospitality is the act of

kindness the guest experiences of being turned from a stranger to a friend for a short space of time (O'Gorman, 2007). The success of a hospitality experience is thus based on the connection of the host and guest and the willingness of the guest to engage in the proposal of the hotel experience offered by the hotel company (Alcántara-Alcover et al., 2013, Walls et al., 2011). Without a doubt, both staff and guests have roles to play in service encounters and service experiences (Carù & Cova, 2006; Lugosi, 2008; McGrath & Otnes, 1995; Price et al., 1995).

According to Johnston (1999), Gilmore and Pine (2002) and Tosti (2009), luxury hotels may be viewed as part of the 'experience economy'. The dimensions of guest experiences within the context of a luxury hotel include the human interaction with fellow guests and employees, the physical environment, and the personal characteristics of guests (Ariffin, Nameghi, & Zakaria, 2013; Brien et al., 2012; Walls et al., 2011). Walls (2013) took this further by suggesting that the hotel experience should include a detailed strategy that manages the guests' entire journey from the pre-experience expectations right through to the post-experience assessments of the experience. Furthermore, Gilmore and Pine (2002) suggested that the orchestration and innovative experience design will increasingly become a critical core capability of successful hotel management. Williams (2006) observed that in theatre and hospitality, there is a sense of staging the environment and a need to stage-manage the experiences. In both restaurants and hotels, preparing the front of house as a stage needs to be meticulous, will take time, but is essential to the experience (Williams, 2006). An example of this happening in hospitality is Starwood Hotels and Resorts using 'experience engineers' whose primary objective is to change the service culture in order to increase customer loyalty and satisfaction by delivering customer experience (Walls, 2013). Starwood also used staging in the form of Second Life software to gain valuable feedback from their

guests about new hotels they were proposing to build in order to deliver an improved experience for the guest (Penfold, 2009).

Hemmington (2007) suggested that hospitality businesses should aspire to design their guest experience like good restaurants do, by introducing lots of little surprises, and in order to do so, businesses need to look towards their staff to use their creativity and ideas to excite and stimulate their guests over the time of their experience. He adds to this by suggesting that the delivery of hospitality products very much depends on the retention of the customers' perspective: "customers do not buy service delivery, they buy experiences; they do not buy service quality, they buy memories; they do not buy food and drink, they buy meal experiences" (Hemmington, 2007, p. 749).

Knutson, Beck, Kim and Cha (2010) suggest that hospitality businesses are grappling with the multifaceted demands that are connected to staging experiential buying environments, and if they are to turn their first-time guest into a loyal guest, then management will need to take on board that while they are staging an experience for their guests they can't forget to deliver valve. Therefore, in order for the hospitality industry to be successful, it is crucial for them to be able to create unforgettable experiences (Yuan & Wu, 2008). Cetin and Dincer (2014) took this idea further by explaining that luxury hotels that have several hundred rooms might be advised to concentrate on the physical environment experiences, whereas smaller boutique hotels may want to focus on the social interaction experiences that takes place in their establishments.

2.4.7 Hotels as an experience

Knutson and Beck (2004) suggest that a guest's experience comprises the memorable encounters that happen to them throughout the journey they have with an organisation, and in the case of a hotel, this includes everything from booking the reservation via various channels through to the actual stay until billing. Hotels should therefore focus

on managing the guest journey by incorporating it into their positioning strategy – the journey is important, as it moves the guest from the expectations they had before the experience right through to the assessments they make after the experience is over (Knutson & Beck, 2004). In order to be able to take command of this journey, it has been suggested that businesses will have to recognise two sets of clues: one being the actual functions of the services and goods, and the other being the emotions, which stem from people or things in the environment, for example, the tangible elements that are perceived by the users (Berry et al., 2002).

Drewer (2005) took this idea further and suggested that "rather than simply viewing the hotel as accommodation, clients are looking at the hotel to provide an experience itself" (p. 6). This notion was researched further by McIntosh and Siggs (2005), who focused on specialised accommodation, as they felt that there had been a lack of attention paid to the experiential nature of accommodation, especially in specialist accommodation. Their literature review identifies that the demand for specialised accommodation establishments might be related to experiences of luxury uniqueness, host-guest interaction, personal touches, history and comfort, that these establishments can provide (McIntosh & Siggs, 2005).

What can be said about the hospitality industry is that it has an intangible aspect to it and requires personnel to deliver the hospitality product. "Unlike most service industries, it is the *manner* in which the hospitality employee provides the service – as opposed to the service itself – which is critical to the customer's overall enjoyment of the product or "experience" being purchased" (Dawson, Abbott, & Shoemaker, 2011, p. 290). The emotions guests experience at a hotel can be triggered by an encounter with another guest or an employee that may be negative or positive (Barsky & Nash, 2002). Other encounters such as a disorganised check-in or check-out, a poorly-attired member of staff, or a lack of cleanliness may make guests feel unhappy about their stay (Barsky

& Nash, 2002). So when hospitality organisations are designing customer experiences in order to effectively deliver hospitality products and services they need to focus on the perspectives of the customers to have a successful hotel experience (Bharwani & Jauhari, 2013).

2.4.8   Co-creating experiences

As previously discussed, it is up to the organisation to enhance the guest experience by managing it, and it is up to customers as to how much they are able and willing to participate in the experience (Walls et al., 2011). Although an organisation cannot guarantee that the customer will have a positive experience, organisations can create the circumstances and the environment in which customers can have such an experience (Mossberg, 2007; Walls, 2013). This is the basis of co-creation, which has been described as an interaction between the customer and provider to create value, or simply as a dialogue between customer and supplier (Shaw & Ivens, 2002).

To genuinely get an understanding of the views of the customer, organisations have to begin with a direct understanding of the customer's world, and this includes the exact services they co-construct, what they exactly co-construct, and how they view that co-construction process (Andersson, 2007). Another way to look at this is as co-construction or co-creation: a tourist and a tourism service provider assembles resources that, together with their own skills and time, will provide a consumption set including time, skills, goods and services for an experience (Andersson, 2007).

It could be said that for an experience to be produced for a customer, certain elements have to be put into place: these elements are humans and products (Schembri, 2006). To attempt to connect with customers, business entities choreograph or create experiences via human interaction dimensions (e.g. the appearance, professional behaviour, proactive service and attitude of the staff, and the demeanour, behaviour, appearance and socialisation of the guest) and/or physical environment dimensions (e.g. the

multisensory, function, symbols, ambience, space, signs, and artefacts) (Walls et al., 2011). The multidimensional impression of a customer's experience is based on the customer's willingness to be influenced by human and/or physical interaction dimensions, and is formed by the customer's encounters with products, services and businesses (Walls et al., 2011).

In order to create value, hospitality businesses need to engage the guest through their hotel experiences. For example, both the intangible characteristics of the hotel industry (e.g. if the hotel has a fantastic view, this should be mentioned at check-in, and hoteliers should endeavour to upgrade guests to a room that has that fantastic view whenever it is possible), and the tangible characteristics (e.g. the hotel rooms need to be well maintained, in pristine condition and thoroughly cleaned at all times) both have an important role to play in enhancing the overall hotel experience the guest has (Khoo-Lattimore & Ekiz, 2014).

In service industries such as the hospitality industry, product quality has been replaced by service quality and this is seen as strategy for hospitality to differentiate themselves and to be able to add value to the experience for their guests (Knutson et al., 2010). Service quality can been seen as good service or personalised service, an example of this would be a hotel knowing its guests' names or personal information, which in turn makes the guests feel special and that the hotel staff are treating them as important guests (Ariffin & Maghzi, 2012). Personalising the service can be facilitated through the interaction between the customers and frontline employees, as the host-guest relationship is a core activity in the guest experience (Lashley, 2008; OnsØyen et al., 2009). In the eyes of the guests, the employees in a service organisation are the service and the brand (Zeithaml et al., 2006). Creating a memorable experience relies on being able to engage the customer by involving them on a sensory level, cognitively,

emotionally, relationally and behaviourally, instead of being on a functional level (Lashley, 2008; Oh et al., 2007; Schmitt, 1999).

It could be said that experience is a form of co-creation, as the customer has an acquisition of knowledge through interaction with different elements created by a service provider (Gupta & Vajic, 1999). Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2002) stated that there was an increase in momentum towards a market environment where companies and customers were co-creating experiences, and that companies would have to embrace the fact that customers were becoming partners in the co-creation of their own experience (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2002). Scott et al. (2009) took this further by suggesting experience has moved from being something intrinsic to the visitor, to being a managerial approach were it is designed and co-created by the supplier and visitor.

2.4.9 Conclusion

Experiences in various forms have been researched in a variety of ways for over 60 years, and have tended to be lumped in with the service sector. Yet in some sectors, consumption has shifted from service to experience. Experiences are of interest and importance to customers and organisations alike, but experience is difficult to define because of the multitude of definitions already in existence. Experiences are said to be something unique, memorable and sustainable over time, and what can be seen about customer experiences are the two dimensions in which they need to be active: one being the participation of the customer, and the second being the relationship or connection that unites the customer with the performance or event. It has been suggested that experience arises from co-creation in which the customer has a more active role in the experience. The next section explores the concept of co-creation.

2.5 Co-creation

2.5.1 Introduction

The final section of this literature review examines the topic of co-creation. Co-creation has generated interest since its inception, which is believed to have coincided with the introduction and mass use of the Internet. To provide a clear understanding of this topic, the following section will review the various views authors hold on the definition of co-creation, the history of co-creation, who is involved in co-creation, the importance of co-creation, why it is a worthy topic for further research, and how it is linked to experience.

2.5.2 Definitions of co-creation

First, it is important to explore the meaning of co-creation. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004a) believe that co-creation highlights the interaction between the customer and company as the point of creating value, and argue that customer experiences that are positive are often dependent on the customer's active participation in the creative process. With this in mind, it could be argued that co-creation is indeed a process whereby organisations gain competencies and knowledge of specific customers so that they can use this information to their advantage to provide an 'experience' to those specific customers (Campbell, 2003).

Another definition for co-creation can be found in service management literature; co-creation is defined as customisation of a service or of a product achieved with a large amount of collaboration and participation from the customer for the purpose of innovation (Chathoth, Altinay, Harrington, Okumus, & Chan, 2013; Kristensson, Matthing & Johansson, 2008).

Co-creation has been defined in different contexts but is still linked to the customer's perception of value. 'The customer is always the co-producer of value' was a phrase coined in an article by Vargo and Lusch in 2004, but almost as soon as it was published,

the authors doubted their own ideas and changed the phrase to 'The customer is always a co-creator of value' rather than a co-producer of value (Lusch & Vargo, 2006; Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

The term co-production indicates the participation of the customer in the creation of value proposed by an organisation, an example of this being co-design, customer assembly and self-service (Lusch & Vargo, 2006; Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

Going back to the term co-creation of value, it is the intention that this element essentially captures the nature of value creation: this always involves the recipient's participation (through the integration and use of other resources) in some way (Lusch & Vargo, 2006; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Co-creation has been used by researchers to describe how customers interact and engage in dialogue with an organisation when designing a product, its production, its delivery and finally its consumption (Chathoth et al., 2013; Payne, Storbacka, Frow & Knox, 2009). Finally, co-creation has also been described as a "consumer experience, of a particular kind, that is, the activity participated in and interactive experience" (Campos, Mendes, Oom deValle & Scott, 2015, p. 25)

2.5.3 History of co-creation

The appearance of co-creation has been largely credited to the Internet and the vast amount of information it offered customers (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000, 2002).

This was due to expansion in the corporate pursuit of efficiency that had started in 1995 (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000, 2002). Customers could now more readily engage in active and explicit dialogues with the manufacturers of services and products, and the Internet allowed access to activities that were either affecting or directly involving the company-customer relationship (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000, 2002).

2.5.4 Lack of research conducted on co-creation

Researchers have stated many reasons why co-creation should be researched, and reasons why it has not been researched. In 2006, Woodruff and Flint suggested that to date relatively little was known about co-creation, especially how customers engaged or were engaged. In 2008, Payne, Storbacka and Frow concurred, concluding their review on the subject by arguing that there are ample examples of businesses that have adopted co-creation; unfortunately they did not give clear directions on how to achieve co-creation (Payne et al., 2008). Zhang and Chen (2008) echoed these findings, believing that "despite its importance, research on co-creation with customers is still in an early stage" (p. 242).

Co-creation generally occurs between *the customer* and *the provider* (Finsterwalder & Tuzovic, 2010), and according to Finsterwalder and Tuzovic (2010), researchers have also neglected to research co-creation processes, which involves a wider circle of people than just the customer and provider. Researchers have tended to focus on the effect of the service encounter on one customer's perception and experience while being among other customers, and not taken into account the group dynamics in the co-creation process (Finsterwalder & Tuzovic, 2010). Other research on co-creation has been conducted mainly in virtual environments (e.g. Füller & Matzler, 2007; Nambisan & Baron, 2009) or in the context of mass-customisation toolkits in order to help to co-create products (e.g. Fuchs & Schreier, 2011; Kohler, Matzler, & Füller, 2009). Campos et al. (2015) suggested that more research needs to be conducted to examine the extent to which co-creation experiences involve interaction and active participation, and to what extent co-creation affects psychological processes (cognitive, affective or perceptual). Research in co-creation and hospitality will be discussed in Section 2.5.8.

2.5.5   The importance of co-creation

Value is seen as the output of co-creation for customers, and Bitner (1992) suggested that how customers experience their activities was important to their perception of value. Kambil, Friesen and Sundaram (1999) took this suggestion further by explaining that the measurement of co-creation is how much value has been created for both the customer and the producer. In order to produce this value, "value is now centred in the experiences of consumers" (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a, p. 137).

There is significant interest in the potential of 'co-creation' and 'co-production', either in a community environment or individually, to enhance business and innovation performance (Rowley, Kupiec-Teahan, & Leeming, 2007), and part of this innovation should be to look at shifting the emphasis away from service and products onto an experience environment. This environment would enable individual customers to create their own unique and personalised experience. This environment would need to be supported by networks of customer communities and for individual customers to co-create unique value to them (Gibbert, Leibold, & Probst, 2002; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2003). Indeed, there is a strong belief that co-creation is so important that through the personal interaction with companies, customers should be adding specific value to their own experiences (Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009). Due to revised perspectives there is now a greater emphasis on not only acknowledging customer co-creation but harnessing it (Lusch & Vargo, 2006; Morgan, 2010; Prahalad & Ramawany, 2003, 2004). What is interesting to note is that instead of being focused on the outcome of co-creation, managers are being encouraged to focus on analysing the actual process (Grissemann & Stokburger-Sauer, 2012; Richards & Marques, 2012).

In 2000, Prahalad and Ramaswamy had raised the awareness of companies that their customers were now an involved partner when creating value and that it was important for them to take on board how to harness customer competences. An important aspect

would be how to engage customers into co-creating their own personal experience (Rowley et al., 2007). Sandström, Edvardsson, Kristensson and Magnusson (2008) suggested "in services where the service encounter is critical to how the customer experiences the service offering, the service employee has the potential to influence the value creating experience by interacting with the customer" (p. 112). But in order for organisations to co-create unique customer experiences, they must empower their employee experience 'inside' the actual organisation so employees can initiate and accept problem resolutions that will ultimately enable them to approach customers and create an experience with them (Ramaswamy, 2009).

2.5.6 Relationships in co-creation

What or who participates in the co-creation of value needs to be identified and examined. When creating and competing for value, customers play a very active role, and this can only be possible when the market has an opportunity for the customers to act out this role (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000). As previously discussed, Ramaswamy (2009) highlighted that without organisational competences which enable the 'customer to employee' experience to align with the 'employee to customer' experience, co-creating value with customers could be difficult to achieve. But by co-creating an employee's experience that is empowered 'inside' their organisation, could enable that organisation to co-create a customer's experience that is unique (Ramaswamy, 2009). To ensure employees are able to interact with customers successfully, organisations need to engage employees successfully in the co-creating customer value process (Ramaswamy, 2009). Scott et al. (2009) took this point further by suggesting the interaction between the producer and customer is more important than the product itself, and that there should be an emphasis on creating an experience in which the customer participates more activity rather than being a mere submissive observer, and that customer-staff interaction is becoming more and more important. Santos-vijande,

Álvarez and Rodríguez (2012) echoed this, stating that frontline staff are critical to the facilitation of co-creation activities. This is due to the amount of interaction they have with the customer.

There is the belief that the co-creation process also makes demands on both customers and managers in order for them to make adjustments that may be necessary. An example of this being that both the customer and manager recognise that their interaction and the point of interaction where the value creation happens should be built on critical building blocks, which are having good dialogue, access to information and a clear indication of whether there are any risks involved, and being transparent throughout the process (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004b).

The Nordic school of thought believes that the meaning of service logic is that firms facilitate processes that enable customers' value creation to happen, because, owing to the involvement of customers in these interactive processes, customers and firms are the co-producers of the service and the co-creators of value (Grönroos, 2006). In essence, value is co-created through the joint efforts of organisations, customers, employees and any other individuals connected to giving any exchange, but ultimately is always determined by the recipient, that is, the customer (Vargo, Maglio, & Akaka, 2008).

Relationships and their influence on co-creation were examined by Den Dekker (2006) in his thesis *Guest Employee Interaction in the Hospitality Experience*. He revealed that when people were given the opportunity to meet within a tourism experience network and have an interaction that is positive, it is the start of meaningful co-creation on an interpersonal level. He suggested that being sensitive to the needs, wishes and desires of individual guests and being empowered to act alike were great steps towards creating memorable tourism experiences (Den Dekker, 2006). Campos et al. (2015) also suggested that more empirical investigation needed to take place during the on-site experience where learning, strong emotions and memories that are memorable emerged.

Binkhorst and Den Dekker (2009) took Den Dekker's (2006) ideas further by suggesting that when customers are co-creating value in their tourism experience, technology will have a large part to play and will empower customers. Binkhorst and Den Dekker (2009) state that exploring co-creation experiences in leisure and tourism was only at the beginning phase and a lot more research was required. They note that only a few examples of empirical research conducted on the topic of co-creation involving tourists could be found and documented for their study, and believed that co-creation should be of great interest to tourism because if the concept of co-creation were applied it would add value to the visitor and the destination, as well as contributing to the authenticity and uniqueness of that destination (Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009).

When commenting on co-creating the future, Ramaswamy (2010) states that leaders must recognise the importance of the individual; the individual could be the employee, the customer or any other stakeholder, and it is their interactions and their experiences that will give an organisation a new position and basis of value creation. And in the case of tourism, encounters between tourists and employees are vital for the co-creation of experiential attributes, these attributes being what tourists want from their experience (Sørensen & Jensen, 2015).

2.5.7   Co-creation and experience

It could be argued that personalisation is the end result of customers becoming co-creators of their own experience, but for this personalisation to be produced, companies must be able to create the opportunities for their customers in which they can decide how much involvement they want, and to be able to experiment while creating an experience with those companies (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000). Personalisation takes more than providing a customer with a company's à la carte menu. Co-creating the experience requires the company to look at the content of the experience and develop the individualised interactions within it (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2003). From

the customers' perspective, personalisation reflects on how those customers choose to interact within the experience environment by having active dialogue and co-construct their own personal experience (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2003).

Central to the experience environment is the individual customer and it is an event within this environment that triggers a co-creation experience. An event needs the context of time and space, and the individual customer's involvement will ultimately influence the experience. The personalisation that is derived from the co-creation of an experience is the value that the individual customer gives to it (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2003).

Merging the roles of the company and the customer eventually results in a unique co-creation experience or an 'experience of one person'. According to Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004a, 2004b), companies will gain a new source of competitive advantage if they enable individual customers to have high-quality interactions while co-creating their own unique experience.

In the late 1990s, the phrase 'first-generation experiences' was coined by Pine and Gilmore (1999). There were five simple principles involved in first-generation experiences: (1) a theme – there is a concept, a history and a storyline; (2) harmony – impressions are synchronic with each other; (3) the elimination of negative cues, making sure the environment is beautifully kept; (4) memorabilia – the souvenirs guests take home; and (5) engagement of all five senses – sight, touch, smell, taste and sound (Boswijk, Thijssen, & Peelen, 2006). Boswijk et al. (2006) then argued that the 'next practice' or 'second-generation' experience could be seen as the future of innovation and as a basis for value. The whole concept of the 'second-generation' experience is based on one principle – *naturalness* - to make an authentic and natural impression to give people the feeling that they are welcome (Boswijk et al., 2006).

When creating customer experiences it is more about the relationships the customers have and less about the products. It focuses on involving 'value in use' instead of having more product (Payne et al., 2008). A co-creation framework was created in 2008 by Payne et al. to conduct fieldwork with companies, and one of their recommendations was that it was important to further amplify the mapping of the encounters that the suppliers and customers have in order to identify co-creation opportunities. The reason for this recommendation was threefold: firstly, the companies that they conducted fieldwork on found tracking supplier and customer encounters a difficult activity, so they encouraged them to continue with this practice; secondly, for companies who were planning their value co-creation agenda, mapping their encounters provided them information that would benefit their agenda (Payne et al., 2008); and finally, it provides a method that can identify and organise "micro-specialised competences into complex services that are demanded in the marketplace" (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, p. 53). In co-creation, no longer can companies describe their customers as merely consumers of products, but as partners in creating their experiences that are personalised and add pleasure and value to their lives (Chathoth et al., 2013). Neuhofer, Buhalis and Ladkin (2013) agrees that the guest experience should no longer be looked upon as static or designed passively by the hotel provider, but rather should be seen as being dynamic, personal and proactively co-created by both the staff and guest at a specific service encounter in real time.

2.5.8 Co-creation and hospitality

As previously stated in Chapter 1, Shaw et al. (2011) made a clear contribution to the co-creation literature within the hospitality context, suggesting that hotels need to apply co-creation strategies with guests which would enable them to innovate new products and services, but they restricted their research to co-creation and innovation in hotel IT systems. The Lugano Dante hotel in Switzerland is using one such strategy in the form

of a digital customer relationship management tool (Neuhofer et al., 2013). This tool uses a platform to enable the hotel to collect information about their guests and then co-create personalised experiences for them during their stay (Neuhofer et al., 2013). Although companies using this form of information and communication technologies are rare, there are other organisations using Web 2.0 applications such as videos, blogs, fora, wiki, podcast, chat rooms, YouTube, Twitter and Facebook to encourage communication and social interaction, and to co-create experiences with their customers (Dwivedi, Yadar & Venkatesh, 2012; Hays, Page & Buhalis, 2012).

Essentially, the hospitality industry is a people-orientated business – it needs people to serve people – and it is very difficult to create satisfaction and revisit intention in every episode that takes place. Hospitality has an inseparability characteristic (guests and staff must be present in the same place at the same time), and it is this simultaneous production and inseparability of service that can increase the visibility of failures to the guest (Colgate & Norris, 2001). As previously discussed, Dawson et al. (2011) suggested the 'manner' in which the service is provided by the hospitality employee to the customer is critical because the overall enjoyment of the customer's 'experience' being purchased can be easily influenced by the employee's manner. Bharwani and Jauhari (2013) suggested that when developing and training hospitality professionals it was important that they understand the different degrees of social behaviour and be capable of catering to the requirements and wants a guest may have.

Within a hotel context, organisations can collaborate with customers in co-creation in two ways (Chathoth et al., 2013). The value-creation process is the first way "and leads to value-in-use" (Kristensson et al., 2008, p. 476). An example of this being the futuristic style of rooms in the Qbis Design Hotels which offers its guests the opportunity to change the colour of their room throughout their stay to match their mood (Chathoth et al., 2013). The second way "shares inventiveness, co-design, or

shares production" (Lusch, Vargo, & O'Brien, 2007, p. 7). As previously discussed in Section 2.4.6, Starwood Hotels used Second Life to launch a virtual Aloft hotel, and guests could 'visit' the hotel in its virtual setting and co-create its design (Chathoth et al., 2013). Encouraging customers to co-create services and products within Second Life has enabled Starwood to collect and collate data that they use on their real life Aloft hotels, thereby moving towards experience co-creation (Chathoth et al., 2013). In Copenhagen, a small retro boutique hotel experimented on a new way to allocate rooms, by waiting until the guest booked in and involved them in the allocation of their own room (Sørensen & Jensen, 2015). Other hotels are using other processes of co-creation in the forms of multisensory dining experiences combining food, sound and vision to stimulate all the senses. By using ongoing feedback from guests, and using the guests' individual history regarding their favourite drink, newspaper or interests, temperature of the room and comfort of their bed (Neuhofer et al., 2013), and by personalising the hotels services accordingly, organisations will be finally aware of the interactions happening during the guest's stay (Chathoth et al., 2013).

2.5.9   Conclusion

Co-creation results from an interaction between the customer and provider in order to create value. Co-creation can involve customers, managers, employees, stockholders, organisations and government agencies. Co-creation made its appearance because of the introduction of the Internet and the massive amount of information that customers can access. The impact of co-creation has seen organisations rethink their focus on services and products and look towards the experience environment in order to engage their customers in an experience and not just the services and products, and by shifting their focus in this way, many organisations have gained competitive advantage and increased their value.

To conclude, the future belongs to those organisations who can successfully co-create unique experiences with their customers (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a), and in order to gain competitive advantage, frontline employees should be used for their knowledge and skills to help co-create customer experiences (Bharwani & Jauhari, 2013). Executives must learn how to institute the principles and practices of co-creation throughout their organisation (Ramaswamy, 2009).

2.6   Chapter conclusion and a gap in the knowledge

This literature review has explored luxury, experience and co-creation as individual concepts in the process of creating the luxury hotel and lodge experience. Luxury accommodation is not new, but luxury as a concept has gained renewed interest because of its changing nature and fluidity in its definition. Identifying key components or characteristics of luxury has assisted in defining the term, yet overuse of the word in the hospitality industry, changing consumer demands, consumers moving from consumption of goods to the consumption of experiences, and operators introducing self-styled luxury products has caused confusion in the market place as to what a luxury hotel is, and what consumers expect from a luxury hotel.

Tourism and hospitality experiences are not new concepts, but trying to determine the what, where and how of an experience is a new concept. It has been argued that it is not the organisation that gives the consumer an experience, but that organisations can only create the circumstances and the environment in which the consumer can have the experience (Carlson, 1997; Mossberg, 2003, 2007; Schulze, 1992). It is the customer who adds that final element to the production sequence to enable the resources to be put together that produce the consumer experience (Andersson, 2007). The experiences that customers encounter happen inside of them; are internalised, and the output (customer experience) is really dependant on how customers (based on the specific situation or

their state of mind) respond to the staged encounter (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Mossberg, 2007; Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Wang, 2002).

Traditionally, routine daily hospitality and tourism experiences such as sleeping, eating and taking part in activities have been looked upon as the support to the extraordinary experiences that tourists experience (McCabe, 2002). There has been little empirical research conducted to identify the structural dimensions of customer experience from the perspective of the customer in a luxury hotel setting (Knutson et al., 2009).

As previously discussed, Binkhorst and Den Dekker (2009) stated that studies exploring co-creation experiences in leisure and tourism are only at the beginning phase, and that a lot more research is required. If further research is conducted on this process it will provide managers with important implications regarding the allocation of their limited resources that would then enable them to create a more positive tourism and hospitality experience in luxury hotels (Walls et al., 2011). But, as previously stated in Chapter 1, there are still few empirical studies that have examined customers' co-creation activities and their consequences for organisations within the travel and service sector (e.g. Auh et al., 2007; Carbonell et al., 2009; Li & Petrick, 2008; Prebensen et al., 2013; Shaw et al., 2011), and there is a lack of empirical research on guest experiences in the hospitality field.

Previous luxury hotel experience studies that were reviewed for this chapter used interviews as the method of collecting data on the guest experience, but this research was usually conducted after the experience, usually involved interviewing only one set of participants (the guests or employees or managers), and was undertaken on a voluntary self-selecting sample basis, for example, when participants respond to advertising for participants (Ariffin & Maghzi, 2012; Cetin & Walls, 2015; Eggert & Ulaga, 2002; Liu, Leach, & Bernhardt, 2005; Sanchez, Callarisa, Rodriguez, & Moliner, 2006; Walls et al., 2011). Other research that has been conducted on the luxury hotel

experience has either been undertaken conceptually (Bharwani & Jauhari, 2013; Torres & Kline, 2006) or has used quantitative methods to collate the data after the experience is over, that is, retrospectively (Alcántara-Alcover et al., 2013; Khoo-Lattimore & Ekiz, 2014; Nasution & Mavondo, 2008; Torres et al., 2014).

This review has demonstrated that, individually, the concepts of luxury, experience and co-creation have an important part to play in the creation of the luxury hotel and lodge experience, but until now no one has identified how these concepts are interlinked as shown in Figure 1. There has been no holistic overview of this process: it is like having a jigsaw puzzle with no guiding picture to help to complete it.
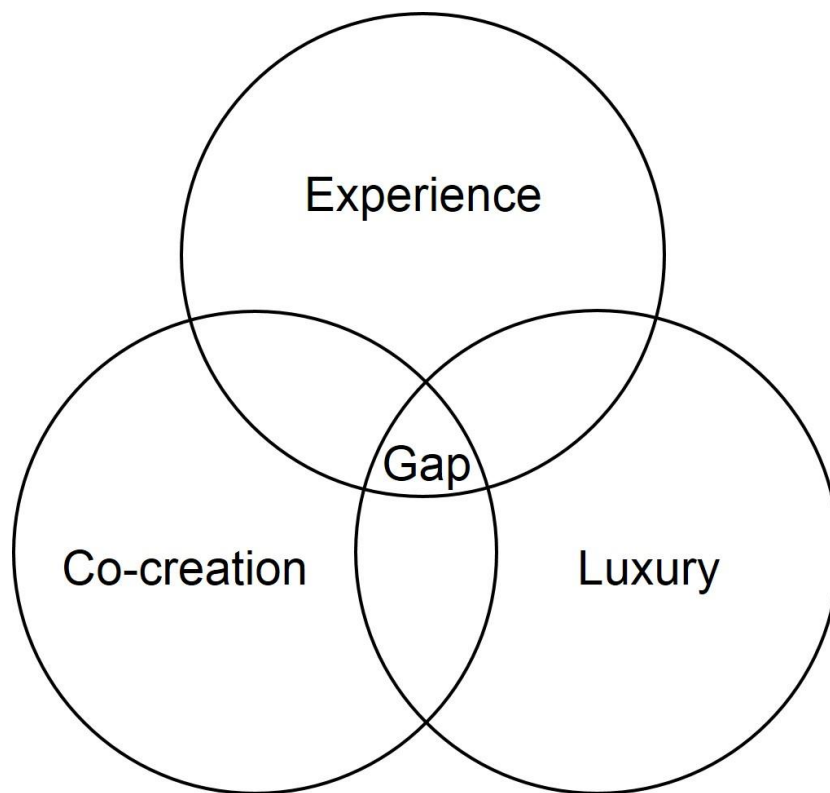
Figure 1: The gap in literature that needed to be researched

This gap as shown in Figure 1 needs to be filled by researching this process from three different perspectives (managers, employees and guests) that are involved while the experience is happening, utilising all three concepts – luxury, experience and co-creation. The purpose of this thesis is to understand the three difference perspectives

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(those of managers, employees and guests) on what the luxury hotel and lodge experience is and how it is created, in order to fill the gap in knowledge identified in this literature review. The gap is that, until now, no one has identified how luxury, experience and co-creation are interlinked from the perspectives of managers, employees and guests. The following chapter will explain the research process that was undertaken to address this gap.

Chapter 3: Methodology and methods

3.1 Introduction

This study seeks to examine what is the luxury hotel and lodge experience and how it is created. This chapter will discuss the choice of the research methodology and methods that were adopted for this study, and commences with an overview of philosophical positions of a researcher, and an explanation of the philosophical position of this researcher. The chapter will then discuss the choice of research methodology and the methods chosen to address the research question (Crotty, 1998; Guba, 1990; Slevitch, 2011).

3.2 Research philosophy

Deciding which research philosophy to adopt for this study was important as it underpins the research strategy. As Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2008) explain, there are three main reasons why the right research philosophy is so important: (1) it helps researchers to clarify the research design; (2) it helps them to evaluate different research methods; and (3) it then enables them to identify the research methods that they will use. It is essential for researchers to understand the basics of the various research philosophies that can be employed, as these philosophies will determine the way they will construct knowledge in their research project (Jennings, 2010).

There are two main research philosophies: positivism, and phenomenology or interpretivism. Positivism adopts an objective view of reality, often using data from experiments and surveys, whereas interpretivism adopts a more subjective approach using methods that examine people, their perspectives and their social behaviour (Gill & Johnson, 2010). The positivist philosophy encourages researchers to take the stance of a natural scientist, staying distant from the object they are studying, focusing on what are seen as facts and formula, and often using quantitative measurements through questionnaires and experiments to collect quantifiable data for hypothesis testing

(Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Lowe, 1999; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007). An interpretivist philosophy encourages the researcher to seek insights into phenomena by referring to the participants in the phenomena, who provide a starting point and through whom the researcher attempts to understand and interpret what is occurring and why (Easterby-Smith et al., 1999; Saunders et al., 2007).

3.3   An interpretivist paradigm

A paradigm reflects a basic set of philosophical assumptions or beliefs about the nature of the world or a worldview, and provides principles and guidelines concerning the way in which research will be conducted (Ticehurst & Veal, 2000). Paradigms can be characterised through their ontology (what is reality?), epistemology (how do you know something?) and methodology (how do I go about finding out?) (Guba, 1990). These elements create a holistic view of how the researcher views knowledge, how they see themselves in relation to this knowledge and the methodological strategies they use to discover it (Guba, 1990).

This research is focused on managers', employees' and guests' perceptions of the luxury hotel and lodge experience. It seeks to explore and understand the multifaceted views of the people who are involved in the luxury hotel and lodge experience, and to interpret the meanings that are given to it by the participants themselves. Therefore, the interpretivist paradigm was selected for this study, as the interpretivist paradigm has the intention of understanding "the world of human experience" (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p. 36) and provides a deep insight into "the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it" (Schwandt, 1994, p. 118).

In a broad sense, interpretivism is the study of human intentions and meanings, and in a narrower sense, it is the attempt to interpret human behaviour in terms of the meanings that are assigned to it by the participants themselves (Gerring, 2007). Interpretivism is a term that signifies an alternative to the positivist paradigm, which is grounded in the

physical sciences (Bryman, 2008; Jennings, 2010). The interpretivist paradigm, also known as the constructivist paradigm, is based on the work of Max Weber. Weber introduced the term 'verstehen', or empathetic understanding, and suggested that verstehen could be achieved by systematic participation and being able to adequately grasp the emotional context in which action takes place (Weber, 1978). According to Blumer (1962), for researchers to achieve verstehen, they are obliged to enter the social setting and become one of the social actors acting in that social setting.

The interpretivist paradigm assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjective epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understandings) and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The interpretivist paradigm asserts that there are multiple realities to explain a phenomenon, that the research process is subjective, that a qualitative methodology should be used and that the empirical material is collected from an insider's perspective in a real-world or natural setting (Jennings, 2010). The enquiry process of the interpretivist framework supports the ontological perspective of relativism, the belief in the existence of multiple realities and that these realities are constructed and can be altered by the knower (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Reality is something that is specifically and locally constructed and not just something that is out there. Realities are not less or more true, they are simply less or more informed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Our knowledge of reality is obtained only through social constructions such as shared meanings, language, consciousness, tools, documents and other artefacts (Klein & Myers, 1999). Because interpretivist research is best executed by taking into account multiple realities and collating multiple sources of data, this approach is the best fit for this research, as the research question is best answered by gathering empirical data from various sources – three different sets of participants in various properties throughout New Zealand.

Interpretivist researchers adopt an inductive approach to research and start their study in the empirical world in order to gain an explanation of the phenomenon that is being studied (Jennings, 2010). An interpretivist researcher's ontological assumption is that social reality is specifically and locally constructed by people through their actions and interactions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991). An interpretivist researcher's epistemological assumption is that the findings are literally created as the research proceeds (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Taking the position as an interpretivist researcher will enable this study to explore all of the managers', employees' and guests' perceptions and perspectives of the luxury hotel and lodge experience.

It is the interpretivist researcher's quest to understand behaviour from the participants' viewpoint (Gerring, 2007). The interpretivist researcher depends upon these participant views of the situation to explain the experience as they live it (Creswell, 2003). Creswell (2003) also suggests that interpretivist researchers have a reliance on their own background and their experience that impacts on the research. The researcher for this study spent 10 years working in the luxury hotel sector, and has on various occasions stayed in luxury hotels and lodges in a variety of countries over the past 20 years.

Interpretivist research accepts that reality is socially constructed and the researcher becomes the channel through which this reality is revealed (Cavana, Delahaye, & Sekaran, 2001; Walsham, 1995a, 1995b). Gaining knowledge through the use of an interpretivist paradigm and qualitative case studies enabled this study to understand participants' perceptions regarding what the luxury hotel and lodge experience is and how it is created.

The interpretivist paradigm is not so much a school of thought as an attitude about knowledge, as knowledge is seen, not as a statement of what is ultimately real, but as the best understanding we have been able to produce so far (Laverty, 2003). Knowledge

is socially constructed, so constructivists (interpretive) believe in contextual and experiential accounts, and case study research assists the readers in the construction of knowledge (Stake, 2003). This research takes into account three different perspectives of the luxury hotel and lodge experience as three different realities, each of which is subjective.

3.3.1 Choice of methodology – Interpretive qualitative case study

The interpretive qualitative case study as a methodology is presented as the appropriate approach to gain varying perspectives on the luxury hotel and lodge experience consistent with the research question.

3.3.2 Qualitative

Pullman, McGuire and Cleveland (2005) described qualitative information as the neglected stepchild of guest surveys because of its 'messiness' and the complexity of interpreting the data, but stated that hospitality researchers find that qualitative data greatly add to an understanding of the guests' experience. The hospitality industry itself frequently asks guests to evaluate their service experience via some form of guest survey (Pullman et al., 2005), but when using this traditional research tool, it is difficult to reach the depth of understanding that is required because guest surveys ask the customer to score their satisfaction in numerical form instead of explaining their satisfaction in words (Kwortnik, 2003).

The aim of qualitative research is to develop an understanding of the context in which behaviours and phenomena take place, and this can be achieved by seeking members of an organisation and studying their day-to-day situation and their interaction with people from a local perspective (Altinay & Paraskevas, 2008; Walsh, 2003). So, for the purpose of this research, a qualitative methodology was used because qualitative research mainly focuses on emotions and experiences – it is probing in nature in order

to encourage participants to introduce concepts of importance from their perspective (Altinay & Paraskevas, 2008).

Qualitative research can play four important roles in helping a researcher create theories that can have immediate and practical implications for hospitality managers (Walsh, 2003). The first role is to gain an understanding of how and why respondents view a particular issue as they do. The second role is that the qualitative researcher can help to interpret quantitative findings. The third role is the powerfulness and richness of the data (as long as the data have been collected and analysed appropriately). The fourth role is to teach the researcher the realities of life within the hospitality industry (Walsh, 2003).

Qualitative research can help hospitality managers learn how customers think and feel, including the reasons why they may find it difficult to express this (Kwortnik, 2003). Qualitative data are usually in a text format (although they can also be in the format of observation notes and images or photographs, which can be converted into text by the researcher), thus providing a richer and more in-depth representation of participants' attitudes, beliefs and experiences (Altinay & Paraskevas, 2008; Patton, 1991).

3.3.3 Interpretive case study

Among hospitality researchers investigating a number of subject areas in the context of hospitality and tourism firms or tourism destinations, the case study has been seen as a popular strategy (Altinay & Paraskevas, 2008). Using a case study approach in research is useful in newer and less well-developed research areas, particularly where the examination of the context and the dynamics of the research situation is important (Darke, Shanks, & Broadbent, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 2010).

So for the purpose of this research, interpretive case studies were used. The interpretive framework is a theoretical approach that encompasses a systematic analysis of socially meaningful action to be able to reach an understanding and interpretation of how people

create and maintain their social worlds (Neuman, 1997). When using an interpretivist approach, the researcher has to respect its theoretical principles and use it to enhance the usefulness of the findings (Thorne, Kirkham, & MacDonald-Eames, 1997). Interpretivism encourages the researcher to be the main data collection tool as it supports the researcher's engagement in the study and enhances the consistency of data collection (Parry, 1997). Through the use of interpretive case studies, the researcher aims to interpret the data collected by developing conceptual categories and challenging or supporting the assumptions made regarding them (Chetty, 2013).

Although Stake (1998) argues that a case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of an object to be studied, others, such as Merriam (1988), do consider it a methodology. A case study is described as an exploration of a 'bounded system' or a case (or collective/multiple cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection that involves multiple sources of information rich in its context (Creswell, 1998, 2007). Case study research offers this study an input of real-world data from which perceptions can be formed and proposals and theory can be tried (Gummesson, 2003). Case study research is also seen as a valuable way to explore an issue in depth within a specific context (Brotherton, 2008). This research explores the perceptions of managers, employees and guests of the luxury hotel and lodge experience, using case studies from New Zealand. New Zealand was chosen as the location for this study because of the opportunities that were presented to the researcher in regard to gaining access to luxury hotels and lodges.

A researcher can produce a 'thick' description of a case or cases in order to emphasise the unique character of the situation (Botterill & Platenkamp, 2012). The purpose of case study research is holistic and systemic, to give a rich and full explanation of a linkage of relationships between a host of events and factors (Gummesson, 2003).

The main strength of case study research is the detail, richness, depth and completeness and within-case variance. If a researcher wants to understand a phenomenon in any degree of thoroughness, they should consider using case studies (Flyvbjerg, 2011).

Having completed an extensive review of literature, this researcher determined there has been a lack of research conducted on how luxury hotel and lodge experiences are created. So being a research area that is less well developed and about experience, using a qualitative interpretive case study approach is relevant for this research.

3.4   Research methods

Methods are the procedures, techniques, sets of tools or strategies that can be used to gather and analyse data relating to the research question (Crotty, 1998; Slevitch, 2011). The choice of a particular research method should be driven by the research question – a study requiring a detailed understanding of a phenomenon is most likely to use qualitative methods (Bazeley, 2004). The greatest strength of qualitative methods is that they can highlight issues and turn up possible explanations – essentially, a search for meaning. Qualitative methods concentrate on the type of evidence (what people tell you and what they do) that enables the researcher to understand the meaning of what is going on (Gillham, 2000).

The current research question is what is the luxury hotel and lodge experience and how is it created? The introduction and literature chapters have indicated that the luxury hotel and lodge experience has so far been under-researched and is a phenomenon that requires further research. Research needed to be conducted in order to collect data on the participants' perceptions of the luxury hotel and lodge experience to answer the research question.

3.4.1   Choice of methods

In order to achieve a deep understanding within case study research, multiple research methods are used, and can include observation, interviewing and analysing documents

(Woodside, 2010). Yin (2003) suggests that to make research as strong as possible, the researcher should gather as many sources of evidence as possible, and proposed that there are six sources of evidence (see Table 1). In this research, the researcher gathered five sources of evidence, and a full description of each of these sources can be found in Table 2.

Table 1: Six sources of evidence (Yin, 2003)

Source/type of evidence
Documentation
Archival records
Physical artefacts
Direct observation
Interviews
Participant observation

Table 2: Five sources of evidence gathered by researcher

Source/type of evidence	Data gathered by the researcher
Documentation	Public records such as annual reports, press briefings (newspaper and online sources), travel guides and brochures were searched for, read and documented. A list of the material that was read and documented can be found in Appendix A.
Archival records	Management information, standards, operating procedure manuals, previous information gathered (any previous surveys and questionnaires that the hotel and lodge has had commissioned), company and traveller websites. Management information in the form of standards of procedures, and surveys previously undertaken were given to the researcher to examine and take notes from. Websites (the company's and TripAdvisor) were read and documented, and notes were taken. A list of the archival records that were read and from which notes were taken can be found in Appendix B.
Physical artefacts	Architecture of the building, artworks, craft and heritage displays, cultural symbols, etc. Photographs were taken throughout all of the properties, and a sample of these can be found in Appendix C.
Direct observation	At each of the properties the researcher spent time observing managers, employees and guests, and took field notes of those observations. The observation checklist and the observation protocol can be found in Appendices D and E.
Interviews	The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with guests, employees and managers at each of the properties.

3.4.2 Interviews

Qualitative interviewing is the key source of data collection for this research. The main purpose of qualitative interviewing is to gain an understanding from the perspective of the participant, and this may include not only what their viewpoint is, but also why they have that viewpoint (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). Qualitative interviews capture the interpretation and meaning of a phenomenon in relation to the worldview of the interviewees (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). In this research, it was proposed that all three perspectives of the luxury hotel and lodge experience (manager, employee and

guest) would be examined in order to obtain a more complete understanding of the overall experience.

Interviewing is regarded as a suitable approach when qualitative data are required and when a more in-depth exploration is necessary (Brotherton, 2008). In-depth interviewing gives the researcher an opportunity to probe deeply to uncover new clues and to secure inclusive accounts that are based on personal experience (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). Rather than adhering to the areas that have been predetermined by the researcher, qualitative interviews are generally unstructured and conducted on a one-to-one basis, and encourage participants to introduce concepts of importance from their own perspective – therefore, the data elicited will offer a more in-depth and richer representation of participants' beliefs, attitudes and experiences (Altinay & Paraskevas, 2008). The objective of prompts and probes (verbal or non-verbal) during the interview is to reveal the often-hidden meanings in a person's experience, from the participant's perspective (Kwortnik, 2003).

With any research, how much structure is put into the interview is predetermined because no research can exist without presupposition, which means that all researchers to a certain extent have some prior knowledge of the topic being researched (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). As previously stated, the researcher spent 10 years working in the sector of luxury hotels, so the researcher did have some presumptions on the topic before the research commenced, but it is felt that this prior knowledge aided the researcher when the interview guide was designed.

Researchers working in an interpretivist vein favour using semi-structured interviews as it enables a more fluid conversation (Botterill & Platenkamp, 2012). Using semi-structured interviews strikes a balance between very structured interviews, which have an explanatory or descriptive approach, and the use of unstructured interviews, which enable a broad investigative approach (Altinay & Paraskevas, 2008; Brotherton, 2008).

The flexibility of the semi-structured interview makes it a productive research tool, but the naturalness of it relies on clear structure, careful development and practice (Gillham, 2000). For the purpose of this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted as they help provide rich and deep data, and offer the researcher a more relaxed and less structured framework in which to interview the participants (Gillham, 2000; Woodside, 2010).

Triangulation is considered a process of using multiple perceptions to gain clarity of meaning, verifying the repeatability of interpretation of an observation. Unfortunately, no interpretation or observation is perfectly repeatable, but triangulation can serve as a way to clarify meaning by identifying different ways a phenomenon is seen (Stake, 2003). For the purpose of this study, triangulation was sought by investigating the luxury hotel and lodge experience from three different perspectives: those of managers, employees and guests. These different perspectives were gained by collating data from documentation, archival records, interviews and direct observation, and photographing physical artefacts.

In addition, a multiple case study approach was adopted (Botterill & Platenkamp, 2012), because by comparing two or more cases a researcher is in a better place to establish the circumstance in which a theory will or will not hold (Eisenhardt, 1989). A single case study is looked upon as being very vulnerable – researchers are putting all their eggs into one basket – and perhaps, more importantly, there is an analytical benefit from having two or more case studies, as similarities and differences between the cases can be identified (Yin, 2003). Eisenhardt (1989) suggests that the concern is not whether two cases are better than one or four are better than three, but that the appropriate number of cases will depend on how much is known or how much new information is likely to be learned from incremental cases. Also, by using a case-by-case comparison, the researcher may be able to construct some key typologies of the data (Gibbs, 2007).

For the purpose of this research, it was anticipated that a minimum of three properties would be required for cross-case comparisons.

3.5 Population of luxury hotels in New Zealand

Access to luxury hotel and lodge properties was critical to the success of the research. Generally, when research is conducted on luxury hotel and lodge properties, the explanation of the rationale for the chosen population and selection of sample typically includes one or more of the following terms – *for the purpose of this study deluxe, luxury, four- to five-star rated, full service properties were chosen*. As previously discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2, when trying to define what a luxury hotel property is, problems arise through the lack of a widely accepted definition.

Walls et al. (2011) used the following definition in their study: a luxury hotel is a *deluxe, four- to five-star rated, full-service hotel.* Two other clear definitions for a luxury hotel have emerged from India and Malaysia – the Ministry of Tourism in India and the Malaysian Tourism Board have categorised four-star, five-star and five-star deluxe hotels as luxury hotels (Ekiz et al., 2012; Mohsin & Lockyer, 2010).

Until recently, there have been no clear criteria or definitions for a luxury lodge in New Zealand. The population and sample for this research was determined by using the Qualmark 2012 categories of Exclusive – lodges (see Section 3.5.1) and Five-star – Exceptional – hotels (see Section 3.5.2). In March 2013, after data gathering commenced, Qualmark introduced the category of New Zealand Luxury Lodge into their ratings, which replaced the Exclusive category.

3.5.1 The Qualmark category of Exclusive

Qualmark's category Exclusive for luxury accommodation does not have a star grade, but to be in the Exclusive category properties must first achieve a five-star grade of 95% or higher within the assessment criteria that are set. In addition to the assessment criteria, there are further requirements that must be met. The Exclusive category

includes highly individual, intimate, exclusive establishments that offer the finest facilities, activities, locations and service. They include destination retreats offering fishing, golfing, wilderness adventures and food and wine; to stylish hotels; riverfront villas; and secluded beach properties. Properties in the Exclusive category are described as escapes from the norm and having outstanding activities and excursions, incomparable locations and admirably discreet staff giving faultless service. There are only seven properties that are eligible for this 'best of the best' category (Qualmark, 2012).

3.5.2 The Qualmark category of Five-Star – Exceptional

The hotels that were in the *Five-Star – Exceptional* category were described as five-star luxury hotels. There are 18 hotels that have been described as being among the best available in New Zealand (Qualmark, 2012). For the purpose of this research, all five-star luxury hotels and luxury lodges in New Zealand that were in the Five-Star – Exceptional and Exclusive categories comprised the population, which was 25 properties in 2012, consisting of seven luxury lodges and 18 luxury hotels.

3.6 Sampling

Conducting research on the entire population of New Zealand luxury hotels and lodges would be resource intensive, so a sample had to be selected. Quantitative and qualitative research use different approaches to sampling – while quantitative researchers concern themselves with probability sampling, qualitative researchers choose non-probability or purposive sampling (Clark, Riley, Wilkie, & Wood, 1998; Patton, 2002). A qualitative enquiry typically utilises a relatively small sample that has been purposefully selected, and this purposeful sampling comprises rich cases whose study will help to address the research questions that are being studied (Patton, 2002). Purposive or non-probability sampling can enable the researcher to select a sample of subjects on the basis of some important characteristic(s) they possess, and it can also purposefully inform an

understanding of the central phenomenon in the study (Brotherton, 2008; Creswell, 2007).

In practice, the sample for this research depended on the willingness of the properties to participate, rather than a formal sampling strategy. In 2012, there were 18 Five-Star – Exceptional and seven Exclusive properties listed on the Qualmark website. All properties were considered, and a mixture of city and rural locations was sought. This was to gain different perspectives geographically, and it was important to look at a mixture of city and rural properties from both the North and the South Islands to show a spread of data. It was also likely that the luxury hotel and lodge experience might be different for city hotels versus rural lodges.

During September and October 2012, all the properties in the population were contacted through personally addressed letters to the general managers (see Appendix G), and these were followed up with an email to ascertain interest and availability (see Appendix H). Nine of the 25 general managers showed an initial interest and requested further information on what was required of them (four out of the seven Exclusive and five out of the 18 Five-Star – Exceptional properties). The researcher contacted the remaining 16 properties by email and phoned to ask if they were interested and was told that they did not have time, were not interested or their property did not involve itself in such research. During the period November 2012 to May 2013, through emailing and phone conversations with those that had expressed interest, six properties finally committed to taking part in the study.

As previously mentioned, this research aimed to gain a more accurate view of the subject under examination by looking at more than one view of that subject. For this research, viewpoints were taken from (a) the managers at the properties; (b) employees of the properties, and this included, but was not restricted to, the front office and food

and beverage employees; and (c) the guests staying at the properties when the research was being conducted.

Ultimately, the determining factor for who individually participated in the study was the willingness of the participants to be interviewed. Times and dates when the fieldwork could be conducted at each property were given to the researcher by all of the properties' general managers. At the start of each fieldwork day, the researcher arrived at the properties with participant information sheets (see Appendix I) in the form of a letter. These were handed out by the researcher to the managers and employees who were on duty that day, and participant information sheets were put into guests' bedrooms. Participation was on a voluntary basis, but properties were very happy for managers and employees to be interviewed during their work time, and each property gave the researcher an assigned area to wait for participants to come and be interviewed. The researcher also observed the property's day-to-day operation while waiting for participants. Guests approached the researcher after reading the letter or after watching the researcher interviewing other participants on site – guests were very interested in what the study was about and were more than happy to be interviewed. Every effort was made to ensure that only leisure guests were interviewed, although some leisure guests made references to when they stay in luxury hotels while on business.

As previously discussed, deciding how many properties and participants would be needed was a difficult question to answer, and as Slevitch (2011) suggests, the size of the sample in qualitative methodology becomes irrelevant, as sample size should be evaluated on the ability to provide important and rich information. It was anticipated that a minimum of three properties would participate in the study, with five guests, five employees and five managers being interviewed at each property, giving a total of 45 participants. It was believed that this would be sufficient to provide the important and rich data required. Three properties and 45 participants were estimated numbers, as a

starting point, to achieve theoretical saturation – this is the point at which the researcher feels additional data will result in no new insights emerging or that minimal increments of understanding will be gained (King, Funk, & Wilkins, 2011; Kwortnik, 2003). In the end, the sample comprised of six properties – three rural luxury lodges (one completely rural, one near a city and one near a town), and three luxury hotels (one rural, one in a town and one in the middle of a large city), and 81 participants consisting of 27 managers, 27 employees and 27 guests. The sample number was not predetermined, and the final number was the result of an ongoing interviewing process until saturation was achieved. The breakdown of participant numbers can be seen in Table 5 in Section 3.7.3. With 81 interviews and ongoing analysis, it was felt by the researcher that saturation had been achieved, and confirmation of this data saturation can be seen in Table 7 in Section 3.11.2.

3.7   Data collection

Table 3 is a timeline illustrating how the researcher planned and conducted data collection and data analysis.

Table 3: Timeline of fieldwork, data collection and analysis

Date	What was done
December 2011	• Ethics approval and doctoral research proposal was accepted
January–June 2012	• Researcher took time away from study while on maternity leave
July–August 2012	• Pilot study conducted and interview guides revised and rewritten. This is discussed in full in Sections 3.7.1 and 3.7.2.
September–October 2012	• Letters and emails sent to general managers to gauge interest and access to properties. These can be found in Appendix G.
November 2012–May 2013	• Fieldwork conducted. This included: – All interviews conducted and fully transcribed – Direct observation conducted – Photographs and notes taken about physical artefacts – Documents collected at the time of the interviews – Documents collated from websites, newspapers and press briefings
March 2013–November 2013	• Coding of all the interviews completed via NVivo 10 • Thematic analysis undertaken. This is discussed in full in Section 3.11.
November 2013–January 2014	• All interviews were reviewed again, and further analysis conducted. This is discussed in full in Section 3.11.4.

3.7.1   The interview guide

An interview guide was designed before the researcher conducted the interviews. An interview guide is a list of questions, issues and topics that the researcher would like to cover during the course of the interviews (Altinay & Paraskevas, 2008; Bryman, 2008). Generally, the interview guide is divided into several sections, starting with an introductory section in which the researcher includes a short briefing of the aims of the research and the purpose of the interview, issues concerning confidentiality and audio-recording issues for the interview.

The main section of the interview guide includes the questions that were developed and the probing questions that would be asked to prompt the participant to provide more information (Altinay & Paraskevas, 2008; Bryman, 2008) about their perceptions of a

luxury hotel and lodge experience. The order in which the questions were asked was not set in stone and this gave the researcher flexibility in terms of which order the questions were asked. This helped when some participants' answers naturally led onto other questions that were not in the sequence they were written. So the researcher carefully marked off each question that was asked to each participant to ensure all the questions were asked.

A draft interview guide was written, tested and then refined in order to produce the final interview guide, and an outline of this process can be found in Table 4. A copy of the interview guide itself can be found in Appendix J, and this also includes a breakdown of which aim each question was designed to achieve.

Table 4: The process of producing the final interview guide

Questions were developed for the draft interview guide
↓
Pilot interviews (using the draft interview schedule) were conducted, recorded and fully transcribed
↓
Questions in the draft interview guide were refined
↓
The final interview guide was produced
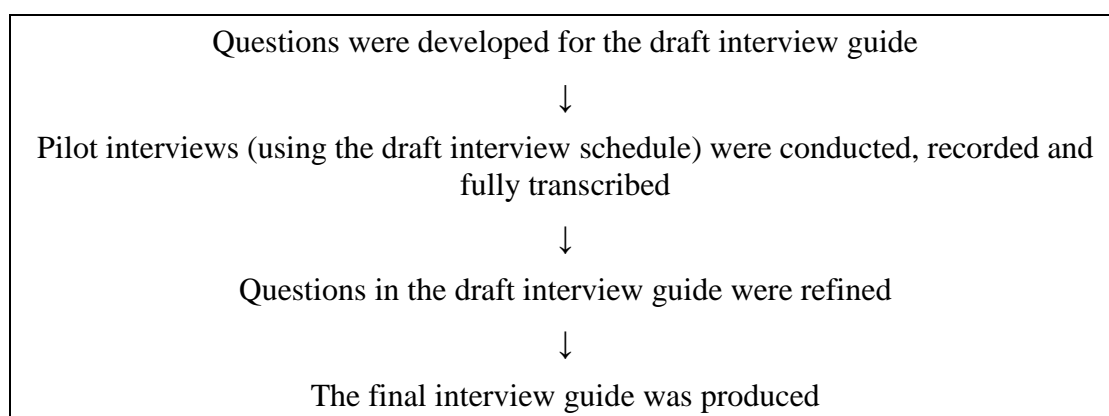
3.7.2 Pilot study

A pilot study was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, visits were made to properties in Auckland to provide context, looking at the constraints of the hospitality industry that may affect the research, and to scope a wider range of views on how the data collection process could be conducted. These visits included preliminary conversations with managers and employees within three Auckland properties, and this preliminary research assisted in the development of the data collection techniques and tools. In the second phase, the researcher conducted pilot interviews with a draft interview guide, and the pilot interview was designed to determine how structured the

interview questions should be. The researcher interviewed three managers and three employees from three Auckland properties – three colleagues who had experience working in the hospitality industry and four friends who had no hospitality industry experience but had travelled extensively. The aim of these interviews was to gain insightful comments before interviewing actual guests, as access to guests during the research process was presumably only to be given once, and that would be during the actual data collection period. None of the data collected during the pilot interviews was included in the final data set used for the final study.

The findings of the pilot study were that certain questions needed to be reworded, the order of questions had to be readjusted and the location of where the interviews were conducted needed to be rethought. The original interview guide and changes made can be found in Appendices K and L. The final interview guide for this research can be found in Appendix J. All interviews were audio-recorded, with the permission of participants (a copy of the consent form can be found in Appendix M), and were fully transcribed by the researcher.

3.7.3 Fieldwork

Two lodges and one hotel were visited in November and December 2012. Interviews went well in both lodges, but when it came time to interview participants in the hotel, only the general manager was willing to be interviewed. The general manager explained that the hotel was too busy for the researcher to interview managers, employees and guests. As a result, this hotel was eliminated from the sample.

Interviewing did not recommence again until April 2013, because of the summer season and properties being too busy for the researcher to visit. During April and May 2013, one lodge and three hotels took part in the research. In total, 81 interviews were conducted at six properties from November 2012 to May 2013 – these were audio-recorded with the permission of participants (consent forms can be found in Appendix

M) and fully transcribed by the researcher. The breakdown of participant numbers for each of the six case study properties can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5: Number of participants

Interviews	Managers	Employees	Guests
Lodge A	3	4	4
Lodge B	5	5	4
Lodge C	2	3	4
Hotel A	5	5	5
Hotel B	4	4	5
Hotel C	8	6	5
Total (81)	**27**	**27**	**27**

3.8   Data from the other sources

Data from the other four sources – documentation, archival records, direct observation and physical artefacts (refer to Table 2 in Section 3.4.1) – were analysed manually. Direct observation undertaken by the researcher was recorded via observation notes while conducting fieldwork, and physical artefacts were recorded and documented via photography by the researcher. A combination of what was seen and observed was written into a property description for each participating property, and this can be found in Chapter 4.

3.9   Limitations

Properties were unwilling for the researcher to collect demographic data on their staff or guests, and although they were happy for interviews to be conducted, no 'personal' information was to be asked. Unfortunately, there was another source of information the researcher was unable to collect: participant observation. The researcher did not participate as a member of staff or customer in any of the hotels or lodges, so no data were collected in this way. All of the properties involved were unwilling for this type of evidence to be collected.

The last limitation of this study was that the researcher looked at the luxury accommodation experience in the 'here and now'. Hospitality is a lived experience and the researcher researched that. The researcher asked people during their experience what it was and how it was created. The researcher didn't give them time to think and reflect on it – it was about being in that moment and explaining it 'then and there' and not a post-experience rationalisation by the participants. For these reasons it was not appropriate to refer the findings to the respondents. In addition, the properties would only allow the participants to be interviewed once, and there were practical limitations with contacting the guests again because personal details were not allowed to be obtained.

3.10 Position of the researcher

Before the analysis section, it is necessary to recognise and explain the position of the researcher, as this is likely to shape their interpretations of the overall study (Creswell, 2009).

The process of reflexivity is critically reflecting on oneself as the researcher as a human instrument (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Reflexivity forces the researcher to come to terms with the choice of their research problem, with those whom they engage with, in the research process, and with themselves and with the multiple identities that represent the fluid self in the research setting (Alcoff & Potter, 1993). Reflexivity requires the researcher to question themselves, their interactions with participants, and the process of their writing (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

As previously discussed in Section 1.5.1, the researcher was very clear in terms of their positioning heading into the research. As an interpretivist researcher, it is possible to understand the participants' meaning of action (grasping the desires and beliefs of the participants) in an objective manner. The meaning that the researcher reconstructs or

reproduces is considered the original meaning of the action (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). But when it comes to the coding and theming of the data, there can be an impact on the research due to the interpretivist researcher's background and experience (Creswell, 2003). So, as previously stated, the researcher for this study spent 10 years working in the luxury hotel sector, and has on various occasions stayed in luxury hotels and lodges in a variety of countries over the past 20 years. So it can be seen that this may impact on the codes and themes that are produced.

3.11 Analysis

There were five sources of data (documentation, archival records, artefacts, direct observation and interviews) collected for this thesis, and all five of these data sources contributed to give a rich, thick description of the properties and of the luxury hotel and lodge experience. A sizeable amount of data was collected from the 81 participants who were interviewed (this equated to 335 pages of transcripts, totalling over 140,000 words). After the interviews had been fully transcribed from the audio-recording by the researcher, analysis of these data began. The goal of qualitative data analysis was to move beyond merely summarising the data to identifying related patterns and themes, finding the relationships among the patterns and themes, and developing an explanation for these relationships (Walsh, 2003).

When a multiple case study approach is chosen, a typical analysis format to follow is to provide a detailed description of each case and the themes within each case – this is called within-case analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989). This is followed by a thematic analysis across the cases, called a cross-case analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Deciding how to conduct the analysis is probably one of the biggest decisions a qualitative researcher has to make. Will the analysis be conducted using computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) or conducted manually using highlighter pens and hard-copy pages of transcript? There is a large amount of literature reflecting

on the usefulness and downfalls of using either process (Basit, 2003; Davis & Meyer, 2009; Welsh, 2002).

It has been argued that objectifying words as entities and just counting them can cause the meaning and context behind these words to be lost (McCaffrey, Raffin-Bouchal, & Moules, 2012). Other concerns about CAQDAS are that novice researchers may fall into a coding trap, as they feel that they must code every line of text, and therefore end up with something very descriptive, rather than a thematic analysis (Johnston, 2006). But the advantages to using CAQDAS are that it can facilitate a visible paper trail through the researcher's reflections and conceptualisations in an electronic audit trail, and this has the potential to add to the rigour of qualitative analysis (Bringer, Johnston, & Brackenridge, 2004). Both processes of analysis have advantages and disadvantages, so the researcher decided to take full advantage of both computer assistance and manual analysis of data.

3.11.1 First analysis – Using NVivo 10 software

All of the interviews were audio-recorded and fully transcribed into Word documents. These Word documents were imported into NVivo 10 software (QSR International, 2014).

Managers

The first set of participants to be interviewed at the first lodge – Lodge A – was the managers, so it was decided to analyse data for this set of participants first. Coding started with the first manager who was interviewed, and continued with the rest of the managers in the order they were interviewed. These participants were coded with an open mind. This is not to say the researcher had absolutely no idea about what might be found, but no codes were predetermined before coding started – this is termed open coding (Gibbs, 2007). The first set of participant transcripts were read and reflected upon, and then codes were raised from the scrutiny of those data (Gibbs, 2007).

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A sample of coding was sent to a second coder to be checked for reliability, and a meeting was held between the second coder and the researcher to discuss the two sets of codes. A small number of differences were found, but after discussion to resolve these differences, a common set of codes was agreed upon, enabling the researcher to continue coding independently with confidence.

Employees

Transcripts of the employees' interviews from Lodge A were analysed next, as they had been interviewed after the managers. The employees' interviews were transcribed and coded in the order they had been interviewed during the interview process.

Guests

The last set of transcripts to be analysed and coded was the guest interviews at Lodge A. Again, these were transcribed and analysed in the order in which they were interviewed during the interview process.

3.11.2 Continued analysis – Five further establishments

The coding continued for the other five properties, but in order to prevent bias being introduced by the sequence in which managers, employees and guests were analysed, it was decided to change the order in which participants were analysed from one property to another. This sequence can be seen in Table 6.

Table 6: The sequence in which participant sets were coded

Property	Participant coding order
Lodge A	Managers, employees, guests
Lodge B	Guests, managers, employees
Lodge C	Employees, guests, managers
Hotel A	Managers, guests, employees
Hotel B	Guests, employees, managers
Hotel C	Employees, managers, guests

Codes

Code names and code descriptions constantly evolved throughout the coding process – some were merged, some were split and some were renamed to fit the data better (Hyde & Olesen, 2011). The code names and code descriptions were revisited after each set of participant interviews were coded to ensure that codes and descriptions fully matched the data. The number of codes found for each property can be seen in Table 7.

Table 7: Number of NVivo 10 codes found for each set of participants

	New codes managers	New codes employees	New codes guests	Total codes
Lodge A	42	3	6	51
	New codes guests	**New codes managers**	**New codes employees**	**Total codes**
Lodge B	13	5	4	73
	New codes employees	**New codes guests**	**New codes managers**	**Total codes**
Lodge C	4	1	2	80
	New codes managers	**New codes employees**	**New codes guests**	**Total codes**
Hotel A	13	0	0	93
	New codes guests	**New codes managers**	**New codes employees**	**Total codes**
Hotel B	0	0	0	93
	New codes employees	**New codes guests**	**New codes managers**	**Total codes**
Hotel C	0	0	0	93

In Table 7 it can be seen how many codes were found for the first set of participants and then the number of new codes that were found subsequently for each new set of participants that were coded thereafter. Analysis was carried out after each set of participants, and after 10 sets of analysis had been evaluated, no new codes were identified, even though another eight sets of participants were analysed. It can be seen that no new codes were found after the managers of Hotel A had been analysed. Theoretical saturation had been achieved (King et al., 2011; Kwortnik, 2003).

3.11.3 Thematic analysis

The method of analysis used was thematic analysis, which identifies the data, analyses the data and then reports patterns or themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Patterns or themes can be identified in the data by one of two approaches: in an inductive or 'bottom up' approach, or in a deductive or theoretical or 'top down' approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). "Inductive analysis is therefore a process of coding the data *without* trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame, or the researcher's analytic preconceptions" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.12). This form of thematic analysis is recognised as being 'data driven', whereas in contrast, a deductive or theoretic thematic analysis tends to be driven by the researcher's analytic or theoretical interest in the area. This form of thematic analysis is recognised as being 'analyst-driven' (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The phases of analysis can be seen in Table 8.

Table 8: The phases of analysis

The phases of analysis	Description of the process
Familiarising yourself with your data	Fully transcribing the interview data from audio-recording. Reading and rereading the data, then making notes of initial ideas.
Generating initial codes	Systematically coding any data of interest across the entire data set, then collating the data relevant to each code.
Searching for themes	Putting the codes into potential themes, collecting all the data that relates to each potential theme.
Reviewing themes	Reviewing and checking the themes and generating a thematic map of the analysis.
Defining and naming themes	Refining the specifics of each theme and generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
Producing the report	Final chance for analysis, relating it to the research question and literature. Finally, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Source - Braun and Clarke (2006)

At a bare minimum, thematic analysis describes and organises the data set in rich detail. By familiarising themselves with the data, researchers are able to produce a set of codes and from these codes themes should emerge (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To be counted as a theme, it must be something that is important in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or has meaning within the data set. By reviewing and refining these themes, the researcher is able to relate the data collected to literature and the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Themes from each participant group for each property – 18 matrices

When the first set of interviews with managers had been coded, those codes were then printed, cut out individually, spread out on a table and grouped into themes. These themes and codes stayed on the table for several days in order for the researcher to revisit the themes and ensure that the codes fitted optimally into each theme (Glaser, 1978). Themes were then written up in a matrix with a description of each theme and a description of each code under it. After the first property had been analysed, the researcher shared these matrices with a fellow researcher working within a similar paradigm, and then with the researcher's supervisor, to confirm the plausibility and the interpretation. This process was repeated 18 times (i.e. three set of participants for six properties = 18). The findings of this in-case analysis can be found in Appendix N. This appendix shows the findings revealed after each in-case analysis, conducted on each participant set in each property. Each case was analysed separately, starting with each participant set as explained in Table 6. These findings enabled the researcher to write Chapters Four, Five and Six. Once all of the properties had been analysed within case, it gave the researcher six cases upon which a cross-case analysis was conducted. This appendix clearly signposts how the researcher came to the themes that are presented in Chapters Five and Six.

Themes from each participant group by type of property – Six matrices

When the six within-case analyses were complete, it was decided to examine a complete set of participants, that is, all the managers from lodges together, all the managers from hotels together, all employees at lodges together, and so on. The relevant codes for each participant group were printed, cut out individually and spread out on the researcher's table, and then once codes were grouped together, a theme was named. These themes and codes stayed on the table for several days in order for the researcher to revisit the themes and ensure that the codes fitted optimally into each theme. Themes were then written up in a matrix with a description of each theme and a description of each code contributing to that theme. After all of the managers of the lodges had been analysed, the researcher shared these matrices with a fellow researcher working within a similar paradigm, and then the researcher's supervisor, to confirm the plausibility and the interpretation. This process was then repeated five times: managers of all the hotels, employees of all the lodges, employees of all of the hotels, guests of all the lodges and guests of the hotels equals five. The findings of this cross-case analysis can be found in Chapters 5 and 6.

3.11.4 Second analysis – Manual

As explained in Section 3.11, deciding what strategy to analyse the large qualitative data set was difficult. As explained in Section 3.11.1, the first data analysis was conducted using NVivo 10. Following this analysis, it was decided to conduct a second data analysis using highlighters, paper and scissors. All interviews were printed out (giving the researcher a clean copy of each interview), each interview was reread and highlighted, and notes were taken. The researcher started with the managers of the first lodge – Lodge A – and re-analysed each participant, until all 81 interviews had been analysed. The researcher was looking for any new codes to emerge and to ensure that a full analysis of the data was conducted by analysing the data using both NVivo 10 and a

manual system. Although no new codes were found, by reading through all of the interviews once more, the researcher gained a holistic overview of what participants thought the luxury hotel and lodge experience was, and how it was created.

3.12 Themes into models

Bazeley (2009) suggests that for research to contribute to knowledge, it must do more than just list each theme in order; rather, it should build a more detailed picture of a particular phenomenon. Thomas (2006) took this further by suggesting that the outcome of inductive analysis, as explained in Section 3.11.3, is the development of categories into a model, and that this model summaries the data and conveys the process and key themes. Bazeley (2009) suggests using a 'describe-compare-relate' process for each theme: describe the theme, compare the theme for differences with other themes and then relate the theme to other themes already identified. She explains that researchers know they have 'arrived' at their contribution to knowledge when, despite all the complexities known to the researcher, the final model is a simple one (Bazeley, 2009).

Through thematic analysis of the perspectives from all of the participants, a clearer understanding of how the luxury hotel and lodge experience is created was developed by producing a set of themes. From these themes, two conceptual models were produced to explain what the luxury hotel and lodge experience is and how it is created. These models are presented in Chapters 5 and Chapter 6.

3.13 Research trustworthiness

In order to add to the body of knowledge of hospitality and tourism it is important to show the ways in which the quality of the research has been addressed. Merriam (1998) states that trustworthiness can be established when there is "some accounting for their validity and reliability" (p.198). Qualitative validity means that the researcher employs certain procedures in order to check the accuracy of their findings (Gibbs, 2007), whereas qualitative reliability indicates that the approach of the researcher is consistent

across different projects and different researchers (Gibbs, 2007). Yin (2003) suggests that qualitative researchers need to document as many steps of their process as possible and to also document the procedures of their case studies. Gibbs (2007) suggests several reliability procedures, as can be seen in Table 9.

Table 9: Reliability procedures

Reliability procedures	**What the researcher did**
Check transcripts to make sure that they do not contain obvious mistakes made during transcription.	Once the transcripts had been transcribed, the researcher played the audio recording and read through the transcription at the same time, correcting any errors as they proceeded.
Make sure that there is not a drift in the definition of codes, a shift in the meaning of codes during the process of coding. This can be accomplished by constantly comparing data with the codes and by writing memos about the codes and their definitions.	All of the code definitions were written as part of the coding process of NVivo. Copies of these were printed off periodically so the researcher was very clear what each code meant.
For team research, co-ordinate the communication among the coders by regular documented meeting and by sharing the analysis.	This was an individual study.
Cross-check codes developed by different researchers by comparing results that are independently derived.	Blank transcripts (with no coding on them) were given to other colleagues and a supervisor, in order to cross-check codes found.

Source – Gibbs (2007)

Validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research and is based on determining the accuracy of the findings from the viewpoint of the reader, participant, or the researcher – there are other terms that also express this idea, such as credibility, trustworthiness and authenticity (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Creswell (2009) suggests using a number of validity strategies in order to enhance the accuracy of the findings, and these can be seen in Table 10.

Table 10: Validity strategies

Validity strategies	What the researcher did
Triangulate different data sources of information by examining evidence from the sources and using it to build a coherent justification for themes.	Data was collected from three different sets of participants from six different luxury properties, and five other sources of information were collected from each property. This is discussed in full in Table 2.
Use member checking to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings through taking the final report or specific descriptions or themes back to participants and determining whether these participants feel that they are accurate.	All of the general managers have asked for a copy of this thesis.
Use rich, thick description to convey the findings.	There are three findings chapters in this thesis, which are full of rich thick descriptions of the findings.
Clarify the bias the researcher brings to the study.	The researcher for this study spent 10 years working in the luxury hotel sector, and has on various occasions stayed in luxury hotels and lodges in a variety of countries over the past 20 years.
Present negative or discrepant information that runs counter to the themes.	It is very clear in every theme which participants took part in the themes and who was missing.
Spend prolonged time in the field.	Field work took up to four days in each property.
Use peer briefing to enhance the accuracy of the account.	The researcher had a colleague who was also undertaking their PhD on a similar topic who reviewed their work and asked questions about what they were doing and why.
Use an external auditor to review the entire project.	Once the first draft was complete, the researcher sent it to an ex-colleague living overseas to review it.

Source – Creswell (2009)

Lincoln and Guba (1985) simply explained trustworthiness as a question "how can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of?" (p.290). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested there was four terms involved in trustworthiness these are "credibility",

"transferability", "dependability" and "confirmability". Table 11 illustrates how

trustworthiness is established in this study.

Table 11: Summary of techniques for establishing trustworthiness

Criterion Area	Technique	How this was undertaken by the researcher

Credibility	Activities in the field that increase the probability of high credibility
	   a) Prolonged engagement
	   b) Persistent observation
	   c) Triangulation (sources, methods, and investigators)
		Field work took up to four days in each property.
		
		The researcher conducted observation during their field work. An observation sheet can be found in Appendix D.
		
		Triangulation took place in the form of three different set of participants, six different luxury properties and five other sources of data that was collected from each property. This is discussed in full in Table 2.

	Peer debriefing	Once the first draft was complete, the researcher sent it to an ex-colleague living overseas for review. Two researchers talked through the research during APacCHRIE 2015.
	Negative case studies	It is very clear in every theme which participants took part in the themes and who was missing.
	Referential adequacy	All interviews were audio recorded.
	Member checks (in process and terminal)	No member checks were conducted due the practical limitations of properties not wanting their guests to be contacted again after their stay, and that managers and employees were also to be contacted only once.

Transferability	Thick description	There are three findings chapters (Chapter 4, 5 and 6) in this thesis, which are full of rich thick descriptions of the findings.
Dependability	The dependability audit, including the audit trail	The researcher had a colleague who was also undertaking their PhD on a similar topic who reviewed their work and asked questions about what they were doing and why regarding the data and analysis that was produced.
Confirmability	The confirmability audit, including the audit trail	This was not undertaken.
All of the above	The reflexive journal	This was not used.

Source – Lincoln and Guba (1985)

3.14 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter set out to discuss the choice of research methodology and methods that were adopted for this study, identifying that the most appropriate methodology for this study to be an interpretive qualitative multi-case study. Five different sources of data were collected – interviews, archival records, physical artefacts, direct observation and documentation – and these data were collected from six different luxury properties in New Zealand. In total, 81 participants were engaged in this research, consisting of 27 managers, 27 employees and 27 guests. The data were analysed both manually and by using NVivo 10, and after thematic analysis, two conceptual models were produced.

The following chapter provides an overview of the six properties used for this study, based on information from documentation, archival records, direct observation and physical artefacts.

Chapter 4: The six cases

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a profile of each of the six case study properties based on evidence gathered from documentation, archival records, direct observation and physical artefacts. Documentation and archival records were observed and copied by the researcher, and notes were taken of these (a sample of these can be found in Appendices A and B). Direct observation undertaken by the researcher was recorded via observation notes while conducting fieldwork. Physical artefacts were recorded and documented via photography by the researcher (a sample of these can be found in Appendix C).

4.2 Similarity and differences between properties

The key designed difference within the sample for this research was between the hotels and lodges. As previously stated in Section 3.6, these hotels and lodges were selected through non-probability or purposive sampling. All lodges had an 'Exclusive' rating and all hotels had a 'Five-Star – Exceptional' rating. Lodges have a high ratio of staff to guests and bedrooms. Hotels have a high ratio too, but not as high as lodges. It can be seen that the lodges have far fewer bedrooms than the hotels, but all of the lodges are similar in regards to having a low number of bedrooms. All of the lodges are privately owned, while all of the hotels are part of a chain. It is far more expensive to stay in a lodge than a hotel, but lodges have similar tariffs to one another, and hotels have similar tariffs to one another. No lodge had a loyalty programme. These similarities and differences can be seen in Table 12.

Table 12: Profile of each property

Property name	Property Type	Qualmark Rating	Form of ownership	Number of rooms	Number of guests	Number of staff	Staff ratio to room	Staff ratio to guest	Tariff	Loyalty Programmes
One	Lodge	Executive	Privately owned	20	52	60	2.6:1	1.1:1	$695 - $4620 per person $1205 - $4875 per night	No
Two	Lodge	Executive	Privately owned	7	14	14	2:1	1:1	$850 - $2050 single $1100 - $2350 double	No
Three	Lodge	Executive	Privately owned	13	26	40	3:1	1.5:1	$891 - $3133 single $1150 - $3292 double	No
Four	Hotel	5 star	Chain	60	120	60	1:1	0.50:1	$325 - $1050 per night	No
Five	Hotel	5 star	Chain	318	636	200	0.62:1	0.31:1	$450 - $1250 per night	Yes
Six	Hotel	5 star	Chain	340	680	240	0.70:1	0.35:1	$425 - $1500 per night	Yes

4.3 Property One – Lodge A

The first property is situated in the North Island of New Zealand. The property's stunning setting is rural with breath-taking views everywhere you look, and although there is a major town nearby, you would have no idea that you were so close to it. The property has a real sense of calm, and as you enter the grounds you almost feel as if you are saying 'goodbye' to the real world and entering a surreal, peaceful haven. The property exudes a sense of understated opulence.

There is a real sense of 'wow' when you enter and start walking around the main building of the property, and everything and everyone centres on this building. This is where the guests start their experience as they are welcomed here, and they also receive their final farewell from here. There are lots of couches and places to sit to take in the views, and there is no music or noise encroaching on the peace. There are many flower displays around the property, and bowls of fresh fruit abound. There is a lot of artwork on the walls, and most are priceless pieces – in fact, the owners claim to have more Goldies (Goldie is one of New Zealand's most famous artists) in this property than there are in the Auckland Museum. Across from the main building there is a private wine cellar for guests to participate in wine tasting.

The whole property has the look and feel of an old-fashioned hunting, shooting and fishing lodge in Scotland, but all of the bedrooms are very modern in their design. In some of the bedrooms the televisions are hidden behind the main painting in the room, and in general, if guests want a television or a telephone in their room they have to ask for it to be put there. The bathrooms are understated in their beauty, bedrooms are double carpeted to make sure that the floor has a good spring to it, and the bedrooms have been designed so that each of them has an amazing view.

Although there are fewer than 25 bedrooms in the entire property, there are also separate housing areas for guests who desire even more privacy. In the dwellings within

these separate housing areas, there are sunrooms with bathrooms that can be turned into self-contained rooms for nannies, teenagers or bodyguards: in fact, these rooms are security rooms that can be used in case of an 'emergency'. Each of these dwellings has private dining, which contain kitchens and dining rooms where a chef can prepare meals for two to eight people – the chef prepares the food in the kitchen in front of the guests, and a waitperson serves the food.

Throughout the property, in the outdoor areas, there are sun loungers and chairs situated at various vantage points for guests to enjoy the views. All of the loungers and chairs have warm cosy blankets and very conformable cushions on them, and all of the seating areas are situated under some form of sunshade. There are both indoor and outdoor fires, made possible by the use of mobile fireplaces – these are open fires on wheels that can be situated in any area of the property the guests may want to eat in, ensuring that any area is warm and cosy for the guests to enjoy their dining experience. There is a range of 'static' dining areas throughout the property for guests, as well as for holding events for guests who are not staying at the property, for example, for weddings. The property has the ability to allow guests to eat anywhere: for example, guests often ask for picnics on the lawn, or to have dinner in a teahouse gazebo with stunning views – these teahouse gazebos have been especially designed for guests to dine outside in order to enjoy the views.

Dinner is five courses every night, with canapés and cocktails an hour before dinner. Guests are questioned about their dietary requirements before they arrive at the property, and this is confirmed three times (during the booking, before arrival and when they arrive) to ensure that the guests will enjoy the degustation menu every night without needing to be asked if there is anything on the menu that they will not or cannot eat. The property also makes a big fuss about their guests' birthdays, anniversaries or other special occasions.

The property is immaculately maintained, and the attention to detail is apparent everywhere. For example, on the perfectly kept croquet court, the balls and mallets are set out in a way that they are just ready to play with. The property's lawns are perfectly manicured, and the hedges are designed and trimmed so that there are private areas for guests to have their own part of the gardens. Indeed, all of the grounds of the property are perfect; nothing seems to be out of place. And to help guests further enjoy the gardens, there are catalogues that contain photographs and descriptions of the entire flora that can be found on the property; these are available for guests to take with them while they are walking around the grounds so they can identify the various plants they might see. Furthermore, the gardeners are always happy to give the guests a personal guided tour around the grounds if they wish. To ensure that their experience of the grounds is not negatively impacted by the weather, there are buckets with umbrellas and Driza-Bone jackets hanging up throughout the property for guests to use in case they get caught in the rain while they are on the grounds, or if the sun is too strong for them.

Managers at the property are all very casual in their appearance, and it is often difficult to distinguish the staff from the guests. During the day, guests generally tend to be very casual in their appearance, and unless they are sitting down being waited on, it is hard to determine who is who. There are no uniforms as such, no formal suits or dresses, the only exception being the food and beverage team, who are dressed in traditional black and white. And all staff are very well groomed at all times. There does not appear to be a distinction between managers and staff; rather, everyone is just regarded as staff members: there is a very flat staff structure. Not one member of staff wears a name badge, and there is no visible logo of the property on any of their clothing.

4.4   Property Two – Lodge B

The second property is situated in the South Island. Driving up to the property you are met with rather imposing gates with an intercom to announce your arrival in order to

gain access to the property. The long sweeping tree-lined driveway is filled with white gravel, and you feel as if you are the first visitor of the day as there are no tyre imprints in the gravel before you (the owner-managers later explained to me that this is exactly what they want their guests to feel when they first arrive at the property). Once you have passed the tree-lined driveway, the main building suddenly appears and you are filled with a sense of awe, as the building truly has a majestic presence. The owner-managers were assembled on the lawn to greet me, as they do with every guest who comes to stay at the property.

Standing on the lawn you realise that you cannot hear any man-made noises at all; all you can hear is birds and the wind rustling through the trees, of which there are 20,000 in the grounds: when the main building was being constructed in the late 19th century, the owner acquired a team from Kew Gardens in London to come to New Zealand to plant the trees on the property. Within the extended property, 120 varieties of food are grown, and sheep, chicken and pigs roam around – they are all used in the menu, making the property about 80% self-sufficient.

When you step inside the amazing entrance hall, you feel as if you have been taken back in time to the Edwardian or Victorian era. The property has the feel of grandeur, and you expect someone to come out and greet you dressed in period costume. There is no front desk at the property, as there is no check-in process – this is all done through credit card and during welcome drinks. Throughout the property, there is an airy feeling, and you feel as if you are gliding from room to room, while there is music playing at a very low volume in all areas, so you do not feel alone. As you walk through the property, you realise that there is a commercial shopping area in the hallway opposite the library that sells interesting souvenirs relating to the property, for example, a wooden jigsaw of the property when it was built. From the hallway, you walk into the library, which has been set up with a computer for guests to use and books for them to

read. All over the property the walls are covered with amazing artwork by New Zealand artists, many of them priceless.

The current owner-managers purchased the property in 2007, and have recently lovingly restored it to its former glory – there are many photo albums showing the restoration process and the transformation of the property. There have been many pieces of furniture custom-made to fit the era, but they all have a very practical side to them. For example, in the drawing room the beautiful wall unit that takes up most of one wall is easily transformed into a bar for welcoming and evening drinks for guests.

The private dining room seats only 16 people – 14 is the maximum number of guests the property can accommodate, plus the two owner-managers – and the owner-managers have pre-dinner drinks and canapés and dinner with their guests every night. Every night, a five-course degustation dinner is served to the guests. Their dietary requirements are checked three times before they come and stay at the property: once when they are making the booking, again before they arrive and finally at some point before they have their first meal at the property. There are seven other dining areas available for guests, one of the most popular being the turret room, which is at the top of the property. Breakfast is served in the breakfast kitchen – this farmhouse-style kitchen is primarily used for breakfast (the guests watch their food being prepared for them, and they are served there), but it is also used for cookery lessons for 'staying-guests' and for outside clients.

In the grounds, the original seven outhouse buildings still remain. One building that was used to hang game has now been converted into a wine cellar, while the original laundry of the property has been converted into a spa where guests receive various health and beauty treatments – the property can organise external staff to come to the property and give guest treatments. Guests can enjoy the outdoor spa pool and swimming pool, which is situated outside the spa itself.

There were originally 41 rooms in the main building, but extensive renovations have been undertaken on the interior. There are now only seven suites within the property: five normal suites and two master suites, which have their own private balconies. These suites are situated in the attic, on the first and second floors of the property. Each bedroom has its own colour scheme and its own particular artwork. There are no televisions or electronic devices in the bedrooms. Guests cannot make tea or coffee in their room, there are no minibars in the rooms, but on every landing there is tea, coffee, soft drinks and snacks available for guests to help themselves to at any time, or they can ring a bell to summon a staff member to do it for them. Turndown service is every night with water and chocolate, fruit or brownies, or whatever the guest asks for. Laundry is included in the tariff.

The property does cater for outside clients, and their billiard room can hold up to 64 people for a sit-down function. Over that past five years, the property has become very popular for weddings, and many of the weddings have been featured in some high-profile magazines, including the bridal magazines for New Zealand and Australia, which has further increased interest in the property as a destination to hold weddings.

4.5 Property Three – Lodge C

There is no overt signage for the third property – in fact, when you are driving along, all you can see for miles is countryside with no signs of life in the form of buildings or houses. You need very detailed instructions to get to the property, as the only indication that you are close is a set of low-lying stonemasonry walls with little bronze plaques with the property's name on them – if you blink while you are driving, you would miss them. After driving through the entrance, with the masonry walls on either side, eventually you arrive at a cattle grid with a set of white gates in front of it – these open when you drive up to them, allowing you to drive the final kilometre to the property. Although the ground either side of the drive is quite barren and flat, you have an

amazing view of lake and mountains as you are driving along the windy drive. Eventually, you see the property as you come around the final corner, but all that you are seeing is the back of the property in the form of a set of very impressive wooden doors, and small discreet signs to direct you to where you should park. However, most guests arrive on the property's helipad that is located on the front lawn, so this means that most guests experience a different perspective of the property on arrival, as an amazing 'wow' factor is evoked by the view of the surroundings on the left and the whole property facing them on the right.

As you walk towards the entrance, you notice the golf buggies parked up outside the main building – these are used to transport guests to their chalets. Although you feel as if you are arriving at the back door if you arrive by car, as soon as you open the doors you are instantly hit by the beauty of the property and are greeted by a view that is quite honestly breath-taking. You realise that you are standing on a mezzanine floor overlooking a seating area called the Great Room, and the view that you are hit with is through a window that is at least six metres tall. There is no check-in or check-out desk, as everything is conducted prior to the arrival of the guests and during welcome drinks, so you are welcomed to the property by the staff on the lawn or at the 'back door', and then brought into the property to the Great Room, which is at the main sitting area by the window.

The size of the property is quite deceiving. If you arrive from the back rather than the front, what you see is only one-third of the property, as the remaining two-thirds is actually below you, because the property has been built against a cliff. You can get down to the rest of the property via two sets of wooden stairs leading off from the mezzanine floor to your left and right.

Although the main building of the property is a very modern building, built only 15 years ago, it has a very old feel to it that is really hard to explain. It reminds you of an

old-fashioned Swiss chalet or a ski lodge, but with some very modern furniture and fittings. The walls are exposed schist and wood, and the beams that are in the ceiling and throughout the property are from old bridges that were knocked down in Brisbane and Melbourne, and were shipped to New Zealand by the owners, while the wooden floor is made from recycled wood from various woolsheds throughout New Zealand.

Within the main building there are eight areas for sleeping – five bedrooms and three suites, all of which are named after rivers and mountains. The main difference between a bedroom and a suite is that the suite has a steam room in the bathroom area for the guests to use at any time so that they do not have to go out of their room to the spa area. All of the bedrooms and suites have an amazing view, as they are all front facing, and each has its own private balcony. Outside of the main building of the property are four chalet suites that are almost like self-contained cottages, each containing a mini-kitchen, and a steam room in the bathroom. The chalet suites are for guests who prefer more privacy.

The general manager sees his role as a being a host for the property, and when the owners are staying at the property they assume a similar hosting role. Most of this hosting is conducted during the cocktails and canapés hour every night starting at 6.30pm, before the five-course degustation dinner, which is served at 7.30pm. Guests can enjoy their dinner at individual tables in the elegant Lake View Dining Room, or for a more intimate affair they can reserve the Wine Cave, which is the property's venue for private dining that can hold up to six people. In the summer months, or if it is warm enough, the staff recommend that the guests sit outside on the terrace, which has a large outdoor fire and mobile fireplaces. Chefs are very visible to the guests in the open kitchen near the terrace, and guests have the opportunity to interact with the chefs while they are preparing breakfast and lunch.

There is a games room with a billiard table and board games, and within the games room is a small den with a large flat screen television and various DVDs. Within the games room, there is also a fully functioning bar for the guests to help themselves, or if they prefer, they can ask for staff to come down and assist them with drinks. Off the games room is a map room with a computer and a mini information centre that contains information so that guests can plan activities they would like to try while they are at the property and once they leave the property. Within the property, there is a health and beauty therapy suite, a fully equipped gym, and outside of the gym there is an outdoor heated pool surrounded by sun loungers for guests to relax and unwind.

4.6   Property Four – Hotel A

The fourth property is situated just off a very busy main road entering a South Island town. It is surprising how quiet it is when you step outside your car. The property is set back off the road. You cannot see the property from the road, and if it were not well signposted, you would drive by and not realise that there is a property there.

The reception area has a warm and airy feel about it, with high ceilings and wooden beams, and the first thing that you see as you enter the reception area is a huge window that occupies the entire wall offering you an amazing view over a lake and mountains. The reception area has an open fire and a library, and massive paintings are hung above the fireplace and all of the other walls. This gives the property the feel of a country lodge, especially as these paintings are portraits of people dating back to the early 20th century. But there are no overstuffed couches, carpets with busy patterns or dark painted walls – the colours in the reception area are very earthy, the floor is tiled with a few big rugs scattered about and a number of 1970s-styled couches and chairs are carefully placed for guests to use. So there is a really relaxed and comfortable look about the property but with very modern music playing in the background, which can assault your senses.

As you walk into the reception area, you find an information desk on your right where there is a member of staff offering concierge services to guests, and on your left is the reception counter. The reception counter doubles as the bar and coffee station, so behind it is an array of bottles for a fully functioning bar. Beside the reception counter is a glass door that leads to an extensive private wine cellar that boasts one of the most comprehensive collections of fine Bordeaux wines in the Southern Hemisphere, estimated to be worth over $200,000. The wine cellar is for guests to hold private wine tastings and private dinner parties.

Food and beverage seems to be the general manager's 'baby', and he brought their head chef from Scotland to head up the food and beverage department in the hotel. The restaurant is very rich in colour and has a very warm feel about it – the restaurant can hold 45 comfortably and 60 at a squeeze, and is decorated in a very warm chocolate colour, contains comfortable leather chairs and provides a fantastic view over the lake. Everything is of the highest quality; for example, the glassware and cutlery brands are well known and high end.

In contrast, the guest rooms are very muted in colour with large amounts of white everywhere, with only curtains, throws and pictures giving the rooms any sense of colour. To be honest, the rooms feel cool and slightly sterile, but on the other hand, they look incredibly clean and tidy, and all guests have a fantastic view from their room because every apartment has front-facing, roof-to-floor windows. The apartment bedrooms are quite small, while the living areas and bathrooms are quite big in relation to the rest of the apartment. In the rest of the hotel there is a spa, a small gym and a conference room that is used for group breakfasts and occasionally for conferences.

The property was once described as a concrete jungle, as the hotel itself started off as apartment blocks and was then turned into a hotel in 2008–2009 because of the recession. The apartments were cleverly designed to be able to be split into hotel rooms

or be left as whole apartments that can sleep up to six people. There are 90 apartment-style rooms and 60 hotel rooms. The main part of the property is used for checking in and checking out, and is the first and last point of contact for the guests.

At the property the managers do not wear badges, so it can be quite difficult to differentiate them from the guests. The general manager is a straightforward talker, normally dressed in shorts and tee-shirt, and is often the person driving the shuttle bus into town to drop off and pick up guests – so it is very difficult for guests to pick out who the general manager is. The staff are also difficult to identify as there are no uniforms worn at the property. There is a smart but casual approach to their attire, and the only thing that identifies them as being staff is a very small name badge with their country's flag on it (there are many nationalities working in the hotel). Guests usually gravitate to the staff member who can talk their language, as they are mainly international in origin, because of the extensive overseas marketing that the general manager undertakes.

4.7   Property Five – Hotel B

The fifth property is situated on the outskirts of a busy South Island town. Guests can access the property either by water taxi or by driving around a lake, and the setting brings to mind images of an alpine village in a European town, complete with a long, winding cycling path alongside the lakefront.

As you walk towards the hotel entrance, you see two marked taxi spaces for guests that always have at least one, if not two, taxis stationed there; the general manager explained that this is a permanent service they offer their guests. Walking into the entrance is almost like walking into a cave, and you feel as if you are going underground into another world: the walk into the hotel is quite dark, as the doors into the property are set quite far back into the building, such that the building is overhanging the entrance doors. When you arrive, you are greeted in the forecourt by the concierge team; their

desk is set off to the right as you walk into the property. In fact, the first thing you see as soon as you set foot within the property is the massive reception desk.

Throughout the reception area, the seating comprises purple and red seats, and red couches. The wall at the far end of the reception area is entirely glass, which gives the guests a fantastic view of the lake, and you feel as if you could just sit there all day looking out at the beautiful vista. The floor is completely tiled, and because of the high ceilings in the reception area, the noise from people walking around the reception area is quite loud. There is a huge open fire in the main reception area, and at the back of the reception area there is a carpeted area, which gives that area a nice warm feel, and the walls are wood and exposed stone. The music playing in the reception area is quite loud – it is mainly modern jazz that gets on your nerves after a while if you do not like jazz.

The artwork in the reception area is modern art, and again, if you are not a fan of modern art, you think they are really ugly. The canvases are huge and are just full of splodges of paints, and you feel as if the artwork was produced by a child at kindergarten. There are really ugly lamps and sculptures placed along the hall tables spread throughout the reception area.

While staff wear badges showing their names, the property's logo and their positions, the managers have no real uniform, although everyone seems to be dressed in dark colours. The frontline staff are dressed in gold and black, and porters and concierge are attired in dark red.

There are six different types of rooms and suites available for guests at Property Five, ranging from the standard room to 'residences', all of which are very spacious and elegant, with a warm, soulful aesthetic that harmonises perfectly with the grandeur of the landscape. The standard room includes a schist fireplace, floor-to-ceiling windows that give the guests lake and mountain views, a balcony or terrace, a large living area, a king-sized serenity bed, and a serene bathroom with two basins, a walk-in shower and a

relaxing bathtub. The 'residences' are elegant and spacious open-plan one- and two-bedroom residences with apartment-style facilities that contain an expansive separate living room. A second flat screen TV is located in the large bedroom. In total, the property has more than 170 bedrooms.

In the rest of the property, there is a spa with a 'unique spa experience for today's global travellers', a fully equipped gym with the latest-generation cardio and strength training machines, a 25-metre heated indoor lap pool, a hot tub, and sauna and steam rooms. A business centre, called the Connectivity Centre, offers complimentary Internet and the use of two modern computers, a fax machine, a scanner and a photocopier. There is also a fully functioning cinema that can be booked for corporate events and seven meeting rooms for conferences and events.

4.8   Property Six – Hotel C

Property Six is situated in a North Island city, and although this property is not quite in the central business district (CBD), it is within easy reach of the CBD, and the nearby motorway gives this property some major advantages. The general manager explained that because of the proximity of the motorway and the ample parking facilities, business guests were attracted to the property, while being in the city but away from the 'busy' parts attracted leisure guests. There is a lovely forecourt in front of the hotel that gives the property enough space to distance itself from the busy road on which it is located.

The entrance to the hotel is kept clean and tidy at all times, and someone is allotted this specific task. In the forecourt, you are greeted into the property, and the door is opened onto the reception area, where the first thing that catches your eye is the concierge desk, which doubles as a refreshment station (it has iced water in jugs, fruit with eco-friendly disposable cups and napkins). As you progress further into the reception area, you find a huge reception desk – there are six computer monitors and four to six members of staff on duty at any one time during the day. The reception area itself is very large, and there

are several large, heavy screens partitioning areas off to give a more intimate feel for guests. If there were no partitions, the area would resemble an airport lounge, big, cold and unwelcoming.

The reception area is very noisy as the sound of people's footsteps seems to echo in the reception area, and further down in the reception area there is a carpeted sitting area. The reception area itself is decorated in black and white, which is in stark contrast to the brightly coloured reception sitting area, which has pink, purple and red seats and couches that contain an abundance of purple, red and pink cushions. There are huge modern art works hanging on the walls throughout the reception area. The curtains in the reception area are made of organza-like net curtains but without the lace or decoration and are a grey-brown colour.

There are many areas throughout the property set out with leather couches and coffee tables covered with various printed media for guests to read. The general manager explained that they want guests to feel as if they could take time out anywhere in the property, so they provide comfortable chairs and reading material.

There is a 'connectivity centre' situated off to the right of the main lobby, and this contains very comfortable couches and tables and a huge flat screen television. The 'connectivity centre' is described as the guests' 'office away from the office', a place where they can connect to the WIFI network on their own devices, or use the computers provided to attend to business efficiently without delays, all without leaving the hotel. The hotel also hosts a conferencing area.

The property offers the guests a variety of rooms that have all been designed for comfort and convenience, ranging from standard rooms to chic residential suites with living areas and kitchen facilities. All of the rooms are fitted with cutting-edge technologies to support the modern lifestyle of today's modern business and leisure

travellers – the rooms are fitted with flat screen TVs, satellite channels, WIFI and spacious working desks. In total, the property has more than 300 rooms.

There are only two main places to eat within the property. At one end of the spectrum, there is a casual and laid-back bar that offers a smart and up-to-the-minute environment in which guests may entertain, relax and enjoy themselves. At the other end of the spectrum is the formal dining restaurant where they offer regional and seasonal produce and dishes that offer 'works-of-art'.

Within the property's spa area, there are treatment rooms, a fully equipped fitness centre, a heated swimming pool, a spa, a sauna and a steam room. Throughout the property, there are a lot of mirrors hanging on the walls, a lot of free-standing tall tables with black vases containing black dried flowers, and free-standing lamps are found everywhere.

Staff wear a very formal uniform, the main colour being black with a touch of orange in the form of a scarf or tie, and everyone is expected to look very smart and business-like, and wear a name badge with the property's logo on it.

The property is situated across from a public park, so the guests have a green outlook from their rooms. When you leave the property, facing you is a water feature outside the main entrance – a stone wall with cascading water – which gives you a sense of peace, quiet and serenity before you go out into the busy city again.

4.9   Conclusion

This chapter presented a description of the six case study properties. A detailed within-case analysis of data from the six properties is provided in Appendix N. The following chapter is a cross-case analysis of the data collected from the 81 interviews conducted at the six properties to establish what the luxury hotel and lodge experience is.

Chapter 5: What is the luxury hotel and lodge experience?

5.1   Introduction

This chapter describes in detail what the luxury hotel and lodge experience is, based on the findings of cross-case analyses of the six properties. The themes identified in the data suggest that the luxury hotel and lodge experience is about being in the moment; opulence; the essence of the luxury hotel or lodge; the feeling of indulgence; the location and setting of the properties; the sensations and emotions of managers, employees and guests; the physical surroundings of the properties; delivering tailored attention; hospitableness; activities that can be undertaken at the properties; and guests' desires and expectations. Across all properties, regardless of whether they are hotels or lodges, the three strongest themes identified by all participants were being in the moment, opulence, and the essence of the luxury hotel and lodge. This chapter concludes with a conceptual model that explains what the luxury hotel and lodge experience is from a guest, employee and manager perspective, based on the findings of the cross-case analysis of the six properties.

5.2   Being in the moment – Theme expressed by all participants

Regardless of whether the property was a hotel or lodge, there was consensus among managers, employees and guests that the luxury hotel and lodge experience relies upon the guest being in the moment. Participants saw being in the moment as consuming the experience of the hotel and lodge itself, and the experiences that can be gained or engaged in during their stay at the hotel and lodge.

5.2.1   Managers

Hotel managers saw being in the moment as comprising both the luxury hotel experience and those experiences that guests participate in outside of the hotel during their stay. Managers also felt that what is inside the hotel and the staff interactions are important factors in the luxury hotel experience, and believed that local staff, local

furnishings and local produce help to create the whole experience for the guests (a New Zealand experience). Managers saw the experience as a flow of many different elements and touchpoints – elements that are memorable and happening throughout the stay, and that help guests to decide whether to come back or not. Managers felt that guests return to the hotel because of the experience they have at the hotel. As highlighted by Hotel Manager K:

> *"The main thing is when the customer leaves that they feel that they've had an experience here – that the experience started from the moment they walked in the door and that we do our best to make their experience based on all of their requests."* (Hotel Manager K)

The quantity and quality of facilities within the hotels add to being in the moment, for example, having a spa, and introducing new treatments such as a Whittaker's chocolate scrub and massage (a New Zealand–only product and experience). Hotel managers talked about the concierge service at the luxury hotels, and how it enables guests to have memorable experiences outside of the hotels, and that they have dedicated teams for the guests to use in order to have a great experience outside of the hotel. As described by Hotel Manager U:

> *"Those are the people who really get involved in the service and give the guests an experience. They take it from one scale of just providing a service to the next scale of providing an experience."* (Hotel Manager U)

Hotel managers explained that their staff play an important role in the luxury hotel experience and that they feel that they have a great local team (staff that are from the surrounding community) who focus on delivering personalised services to the guest. They also saw having communication with the guests before, during and after their stay as a way that their staff can interact with the guests to enhance their being in the moment during their stay. This is illustrated by the following comment by Hotel Manager M:

"Every single team member's interaction is important for a guest, and even if they don't interact directly – for example, if the room needs to be cleaned, they might not see the housekeeper, but if the room is not clean when they walk in, that could ruin the entire experience – everyone contributes to the experience for the guests." (Hotel Manager M)

A luxury experience is seen as something out of the ordinary, enveloping the guest, engaging their senses in order for them to embrace something unique. The lodge is seen as an experience for the guests, and everything that is done for the guest inside and outside of the lodge adds to the guest being in the moment. Managers view the guest's experience as starting with the initial contact, followed by the initial greeting, and continuing until the last goodbye, but they felt that they concentrate on enabling guests to experience that being in the moment feeling, and this involves everything and everyone at the lodge. As illustrated by Lodge Manager A:

"If everyone is not on the same page, the experience that the guests will get won't be the same. Because there are so many expensive places all over the world you need to have something that will stand out. And people will only remember the staff. I would say making sure that they are happy, and I think that's where it sort of starts and ends." (Lodge Manager A)

Lodge managers felt that the food at the lodges is also about being in the moment – guests can experience different dining venues inside and outside of the lodge, as portable fireplaces and specially positioned teahouses are available so that the guests can enjoy any of the many available views, and this helps to ensure that the guests have a memorable food experience. As explained by Lodge Manager S:

"The lodges, by contrast, are more of an experiential travel which is all hooked around not just the fact that you are staying in a bedroom and paying your tariff; it's more the experience that you are having, and the intimacy of the service that people can offer." (Lodge Manager S)

Being in the moment also includes the activities that are available to the guests, both in and around the property (these external activities are generally contracted out or the property retains a number of local guides permanently on their payroll). Activities include a class on atamai (the Maori word for enlightenment) with one of the local

Maori chief's sons (who gives the guests an in-depth view of Maori culture), hunting, horse riding, jetboating, a master class with a celebrity chef and a helicopter ride to other areas of New Zealand. Every single guest is matched with a specific guide to ensure that they have the best luxury experience possible.

5.2.2   Employees

Hotel employees saw being in the moment in the form of their hotel's experience and the experience that guests can take part in outside of the hotels. They felt that the experience of the hotels starts before the guests arrive at the hotels, as they contact the guests (via email) to ask them if there is anything that they want or need staff to do before they arrive, and this experience continues after the stay as they contact the guests (via email) to see how they enjoyed their experience at the hotels (gaining valuable feedback that can be used to make improvements for future stays). Employees did note that they concentrate on guests being in the moment during their stay and that the guests only have the memories of their experience to take away with them, so it is important to concentrate on the 'here and now'. As explained by Hotel Employee J:

> "*I think that guests here have a good experience and have a good time; they just enjoy themselves. It's all about being in the moment. Guests have a great time and I know I have been part of that experience.*" (Hotel Employee J)

In terms of the guests being in the moment, employees felt that they are directly involved in delivering a luxury hotel experience by having a positive attitude and giving guests flawless service. Employees felt that guests return because of their previous luxury experience at the hotels. Employees felt that they are part of their guests' luxury experience outside the hotels as they are directly or indirectly involved in organising activities that the guests participate in, and the guests share their luxury experiences with the employees that night or the next morning. As described by Hotel Employee M:

"The word is helping people – you know, working on their trips and giving them experiences. You enjoy hearing their stories about how good it was or what an amazing experience it was." (Hotel Employee M)

Lodge employees saw being in the moment as something that happens both inside and outside the lodges, and explained that being in the moment at the lodge is an experience and that it encompasses the food, the tranquillity, the relaxation, and so on. Employees described the food and beverage at the lodges as a whole meal experience, and they recognised that their chefs have all been nominated for, and have won, many awards for their food. Chefs that were interviewed explained that the standard of the food that they produce and serve at the lodges is top of the line. As illuminated by Lodge Employee D:

"It's the whole ambience of the place, and it's right through the lodge. You have to come and experience it – it's right through, from the food to the rooms. It's just the whole lodge experience." (Lodge Employee D)

Lodge employees pointed out that being in the moment includes all of the activities that are organised for the guests in order for them to experience a unique experience, for example, being helicoptered to the top of a glacier, then drinking whisky that had a lump of glacier in it that is 400 million years old, or having afternoon tea at the lodge with one of New Zealand's leading artists and talking about their paintings. As explained by Lodge Employee U:

"There are so many amazing experiences in and outside of the lodge; everything is on their doorstep. We organise everything for them, and all they have to do is turn up. Now that is really cool." (Lodge Employee U)

5.2.3 Guests

Hotel guests talked about their experience, starting from logging onto their computer to find a place to stay, but they saw being in the moment as being the stay itself, and hoping that would continue until they checked out of the hotel. Guests did feel that a luxury hotel experience is an experience that is going to be more memorable than staying at an ordinary hotel. They also saw being in the moment as consuming

experiences outside of the hotel and that those experiences can also influence their overall stay at the hotel. As highlighted by Hotel Guest X:

> "*Every experience we have had so far has met our expectations, before and during our stay; we are totally happy with every aspect of our stay.*" (Hotel Guest X)

Guests acknowledged that there is a lot involved to enable them to be in the moment at the hotels – more than they ever see or ever know about. But they saw lots of employees who did lots of things (e.g. making sure that the amenities and facilities are on hand and ready for the guests to use) in order to create the finished product, which is what the hotels offer the guests – an opportunity to experience an experience. Guests did point out that if something is missing or out of place, it makes it very difficult to experience being in the moment. As explained by Hotel Guest O:

> "*There will be so many combinations of things and people that makes that experience different for everyone – but if there is something missing from that combination it can make it an unpleasant experience – get everything right, then it will be a pleasant experience.*" (Hotel Guest O)

Lodge guests described being in the moment as doing something you would not normally do at home, taking something home with you that you could try to reproduce (e.g. the number of outdoor eating experiences that the lodge has), the elevation of your senses, and when you get home telling people about what you did. Guests felt that the luxury lodge experience comprises the accommodation, the food, the outdoors and the staff – they felt that the employees can make or break the experience at the lodge. As illustrated by Lodge Guest S:

> "*This lodge experience is not to be missed – the location, the lodge is phenomenal, the food is flawless, and the staff are amazing.*" (Lodge Guest S)

Guests explained that being in the moment is about them wanting to find out the story behind the places and people that they encounter, the result being that a connection is made. Guests pointed out that these connections develop through the experience,

making staying at the lodge special. Guests explained that being in the moment inspires them to make a connection with their surroundings, making them want to engage in everything at the lodge – for example, going to the garden, listening to the gardener, picking tomatoes for dinner that night, and knowing while you are eating dinner that you picked those tomatoes. Guests pointed out that the more instances that they are being in the moment the more engaging it is, the more luxurious it is and the more memorable it is. As explained by Lodge Guest C:

> *"We like to participate in the experience – it's one thing to be waited on, it can be very nice – but we really do like to participate. And it is also attaches you to the experience and you remember it."* (Lodge Guest C)

5.3 Opulence – Theme expressed by all participants

Regardless of whether the property was a hotel or lodge, there was consensus among managers, employees and guests that the luxury hotel and lodge experience relies upon opulence. The opulence aspect relates to the luxury part of the luxury hotel and lodge experience, making it a luxury hotel and lodge experience, as opposed to being just a hotel and lodge experience. Participants saw luxury as being traditional or contemporary, tangible or non-tangible and something more than ordinary but something that is forever changing.

5.3.1 Managers

Hotel managers saw the opulence aspect as something that costs a lot of money and something that not everyone can experience because of the cost. Managers felt that luxury can be seen in two categories – very traditional or very contemporary – and that luxury hotels fall into one of these two categories, but in all cases, a luxury hotel will go over and beyond any standard hotel. As explained by Hotel Manager X:

> *"We offer a more contemporary luxury style service; it's not a super formal style – it's great service but in a slightly more relaxed way, and that's what we suppose today's luxury traveller wants. And that's what we are aiming for, today's luxury traveller. We're not aiming for the ones that do want the top hat*

and tails; we are aiming for the ones that want fantastic, efficient service with just probably a little bit more friendly style." (Hotel Manager X)

Managers explained that luxury in luxury hotels involves many elements; luxury can be seen as meaning individualism (treating the guest as an individual), giving guests a luxury customer service and bending over backwards for them – as it is all about the guest. As highlighted by Hotel Manager M:

> *"Luxury would be acknowledging and taking the time to see the guest as an individual, and that is a very hard thing to do – but luxury means individualism."* (Hotel Manager M)

Opulence comes down to giving guests excellent service throughout their stay. As well as everything in the luxury hotel bedroom looking pristine and having luxurious products in it, opulence is seen as doing small things in the room such as having a nice bottle of wine waiting for the guest when they arrive, along with a welcome note signed personally by the general manager, small fruit bowls and a turndown service at night.

Lodge managers pointed out that the word luxury is overused, that it is not sufficiently well defined and that it means different things to different people, so managers saw luxury in the context of the lodge and being able to produce a luxury experience for their guests. Managers explained that luxury can be seen as being all about money, that it takes money to be able to produce luxury experiences, but they felt that it takes more than money to produce luxury. As explained by Lodge Manager F:

> *"I think for our guests the real luxury is in the experience and knowing that they are in a place where they are having an experience that is very rare and very unusual, and hopefully really, really special."* (Lodge Manager F)

Although managers found it hard to define luxury, they did see it as encompassing high-quality service, high-quality surroundings and high-quality food and wine. As illustrated by the following comment by Lodge Manager G:

> *"So the people are coming for an experience which is more than just a comfortable bed and room – they want a sense of wonder. They like the design*

element of a luxury lodge. They like the fact that there are different spaces for them to do different things. It's more than just a room and it's not anonymous." (Lodge Manager G)

5.3.2 Employees

Hotel employees explained that the opulence aspect is not about just doing the basics; it is about going above and beyond for your guests all of the time, taking care of them, and making sure that you are doing everything in order for them to have a luxury experience at the luxury hotels. As stated by Hotel Employee W:

> "*We are luxury – we serve the guests, take care of our guests – we create the luxury experience for our guests.*" (Hotel Employee W)

Employees saw guests wanting to stay in the best accommodation and experience the best local food and wine in the hotel's luxurious surroundings. Employees felt that luxury is expensive and not something that everyone can afford, and that it attracts a really high-end client base to the luxury hotels. As illustrated by Hotel Employee X:

> "*Luxury is – well it's about price, obviously the prices are always high, you pay good money for luxury.*" (Hotel Employee, X)

Lodge employees saw opulence as having the best of everything within the lodge, having well-trained staff and beautiful surroundings. As explained by Lodge Employee F:

> "*Luxury is the best of everything – the best toiletries, the best linens on the bed, the best food, best cleanliness, the friendliest staff who are very helpful, and beautiful surroundings.*" (Lodge Employee F)

Employees thought that the opulent aspects of the lodges are the exclusivity, that guests certainly do not have to fight for services and that those services are first class; employees suggested that guests become 'royalty' for the duration of their stay and it is the employees' role to wait on them and run after them. As highlighted by Lodge Employee H:

"The attraction is that you shouldn't be stressed at any point, you shouldn't be anxious about anything. The attraction is that exclusivity allows for guests not to have to fight for services." (Lodge Employee H)

5.3.3 Guests

Hotel guests saw opulence in the context of the hotels as being well above normal standard hotels in every way. Guests felt that the opulence of the hotel is having great facilities in which they can be pampered, enjoy themselves, feel comfortable, relaxed and de-stressed, within a great location. As explained by Hotel Guest W:

"Luxury accommodation – high-quality service, relaxing environment, a VIP experience, the best service – it's just that little bit different." (Hotel Guest W)

Guests pointed out that the hotels have to have exceptional customer service and that this is imperative for the term opulence to be met, so hotels have to have fantastic staff.

Guests knew that opulence comes at a price, and that they would be spending a lot of money, and with that there was an expectation that they would get what they paid for. This is illustrated in the following comment by Hotel Guest P:

"It's somewhere that has great facilities, a great location, luxury service, and I think that you are paying for the service in a luxury hotel on top of everything else. You are paying for something a bit more. You could stay in a hotel, but the attraction is the luxury, and people are willing to pay for that, and I think that comes in the form of service." (Hotel Guest P)

Lodge guests saw luxury as existing in two different forms: one form of luxury is the fine fixtures, gilded rooms, marble bathrooms and chandeliers; the other form is that the luxury lodge is something real and authentic, that offers very different areas to dine in, exhibits an attention to detail, provides a dramatically different calibre of staff and offers highly personalised service. As stated by Lodge Guest C:

"I think luxury is different today. The old definition was the old ballroom, the chandeliers and all of that. There is a picture in my head of my parents' dining room, and that for them was luxury. We look at that and go 'my gosh, that looks like torture'." (Lodge Guest C)

Guests believed that the lodges think about the luxury lodge experience that they want them to have, and that they have got it right, as they know that all they have to do is sit and enjoy their experience. Guests felt that luxury lodges have a better chance of getting this right than hotels do. As illustrated by Lodge Guest D:

> "*You just know that somebody was thinking about your experience for a long time to make sure they got it just right, so that you can sit here and not have to think about anything but enjoying the experience. And I think that's rare, really rare to find in a hotel.*" (Lodge Guest D)

5.4   Essence of the Luxury Hotel – Theme expressed by everyone in the hotels

There was consensus among all the participants at the hotels that the luxury hotel experience relies upon the luxury hotel itself. The essence of the luxury hotel is all of the aspects of the properties, providing everything that is required for the luxury hotel experience to be constructed.

5.4.1   Managers

Hotel managers felt that guests want to feel more pampered than they do in their own homes, that they want to be treated well, and that this should start from the moment they arrive and continue until they leave, and it is everyone's responsibility, including the guests, to ensure the guests have a luxury experience during their stay. As explained by Hotel Manager T:

> "*The hotel provides the facilities, and the management of the hotel provides the atmosphere, the experience, and the vision – this is how we are going to present it, and this is what we expect our customers to see and feel when they get here.*" (Hotel Manager T)

Managers explained that they want their guests to feel at home, or that the hotel is a home away from home. Managers felt that it is the location, the people running the hotel and the quality of the offerings within the hotel that makes a luxury hotel what it is. Managers saw guests deciding on the hotel because of the location and what is there for them to do or experience. Managers saw customer service throughout the hotel as an

important element that they have to get right all of the time to make their hotel a luxury one. As explained by Hotel Manager O:

> *"You have a beautiful hotel, you have beautiful rooms, and the guest has to be treated well. That is what you expect from a luxury hotel experience. It's also as if you're being welcomed into someone's house."* (Hotel Manager O)

5.4.2 Employees

Hotel employees saw luxury hotels as a place to which guests go to be spoiled, pampered and made to feel special, and employees felt that it is important to treat guests as individuals to make them feel like this. Employees explained that guests should have that 'wow' feeling when they arrive and be blown away with everything that is on offer to them. This is illustrated by the following comment by Hotel Employee M:

> *"You can't just do the basic level of work. You've got to go over and beyond for the guest. You've got to live up to the brand that you are working for too because you help make it be luxury."* (Hotel Employee M)

Employees thought that a luxury hotel should offer certain facilities, such as a business centre, bar, restaurant, gym, swimming pool, spa and nicely decorated rooms. Employees also saw a luxury hotel as somewhere to relax that has a lot of space and a nice view, and provides amazing service by staff that are willing to go that extra mile. As highlighted by Hotel Employee P:

> *"A luxury hotel is a five-star property, somewhere that has the 'wow' factor – you turn up and you're blown away by everything that is on offer to you."* (Hotel Employee P)

5.4.3 Guests

Hotel guests chose luxury hotels for a variety of reasons. Some wanted to go somewhere special to celebrate an important occasion, others did not want the standard hotel bed and bathroom, but wanted to have space – rooms that are big and well decorated, with lovely beds, beautiful linen, bathrooms with a spa bath and fantastic views. As stated by Hotel Guest M:

> "*Somewhere that is high end, where there is quality, and you can feel it in the ambience – it has a lovely décor, nice food, and staff who are always being hospitable and accommodating.*" (Hotel Guest M)

They wanted exceptional food and wine, to be somewhere comfortable, to be looked after, to be given special attention, and to be somewhere where there is that 'extra attention to detail' and that offers outstanding service from outstanding staff. They also mentioned that they like to be somewhere where they can have their unusual requests fulfilled. As explained by Hotel Guest A1:

> "*A luxury hotel not only offers the basics, but is outstanding in everything it offers, and can offer you something that isn't on the room service menu after midnight.*" (Hotel Guest A1)

5.5   Essence of the Luxury Lodge – Theme expressed by everyone in the lodges

There was consensus among all the participants at the lodges that the luxury lodge experience relies upon the luxury lodge itself. The essence of the luxury lodge is all of the aspects of the properties, providing everything that is required for the luxury lodge experience to be conducted.

5.5.1   Managers

The essence of the luxury lodge was a theme highlighted by all of the lodge managers. One of the lodges is owned and managed by the managers who were interviewed, and being the actual owners-managers, they have a real vested interest in the lodge itself – so they are very much involved in the 'what' and the 'how' things are done in the lodge. As explained by Lodge Manager F:

> "*It is very different, though, having an owner who does this professionally on a day-in and day-out basis, and I think that the experience for the guests is very much linked to enjoying meeting the people behind it.*" (Lodge Manager F)

Lodge managers talked about how it is all about being in a play, making sure that the settings are dramatic, and that they are setting the stage for the fantasy that is the luxury

lodge experience, where both the guests and the staff are the actors in the same play, in order to give the guest an amazing experience. As highlighted by Lodge Manager B:

> "*Both the guests and the staff are actors in the same play.*" (Lodge Manager B)

Managers discussed a 'wow factor' that they want their guests to have, and they want them to have a good impression of the lodges (especially when they first see it), and to assist in this there are many systems in place to make sure that the lodges are always immaculate. Managers explained that guests like the originality, authenticity and 'genuine' feel of the lodges. As illustrated by the following comment by Lodge Manager S:

> "*A luxury lodge is smaller, more intimate. The attraction, whether you're on business or vacation, if you're staying at the luxury end of the market, obviously it's nice to be pampered, looked after, have lovely surroundings, privacy, intimacy, and superior service due to the high ratio of staff.*" (Lodge Manager S)

5.5.2 Employees

Lodge employees saw the luxury lodge experience as being made up of all of the technical tangible (i.e. physical) aspects that guests can taste, touch, see and smell, and being able to measure this in some form – in terms of the food, the room and the surroundings in which they sit or walk and enjoy by themselves or with others. As stated by Lodge Employee T:

> "*A luxury lodge experience – I would say that every experience would be quite different and that it would be quite private, unique and small.*" (Lodge Employee T)

Employees saw the many attractions that the lodges have and why people want to stay at the lodges. One of these attractions is the exclusivity. Celebrities know they will be left alone if they stay at the lodges. Employees knew that they have to impress the guests from the moment they arrive until the moment they leave by maintaining the lodge's standards. As illustrated by Lodge Employee R:

> *"We have a lot of returning guests, and they come here because they know that they will have the level of hospitality that we give, and that everything is going to be the same – the same standard."* (Lodge Employee R)

5.5.3 Guests

Lodge guests stated that they want the best accommodation when they are away from home and they like that the lodges have a homely feel about them, and they feel as if they are staying at a friend's place. Guests explained that lodges have more of an intimate feel than a hotel. As explained by Lodge Guest V:

> *"This lodge has a much more intimate feel than the big chain hotels, and it almost feels like you are staying at a friend's place, albeit a very wealthy friend. But it does have a homely feel about it."* (Lodge Guest V)

They pointed out that the owners must have had a vision as to what they wanted the guests to experience while they are there. Guests also pointed out that they had a "wow" moment when they first arrived at the lodges and were excited and delighted to be staying there. As explained by Lodge Guest I:

> *"From the moment we drove up to those imposing gates, we knew we were in for a special experience. Driving along the tree-lined drive and then the lodge appears – it just looks majestic, and it truly is a spectacular lodge. The owners and staff were outside waiting to greet us, and you feel like you are meeting a family and staying in their country house."* (Lodge Guest I)

Having great food and an outdoor component are also seen as an important factor of the luxury lodges. Guests noted that when they are having a great experience they want to be able to take some of that experience home with them in order to recreate it in their own home. As highlighted by Lodge Guest D:

> *"Sort of breaking away from reality but then also hoping to bring something back. I like the idea that already while we've been here we found all these things that we wanted to bring into our life. So you sort of crave it, a dining experience like this at home because it's so magical."* (Lodge Guest D)

5.6 Indulgence – Theme expressed by everyone except hotel guests

There was consensus among managers and employees that the luxury hotel and lodge experience relies upon indulgence. Participants felt that indulgence is what the guests

want and what the managers and employees are there to provide them with. Guests are made to feel special, pampered and spoilt – it is what guests paid for, and what managers and employees concentrate on.

5.6.1 Managers

Managers saw the luxury hotel as a place that not everyone can afford, and that some guests have to save up for, in order to treat themselves for a special occasion (e.g. birthdays or anniversaries), to enjoy a night or a few nights of indulgence. As highlighted by Hotel Manager L:

> "*Being here isn't something that is in everybody's lives, and it's nice to treat yourself when you work hard, and I think people see it as a treat to stay here.*" (Hotel Manager L)

Hotel managers saw their guests wanting to be looked after, to feel special, to be pampered, to be able to relax, and to have their needs and wants met. Managers felt that guests want things laid out in front of them, to not have to do things for themselves, to see that nothing is a problem and to just let someone else take care of any problems. As explained by Hotel Manager U:

> "*A luxury hotel is all about a style of service that goes above and beyond for the guests, providing both facilities and service on a luxury scale. I believe that you should have the highest quality of everything so that you can make guests feel like they mean something and that they are very special.*" (Hotel Manager U)

Lodge managers saw guests wanting to be indulged and felt that it is their job to indulge them when they stay at the lodges. Managers pointed out that helicopters are the most popular way to arrive at the lodges, and this reminds them of their guests' wealth and that they expect a lot from the lodge. Managers saw this starting from the minute that the guests enter the lodge's grounds, when they try to make them feel as if they have entered a fantasy, surreal or dreamlike world. As explained by Lodge Manager A:

> "*Whatever you would like, someone can offer that to you without any problems. You won't have any difficulty being served or getting what you want if you ask for something.*" (Lodge Manager A)

Managers explained that the guests are paying a lot of money to stay at the lodges and that they expect value for money, and the amount of money that guests spend ensures that managers pay attention to detail, and that they are committed to delivering what the lodge promised – being able to satisfy the guests' wants and needs by pampering and spoiling them. As explained by Lodge Manager S:

> "*Guests come here for the intimacy, exclusivity, privacy … the high tariff of course, that is what buys all that sort of thing.*" (Lodge Manager S)

5.6.2 Employees

Hotel employees saw guests coming to the hotels in order to be spoilt and pampered because of the facilities that are on offer to them. Employees felt that guests do not need to leave the hotels and that there are many facilities ready for them to use. Employees saw guests being looked after as soon as they arrive at the hotels, with valet parking, porters to take luggage, and four to six receptionists to check guests in. As highlighted by Hotel Employee V:

> "*I guess it's just the lack of effort that the guests actually have to do, so the less they have to do the better – if we are parking their cars or taking their bags to their rooms – they relax straight away.*" (Hotel Employee V)

They felt that they show the guest how they care about them by giving them amazing service, making them feel safe, giving them privacy and making them feel important from their arrival through to their departure. As explained by Hotel Employee Z:

> "*Because every individual is different, and to be a luxury hotel experience is to connect with every individual that comes and stays at the hotel, and go above and beyond for every single guest, and then they will depart the hotel with the feeling 'oh wow', or 'this is unbelievable', or they start dreaming about your hotel – that's the experience.*" (Hotel Employee Z)

Lodge employees felt that it is their service that makes the guests feel indulged, by having an attention to detail, making sure that nothing is a problem and giving them personal attention. They explained that they are committed to delivering what was promised to the guest – that all their needs and wants would be satisfied. Employees

frequently see guests arriving by helicopter and this reminds them that their guests are

very wealthy and they expect high standards and quality, and that they are there to be

spoilt and pampered. As illustrated by the following comment by Lodge Employee S:

> "*Just being able to go somewhere a bit different. It's quiet here, and it's more
> unobtrusive than having lots of hustle and bustle around you. Just being able to
> get away, do your own thing knowing you've got privacy and you will be looked
> after.*" (Lodge Employee S)

Employees also thought that the lodges are an indulgence for local people who live near

the lodges, and that these people sometimes save up for a long time to have one night of

pure indulgence and to be completely pampered, and they generally see locals coming

to celebrate a special birthday or anniversary. As explained by Lodge Employee R:

> "*A lot of people come here, especially locals, for special occasions, like
> birthdays or anniversaries. They just want to come here for one night of pure
> indulgence, to be completely pampered.*" (Lodge Employee R)

5.6.3 Lodge guests

Lodge guests talked about arriving at the lodges by helicopters or cars with drivers –

they pointed out that arriving by helicopters gives you an amazing overview of the

lodges before you set foot in them. They also talked about the fact that the lodges are

very exclusive and like that aspect. They felt instantly welcomed by being offered a

glass of champagne (Moët & Chandon, not Lindauer) with the general managers, and

this gave them time to relax and unwind after their journey. As explained by Lodge

Guest U:

> "*We want to be pampered, to feel better about ourselves, to be more relaxed.
> The lodge isn't just another place; we want to be welcomed to a place that is
> exclusive and enjoy everything that it has to offer.*" (Lodge Guest U)

Guests wanted to be looked after, to know that things would be done for them, to

receive personalised service and to know that nothing was going to be too much trouble

to get. They saw the lodges as places to be pampered and spoilt by the staff, who they

felt were intuitive and engaging. As explained by Lodge Guest I:

"The staff are great; they are very engaging and intuitive. The suite is amazing. There are so many extra little touches here that you aren't just getting luxury accommodation but a total experience of being pampered and spoilt." (Lodge Guest I)

5.7   Location and setting – Theme expressed by everyone except lodge guests

There was consensus among all the participants, except the lodge guests, that the luxury hotel and lodge experience relies upon the location and setting of the properties. The location is New Zealand and the setting is either in a city or in the countryside, and being located in a beautiful setting helps to make the luxury experience. Even being in a city is seen as luxury. Being a New Zealand hotel and lodge was seen as a drawcard to the participants, and they felt that New Zealand offers its own luxury experience.

5.7.1   Managers

Hotel managers saw their setting, location and country as all important drawcards for the guests. Managers saw the scenery and views from the hotels as an important marketing tool, and although one hotel is situated in a city and does not have great views, they felt that their location more than makes up for that. As explained by Hotel Manager U:

> *"Well, we're still luxury and we don't have great views, but you know we have the facilities, amenities and location to support it."* (Hotel Manager U)

Managers felt that making sure their surroundings are clean and tidy all of the time gives the guests a good first impression. As explained by Hotel Manager W:

> *"You have guests who are visiting New Zealand for the first time, so you are not only giving them an experience of a luxury hotel, you are also giving them an experience of the entire country."* (Hotel Manager W)

Lodge managers saw their location, setting and the country as drawcards for the guests for many reasons. As explained by Lodge Manager R:

> *"Coming to New Zealand they stay in a luxury lodge and they see the best side of New Zealand, where they see the best side of us through us as the staff, or the*

nature of the country and the food and the region, the wine, and everything – it's the whole package." (Lodge Manager R)

Lodge managers will show guests the exact spot where the photographs for their websites were taken and explain why they were taken there. Managers described the locations of the lodges as being situated on the doorstep of a world heritage site, in an isolated area, in one of the most romantic places in New Zealand and in the middle of one of the most breathtaking areas for scenery and views. As illustrated by the following comment by Lodge Manager S:

> "*Here is precisely where they take one of those photographs. Probably 75% of the images that are used internationally by Tourism New Zealand to convey what New Zealand is about are taken in this area. So that's that location, and we are right in the centre of it.*" (Lodge Manager S)

5.7.1 Employees

Hotel employees saw guests being attracted to their hotel location for different reasons. One hotel is located in a city centre, and employees felt that where they are located is the biggest drawcard to guests coming by car, as they can go straight from the hotel onto one of the main highways taking them north or south. But employees were quick to point out that a city centre can still give their guests that homely feel. As stated by Hotel Employee W:

> "*The location – the location is really central to the city centre, and the environment they feel like they are just at home.*" (Hotel Employee W)

Other hotels are located outside of towns, and employees felt that their setting gives guests amazing scenery and views from their bedrooms. All employees felt that they are representing New Zealand, and if it is the only place or the first place guests visit, it is up to them to give them a positive and warm welcome to the country. As stated by Hotel Employee P:

> "*We offer up something different from what's in the rest of the town. It's a bit more of a relaxed atmosphere out here – in town it can get very crowded and a younger vibe – you see a lot of times in the news of disorderly action in town. I*

think for our guests it's quite a nice experience to have this village which is a much nicer family environment – but still close enough to the city." (Hotel Employee P)

The location and setting were seen as one reason why guests come to the lodges. As highlighted by Lodge Employee H:

"*It all builds to a point where it all comes together so you are suddenly sitting in one of the most romantic places in New Zealand, whether that be inside the lodge or anywhere around the grounds, being served New Zealand wines with local foods.*" (Lodge Employee H)

Lodge employees saw the location of the lodges as being the reason why guests come to the lodges. The reasons include that it is located in an isolated area (and is exclusive) so celebrities like this aspect (as they are just left alone), it has been involved in the filming of a particular movie, it is located near to a national park or they just want to enjoy the peace and tranquillity of the grounds itself. As explained by Lodge Employee S:

"*It's the location. A lot of people want to come up this way because they have seen* The Lord of the Rings*, or they have seen the scenery on TV, or word of mouth.*" (Lodge Employee S)

5.7.2   Hotel guests

Hotel guests were interested in where hotels are situated, and wanted certain locations. For example, some guests wanted a hotel that is situated somewhere clean, peaceful and quiet, while other guests wanted the hotel to be in the heart or near a town or city to participate in activities or events. As illustrated by Hotel Guest Y:

"*For me it is where this hotel is situated. So it really is about location.*" (Hotel Guest Y)

Guests were interested in what facilities the hotel has, if it is branded, or what its reputation is like. The purpose of the visit also had a lot to do with where guests wanted to stay, with some guests staying in the city hotel because of work commitments, and guests in hotels near towns were there for a holiday with their partners or family. As stated by Hotel Guest K:

"We just looked on the Internet; we had a list of things we wanted our accommodation to have, and thought that it had everything we needed for our holiday – location, nice rooms, and a spa. And it is turning out to be a fantastic experience for me and my partner." (Hotel Guest K)

5.8 Sensations and emotions – Theme expressed by hotel managers, all employees, all guests

There was consensus among the hotel managers, all employees and all guests that the luxury hotel and lodge experience relies upon sensations and emotions. Sensations and emotions are what managers and employees felt that they themselves go through during the experience when interacting with each other and while interacting with the guests during service delivery. Sensations and emotions is also what guests felt – their emotions and feelings towards the properties, service personnel and the tangible aspects of the luxury hotel and lodge experience.

5.8.1 Hotel managers

Hotel managers talked about their sensations and emotions and how these enable them to interact with the guests and employees. As explained by Hotel Manager H:

> *"I think that I'm lucky 'cause I'm a people person and I enjoy the interaction and I'm very interested where people have come from, and I guess with all my travel I've generally got something to discuss with them 'cause I've probably been to their country or been to their city. I am continually telling the team where they [the guests] have come from, you know, 'interact with them', and I think that's the emotional part of our job is actually enjoying people, enjoying their stories."* (Hotel Manager H)

Managers talked about revisiting the day in their heads when they finish their day to see whether the guests will have enjoyed the experience. They felt that if they 'stood in their guests' shoes' they could make the experience better. Managers explained that what they feel makes them better managers is that they are experiencing the hotel as the guest is. As illustrated by Hotel Manager V:

> *"I feel happy when I am giving service to a guest. I'll try to understand what they want, what they actually need. I smile and try to meet the expectation of the guests."* (Hotel Manager V)

5.8.2 Employees

Hotel employees talked about how happy they are serving their guests and that they get pleasure from giving their guests a great experience. As highlighted by Hotel Employee A1:

> "*When you're serving a guest and you make them feel special, you feel that satisfaction – I wouldn't be in the industry if I wasn't passionate about it.*" (Hotel Employee A1)

Having positive emotions and feelings helps the employees do a better job and they felt that their passion for their job shows through when they are serving their guests. This was illustrated by the following comment by Hotel Employee Z:

> "*That you are happy, you feel that you are part of something bigger, and it's not just the service; it's the whole hospitality. It's a satisfying feeling.*" (Hotel Employee Z)

Lodge employees explained that they enjoy their work environment and work in good teams, they are cared for in their own place and this rubs off on them, making them feel happy and 'lucky' to have their jobs, and they give their guests exactly the same feeling back. As illustrated by Lodge Employee A:

> "*I think we're a very good team, I have a very beautiful office, I get to try everything, learn a lot, meet guests, and I have learnt so much about other places – it's just a real experience for me being with the team and the guests. I have met a lot of interesting people.*" (Lodge Employee A)

Lodge employees explained that they gain great pleasure and satisfaction from serving their guests, and that they are involved in giving their guests great pleasure and satisfaction from the experience they are involved in. As explained by Lodge Employee H:

> "*You get pleasure from serving people. I don't just cook for them, I serve them as well and explain every course. So the satisfaction they get they normally convey that, and that just gives me a really good sense of satisfaction and happiness that you are doing the right thing, and you're actually giving someone an experience that is pleasurable.*" (Lodge Employee H)

5.8.3 Guests

Hotel guests explained that there are always certain expectations of their experiences and that these expectations are met, exceeded or failed to be met. As explained by Hotel Guest I:

> *"What you expect is superior rooms, good food, good service, good facilities, and that it is situated in a good location."* (Hotel Guest I)

The emotions they experience during their stay impact how the guests feel about their overall experience. Guests were interviewed during their experience and had not had time to process or 'remember' the experience – but what they felt at the time is very important. As stated by Hotel Guest J:

> *"I feel relaxed. I have been able to do a lot of relaxing. I feel comfortable and at peace with the surroundings – they are beautiful. I also feel safe, and that the staff are very approachable."* (Hotel Guest J)

Lodge guests talked of having anticipations about their stay, hoping that the lodge would live up to their expectations. Returning lodge guests had built up a certain amount of anticipation before their stay, and they wanted their stay to be as good as the previous time. As explained by Lodge Guest C:

> *"Well I was feeling anticipation because I had been here before and I just couldn't wait to bring my wife and our friends – I was hoping it was as good as it was 12 years ago."* (Lodge Guest C)

Guests pointed out that the employees, the managers and other guests could affect what they feel during their stay. They also stated that what they feel during their stay is also part of the purpose for staying at the lodge. As illustrated by Lodge Guest V:

> *"Basically people who want to have the experience they feel that for whatever reason that they want to be pampered and feel better about themselves, and at the end a bit more relaxed. It's not just another place to stay, you are actually going there for a reason."* (Lodge Guest V)

5.9 External activities – Theme expressed by everyone in the hotels

There was consensus among all the participants in the hotels that the luxury hotel experience also relies upon activities that are organised outside of the hotels. External activities were seen as the experiences encountered or participated in outside of the hotel, but they still impact on the overall luxury hotel experience because, whether these activities are successful or unsuccessful, the experience cannot or will not be separated from the overall luxury hotel experience.

5.9.1 Managers

Hotel managers realise that the guests come to stay at their hotels so that they can participate in activities outside of the hotels. They explained that sometimes they are at the mercy of the weather and have to organise inside activities for the guests to participate in. For example, one hotel has an in-house cinema and other hotels put on specially themed lunches and dinners. As explained by Hotel Manager N:

> "*You have to have enough to keep your guests occupied if the weather isn't good. That's important because if they come to a luxury property and it snows non-stop for five days there has to be as much to do inside as there is outside.*" (Hotel Manager N)

They also saw their concierge teams as crucial components of the guests' stay, as they are the ones who organise the activities outside of the hotel. As explained by Hotel Manager J:

> "*The concierge team here are great – they don't just book an activity for guests that give them the best commission – they will make sure it's something the guest really wants to do.*" (Hotel Manager J)

5.9.2 Employees

Hotel employees saw guests coming to their hotels so they can participate in an activity or event. Employees recommend things for guests to do, or organise it for them. As explained by Hotel Employee I:

> "*We have a concierge team who will organise your activities so all you have to do is ask. So it's a really relaxed laid-back holiday.*" (Hotel Employee I)

Employees saw how the weather affects what guests can and cannot do, and are involved in organising other things for them to do in the hotels. They saw guests taking full advantage of where they are located. As illustrated by Hotel Employee Q:

> "*I suppose the location is fantastic. If you look out on a day like today – there isn't many places better in terms of location of the mountains for skiing and for many other activities.*" (Hotel Employee Q)

5.9.3 Guests

Guests of the hotel in the city centre did not talk about scenery or views but about the ease of getting to many places outside of the hotel, and they also talked about the activities and events that they participated in while they were staying in the hotel. As stated by Hotel Guest J:

> "*We are having a lovely time here … the ease of getting to places and doing some activities.*" (Hotel Guest J)

Guests of the other hotels talked about the scenery and views as well as the weather and how it increased their enjoyment of the activities they undertook during their stay. As illustrated by Hotel Guest P:

> "*We were just taking some time out and thought Quiettown* would be a fun place to go to, as you can do as much or as little as you like, while you are here.*" (Hotel Guest P)

> *Pseudonym

5.10 Guests' desires and expectations – Theme expressed by everyone in the hotels

There was consensus among all the participants in hotels that the luxury hotel experience relies upon what the guests desire and their expectations. Hotel experiences seem to be more prescribed but dedicated to delivering what their guests desire by following company guidelines, and hotel guests knew what to expect from hotels and anything other than that fell short of their expectations.

5.10.1 Managers

Hotel managers felt that guests want to be treated as individuals and that they are valued. Managers explained that guests want a high level of personalised service from the staff, and for staff to be able to read or second-guess what they want or need without them asking for it – staff should be looking after their every whim. As explained by Hotel Manager Y:

> "*Our philosophy here is to get closer to guests, which is to understand what people need – don't treat them all the same way, just see what each person wants, and then go and deliver the service.*" (Hotel Manager Y)

Managers saw that staying in touch with guests throughout their stay is a way to make the guests feel special, and managers explained that guests are contacted (via email) before they arrive, and that there are certain touchpoints throughout the stay when guests are contacted, and even after their stay they are contacted again (via email). As illustrated by Hotel Manager A1:

> "*The most important touchpoint is when our guests pull up outside. If we get the first touchpoint right, then the rest of the touchpoints don't need to be so necessarily prominent.*" (Hotel Manager A1)

5.10.2 Employees

Hotel employees felt that what guests want is friendly, helpful, nice staff that will do as much as they can to make their stay as stress free and easy for them, and have some connection with them. Employees felt that guests want great service, to be able to relax, to know that someone is looking after them, to be treated well and that nothing is a problem. As stated by Hotel Employee J:

> "*They want full service, nothing to be a problem – don't say no, no matter what they want, you can always work it out. They want people to look after them and make them feel special during their stay.*" (Hotel Employee J)

Employees explained that guests want to be treated as individuals and that this makes them feel special rather than just another number. As stated by Hotel Employee L:

"Guests want to be treated as individuals – if they want to be just a number they could stay at a motel. But if they come to a luxury hotel they want to be treated special – like a king." (Hotel Employee L)

5.10.3 Guests

What hotel guests expected was to receive the pampering that is associated with luxury hotels, being treated to the best of everything, and to have all their desires met by helpful, friendly staff that make them feel special. This is illustrated by the following comment by Hotel Guest W:

"Not having to ask for anything, staff going that extra mile and having an interest in you, and making sure that everything is ok for you." (Hotel Guest W)

Guests wanted those little touches in their room, for example, turndown service at night and an amazing view from their bedroom. Guests also expected a place of relaxation, rejuvenation and comfort, and an attention to detail – that it is peaceful, quiet, relaxing and has fantastic facilities (e.g. great restaurants with different cuisines). As highlighted by Hotel Guest K:

"That a luxury hotel makes you feel special and allows you to feel more relaxed due to the facilities and amenities that surround you." (Hotel Guest K)

5.11 Physical surroundings – Theme expressed by everyone at the lodges

There was consensus among all the participants at the lodges that the luxury lodge experience relies upon the physical surroundings of the lodges. The physical surroundings of the lodge are the grounds, the scenery and the views. Having amazing grounds and scenery and a fantastic view helps to make it a luxury experience.

5.11.1 Managers

Lodge managers explained that they make sure that the physical surroundings of the lodges are maintained regularly because it is one of the first things that the guests see when they arrive at the lodges by car or helicopter. As explained by Lodge Manager G:

"It's when you stand up here at the house and look down on it you have this sense of vastness of the lawn, and you can tell a lot of effort has gone into

creating something special, to make a small amount feel like a special moment, imbue it with that sense of emotion." (Lodge Manager G)

Managers pointed out that there are teams of gardeners who look after the lodge's surroundings and that the guests can be taken on garden tours or just left alone to enjoy a walk around, or they can enjoy a picnic lunch or a five-course degustation dinner in the lodge's gardens. As stated by Lodge Manager G:

> "*Even just to take people out to the garden I think that is probably somewhat of a 'wow' factor (I know that sounds prattish).*" (Lodge Manager G)

One of the lodges has a produce garden, and it is 80% self-sustaining. They felt that this gives them a unique aspect, and they market this factor to their guests.

5.11.2 Employees

Lodge employees saw the physical surrounds as an area that they maintain and an area in which they look after the guests – making sure that they have what they want or need while walking, reading, sitting, eating, swimming or playing games. Lodge employees saw the physical surroundings of the lodges as an important aspect for the guests, and saw guests enjoying the grounds of the lodges. As explained by Lodge Employee U:

> "*It's what is on offer outside the lodge – the view that you get when you are inside this lodge – you are on the doorstep of some of the most beautiful places in New Zealand.*" (Lodge Employee U)

But employees could also see that the physical surrounds of the lodge can and will provide for the guests, because the lodge can grow its own produce. As highlighted by Lodge Employee G:

> "*The food here is simple but it's very fresh as we grow most of our own, and we also have our own pigs.*" (Lodge Employee G)

5.11.3 Guests

Lodge guests talked about the scenery and views that the lodges has, and that there are many areas in and around the lodges that they can enjoy (general seating areas, dining rooms, terraces, bedrooms, gardens, etc.). As highlighted by Lodge Guest I:

"I do love the beautiful gardens. It was the first, and I think it will be my lasting impression of this lodge – they are amazing." (Lodge Guest I)

The lodges have outdoor swimming pools, spas, croquet pitches and pétanque pitches for the guests to use. Guests enjoyed the physical surroundings of the lodges in various ways, such as taking walks in the gardens, taking a guided tour of the gardens and having picnics, lunch, afternoon tea or dinner in the gardens. This is illustrated by the following comment by Lodge Guest H:

"The meals are all made with local produce and many ingredients come from the lodge's gardens. I enjoy the beautiful grounds here. I enjoy being able to walk over the estate, to just take some time out in the gardens." (Lodge Guest H)

5.12 Delivering tailored attention – Theme expressed by everyone in the lodges

There was consensus among all the participants in the lodges that the luxury lodge experience relies upon delivering tailored attention. Lodges seem to have more autonomy regarding what managers and employees can do, and they felt it is important to tailor their attention to the guests. Guests felt that because of the size and structure of lodges they could deliver tailored attention to them.

5.12.1 Managers

One of the most important aspects of the lodge manager's job is to give the guests commitment and deliver to guests the tailored attention they expect. Managers communicate this important aspect to the rest of the employees. Examples that were given are understanding guests' dietary requirements and their medical conditions, and these were seen as easy things to find out from the guest. As explained by Lodge Manager Q:

"From the guest's perspective, anything from a dietary requirement to medical condition to anything that we know about, and making sure that everyone else knows about them. And also that the staff are in communication with themselves and their guests." (Lodge Manager Q)

But managers also felt that guests want them to be able to give them things without having to ask for them. Managers felt that they can read or anticipate what a guest requires in order to surprise or delight them, to show that the managers understand and know what the guests want. As explained by Lodge Manager S:

> "*So that's a personal identification with those people to try and see what's going to press their buttons. And that is something that flows through all of my staff. They have that ability to be able to recognise what it is that those people are here for and then identify with that and then try and turn that into an experience that is going to dovetail and fit with them.*" (Lodge Manager S)

5.12.2 Employees

Lodge employees pointed out that the owners of the lodges are very clear as to what the employees' responsibilities are towards the guests. They are aware that 'we never say no' (to the guests), and employees explained that this had been related to them as meaning 'whatever the guest asks for we get it for them'. Employees said that they understand this, but it could be a challenge for them. As illustrated by Lodge Employee R:

> "*What is important is that what guests expect when they come here is what they get, and that is our responsibility.*" (Lodge Employee R)

Employees knew that they are depended upon to commit and deliver tailored attention to the guests during their stay at the lodges and they have to make sure that the guests are satisfied with the service. Employees felt that they are able to do this by reading their guests and just picking up on their cues – so they are able to give them what they want or need without asking. This is illustrated by the following comment by Lodge Employee G:

> "*As soon as you arrive through those white gates you're now in our care. If you need anything, want anything, it's done at the drop of a hat. We have enough staff here to provide any form of assistance.*" (Lodge Employee G)

5.12.3 Guests

Guests saw that they were extremely well looked after from the minute that they arrived, and they liked being personally met by the staff: one example given was, as the guests got out of the helicopter, a couple that was travelling with them were returning guests, and this was acknowledged by the staff, and they could see that that made the couple feel special. As highlighted by Lodge Guest T:

> "*We were welcomed personally by the lovely staff as we got out of the helicopter – one of the couples travelling with us were returning guests – this was acknowledged by the staff – you could tell that made them feel very special.*"
> (Lodge Guest T)

Guests felt that every comfort and convenience was provided and that no detail had been overlooked and nothing was ever too much trouble. Guests explained that they liked the fact the chefs knew exactly what they wanted for every course every night and that the wine pairing was perfect too. As stated by Lodge Guest U:

> "*Having good staff who know exactly what you want and what you need.*"
> (Lodge Guest U)

5.13 Hospitableness – Theme expressed by everyone at the lodge

There was consensus among everyone at the lodges that the luxury lodge experience relies upon hospitableness. Hospitableness was seen as managers and employees looking after the well-being of their guests, and guests recognised them doing this for them.

5.13.1 Managers

Lodge managers saw it as their job to make sure that everyone that the guests come into contact with is extremely hospitable and treats them like a family member. Lodge managers also encouraged everyone to build relationships during the guests' stay and that everyone built on this during guests' subsequent stays at the lodges. As illustrated by Lodge Manager G:

> *"Well, good hospitality is always made possible by the people that put energy into it – experiences are generally things that are people driven; it's that kind of human connection that produces that emotion."* (Lodge Manager G)

They felt that this is an important element of the guests' well-being – that they feel they are in a very hospitable environment and that they feel the hospitableness of the staff. As stated by Lodge Manager B:

> *"Like me, every one of my staff members takes the same level of regard in – has the same level of interest in the well-being of the guests. Whether it's my gardeners or my kitchen hand or myself – it makes no difference, and they are all expected to interact with guests when the opportunity arises."* (Lodge Manager B)

5.13.2 Employees

Lodge employees felt that they have to understand their guests in order to give them the best luxury experience possible, and they felt that giving them hospitality is not enough; it is just going that one step further. As stated by Lodge Employee A:

> *"An important aspect with the guest – I think getting to know them and fulfilling their needs or just finding out when they want to talk. I think that I can find out a lot of information – I can find out things about the guest that matters."* (Lodge Employee A)

Employees felt that they are looking after the guests' well-being while they are staying at the lodge, not just them in their room, so it is important to understand what guests anticipate and expect from a luxury lodge experience. As explained by Lodge Employee G:

> *"It's not just about you staying the night, we don't just care about you and the bedroom, we care about you and your overall experience in this particular area of New Zealand."* (Lodge Employee G)

5.13.3 Guests

Lodge guests talked about the high level of hospitableness that they received while staying at the lodges. They felt a warm atmosphere and that the managers and employees worked as a team, and that all contact with managers and employees was excellent, and that they made them feel as if they were staying with family or friends at

the lodges as they took an interest in them and what they were feeling. As stated by Lodge Guest F:

> "*The owners create a warm atmosphere – enjoying pre-drinks and canapés in the drawing room with the owners and other guests.*" (Lodge Guest F)

Lodge guests also felt that they could just take it easy, as the managers and employees were doing all the hard work for them, all in an extremely hospitable environment. As explained by Lodge Guest S:

> "*I think there is a lot involved in creating an experience. I think that you would need staff who are discreet, professional, knowledgeable and extremely hospitable.*" (Lodge Guest S)

5.14 Model One – The luxury hotel and lodge experience
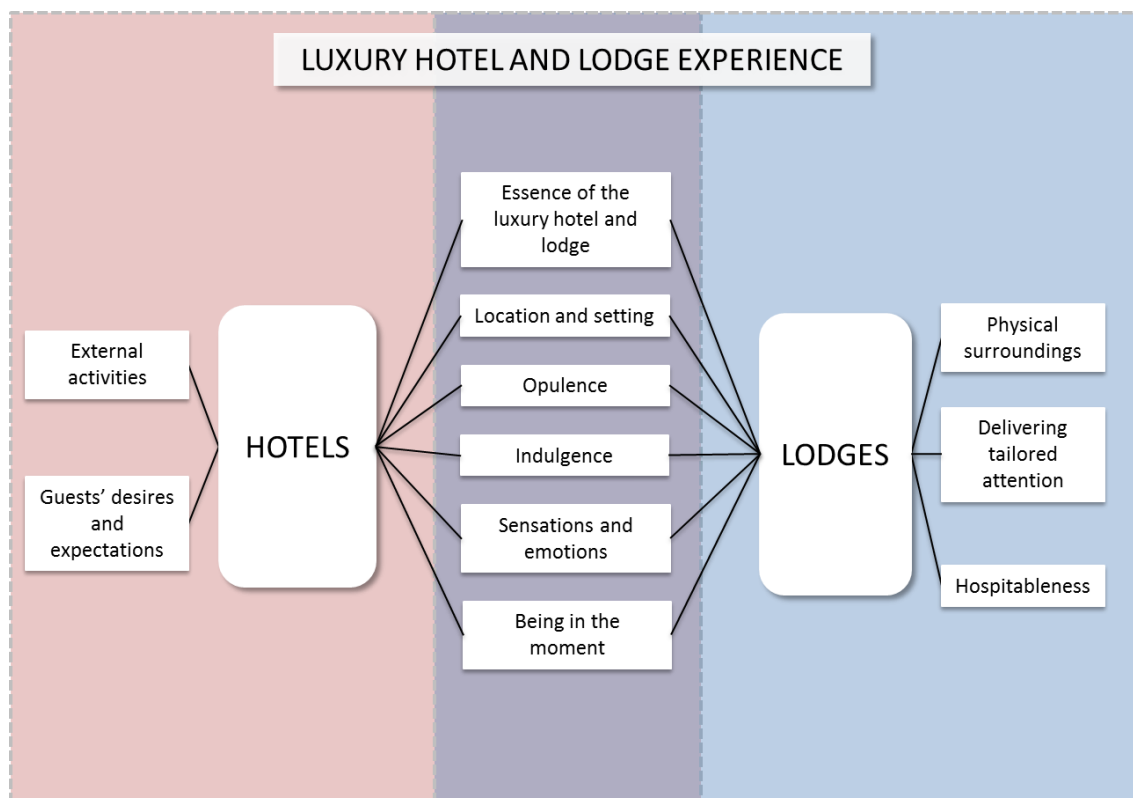
Figure 2: The luxury hotel and lodge experience model

Figure 2 presents a model of the luxury hotel and lodge experience, based on the empirical research undertaken. The centre of the model represents the participants' collective opinions on what they consider the most essential elements in a successful

luxury hotel or lodge experience. Essentially, one may consider this a holistic 'blueprint' for building a successful luxury hotel and lodge experience. On the left are two additional elements that are considered unique to the hotels studied, and on the right are three additional elements that are considered unique to the lodges studied.

The central block commences with the element *essence of the luxury hotel and lodge*, and this includes all the foundation aspects of the properties, including the exceptional standards that are the point of difference between an ordinary hotel or lodge and a luxury hotel or lodge. *Location and setting* in this model relates to luxury hotels and lodges being located in attractive sites with beautiful surroundings, whether city or countryside based. The participants conceded the fact that New Zealand has a distinct advantage as it is already globally recognised by the more discerning tourists as a unique holiday destination for its diversity of landscapes, locations and entertainment, and as having an established luxury status. *Opulence* encompasses the various special components that define a luxury venue; venues missing some or all of these components would be considered 'ordinary'. The degree of opulence defines the standard of the luxury experience.

Indulgence is the confluence between the guests' expectations, desires and requirements and the staff's capability and willingness to satisfy their guests – guests can be made to feel special, pampered and spoilt with the input and cooperation of the entire staff. Participants described the emotional aspects associated with peer interactivity and guest interaction, and being able to provide excellent standards of service by having the 'right tools' and operating environment. 'Getting it right' enhances their own sense of satisfaction and personal fulfilment. The guests' *sensations and emotions* are experienced from a different perspective: here they are judging the property, the staff and all the tangible aspects promoted and supported by the hotel or lodge. And in the end, and most importantly, the client never felt 'short-changed' or neglected. Finally,

the remaining element, that of *being in the moment*, involves how the guests view the luxury hotel or lodge as a 'lived experience', which does not include any preconceived ideas or retrospective judgements. Hospitality and accommodation are lived experiences, and there is an inseparability that means that the production and consumption of these services are interconnected. They are perishable because they are services that cannot be stored for sale at a later opportunity, so the properties have only one opportunity to impress their guests – there are no second chances.

The two unique elements of luxury hotels are *external activities* and *guests' desires and expectations.* External activities, often listed by hotels as 'things to do', refer to activities conducted outside of the hotel environments. In probability, the activity will be arranged by the hotel concierge team and outsourced to a third party, a business neither owned nor controlled by the hotel. Regardless of whether the activity is conducted by a third party or not, an unfavourable outing will often have a negative impact on the overall luxury hotel experience. Hotels in general deliver more prescriptive experiences; they are dedicated to delivering what their guests expect and desire as interpreted by the hotel's operating standards and performance specification, providing those expectations and desires can be satisfied while operating within the hotel's guidelines.

The three unique elements of luxury lodges are *physical surroundings*, *delivering tailored attention* and *hospitableness*. Luxury lodges are often located in relatively remote sites with rugged topography and stunning scenery. The facilities, on the other hand, are anything but rugged or Spartan; in fact, most are the last word in luxury. It would also appear that staff in these facilities are able to exercise a greater degree of autonomy, and as a consequence, have greater flexibility, so they can effectively deliver tailored attention to individual guests, further enhancing the luxury experience. Hospitableness is a general concept implying that all guests are well catered to and that

their well-being is a paramount feature of the luxury lodge experience. To be a successful luxury property, the guests must recognise and acknowledge these endeavours.

5.15 Conclusion

In conclusion, after discussing the themes that were found from analysing the data collected by the researcher, a conceptual model was produced. This was undertaken to give the researcher and the reader a visual understanding of what the luxury hotel and lodge experience comprises. It also fulfils the second last aim of this research, which was to propose a conceptual model explaining what the luxury hotel and lodge experience is, using case studies from New Zealand. The following chapter is a cross-case analysis of the data collected from the 81 interviews conducted at the six properties in order to analyse how the luxury hotel and lodge experience is created.

Chapter 6: How is the luxury hotel and lodge experience created?

6.1 Introduction

This chapter explains in detail how the luxury hotel and lodge experience is created, based on the findings of the cross-case analysis of the six properties. The themes identified in the data suggest that the luxury hotel and lodge experience is created through setting the stage, the ethos of the properties, the actors' performance, co-creation between the participants, guidance, comparisons of the properties, domestic and international comparisons, the brand's values and beliefs, and projecting an image. Across all properties, regardless of whether they are lodges or hotels, the four strongest themes identified by all participants are setting the stage, the ethos of the property, the actors' performance and co-creation between the participants. This chapter concludes with a conceptual model that explains how the luxury hotel and lodge experience is created from a guest, employee and manager perspective, based on the findings of the cross-case analysis of the six properties.

6.2 Setting the stage – Theme expressed by all participants

Regardless of whether the property was a hotel or lodge, there was consensus among managers, employees and guests that the creation of the luxury hotel and lodge experience relies upon setting the stage. Setting the stage involves all of the tangible aspects of the hotel and lodge that the participants interact with (the foundations of the stay, the stepping stones), and if these aspects are not present, there can be no creation of experience, as the stay depends on the basics being present and being right.

6.2.1 Managers

Setting the stage is more regimented in the hotels, as they are governed by brand standards and standards of procedure that are laid out in manuals. As highlighted by Hotel Manager L:

"*I think there are 190 brand standards in total.*" (Hotel Manager L)

These standards and procedures make it easier for international chains to standardise their services and offerings, as staff are trained to a very specific brand level standard and have a permanent reference to consult in terms of all aspects of the hotel's operations, in order to keep standards unified. This is illustrated by the following comment by Hotel Manager L:

> "*The actual thread count is very specific, so that is a worldwide standard, so everything is the same. What is on the top of the bed is what we call a super topper, it sits on the bed, it's a brand standard.*" (Hotel Manager L)

Lodge managers also felt that by setting the stage they can use this as a springboard from which everything enables guests to have their luxury lodge experience – the basics have to be there, and they have to be well maintained and in perfect condition all of the time in order for the guests to have a luxury experience. As Lodge Manager E stated:

> "*You set a benchmark for service and how to do things at a certain level, and that's quite rigorously enforced by a number of checks and balances.*" (Lodge Manager E)

Lodge managers saw guests coming to the lodges for a luxury experience, and they recognised that the luxury experience is much more than just a comfortable room, fine fixtures and fittings, or good food or service, or top-class amenities and facilities. But all of these had to be present to enable the luxury lodge to set the stage and offer the guests a luxury experience. As explained by Lodge Manager Q:

> "*I think that it's the entire package. And I think each guest will find a different part more important to them, but I think the important thing is that the package is right. Everything about it from the dining to the bedroom to the activities to the facilities to the service.*" (Lodge Manager Q)

6.2.2 Employees

Hotel employees listed the 'basic' requirements that they felt guests would expect in the form of good service and nice furnishings throughout the hotel (including the bedrooms). Employees also listed the 'basic' amenities and facilities that they felt

guests would expect luxury hotels to have, which generally included a health and fitness spa facility, and they pointed out that all of these basic requirements, amenities and facilities enable them to create a luxury hotel experience for the guests. Hotel Employee X illustrated this point when saying:

> "*The main thing for a luxury hotel experience for the guest is the staff in the hotel. But also the facilities, the nicely decorated rooms, the food, the bar, the gym, the swimming pool, the spa – and the location – all of this helps us to create the luxury hotel experience.*" (Hotel Employee X)

Food, bars and the actual location of the luxury hotel were also seen as part of the basic elements that set the stage for the guests. As explained by Hotel Employee O:

> "*Well, five-star luxury gives good quality service, good food, nice surroundings and furnishing. All the comforts and all the service is of a top standard.*" (Hotel Employee O)

Lodge employees felt that the luxury lodge experience for the guests comprised the whole picture – the overall effect – and that there are some basic things that have to be included and maintained to keep this image perfect at all times. As highlighted by Lodge Employee B:

> "*Because often it's not what they expect, it's better than what they expect – and it's the whole picture, it's the food, the setting, the accommodation, the service and the location.*" (Lodge Employee B)

The overall effect included the accommodation, the fixtures and fittings, the amenities and facilities, the food and the service – all of these have to be of a very high standard, and well maintained in order for guests to enjoy their luxury experience and not be affected by poor service, bad food, missing amenities or facilities, or broken or damaged fixtures and fittings in the lodge or the guests' bedrooms. As Lodge Employee D stated:

> "*Just the experience of the lodge, the standard of the rooms, the service, the lodge, the food, it's all got to be up at that level so that guests think 'wow'. It's a big ask, but that is what we do.*" (Lodge Employee, D)

6.2.3 Guests

Hotel guests talked about the essentials, or the bare minimum, that they expect from a luxury hotel, and this was very much based on their room and what they expect to be in their room. Guests also wanted the luxury hotels to have nicely decorated public areas. As stated by Hotel Guest O:

> "*Staying in a glamorous comfortable room that has a lovely comfortable big bed with nice linen, and a bathroom that has a spa room. A luxury hotel would have a nice restaurant or restaurants, and would have a beautiful lobby.*" (Hotel Guest O)

Guests listed what amenities and facilities they expected from a luxury hotel, and although food is not included in the tariff for a hotel stay, guests expected luxury hotels to have a restaurant or restaurants that are able to cater to them by offering a variety of cuisines. As illustrated by Hotel Guest Q:

> "*An excellent hotel in a wonderful location, good service, good food, overall good value, somewhere just to have a great stay. Somewhere where the rooms are spacious, with comfortable beds, super kings at least, and bathrooms that are spacious with spa baths.*" (Hotel Guest Q)

Lodge guests discussed what 'basics' they expect the lodge to have, and these include the other buildings that the lodges have, their bedrooms, the food, the services, the facilities the lodges have to offer, and the activities that the lodges had organised for them in and out of the lodge. As stated by Lodge Guest V:

> "*We chose to come here as there is everything we need – there is a games room, a den with a bar, a gym if you feel like exercising after all of the amazing food you are fed here, the spa, and a great room with a fire at your back and an amazing view.*" (Guest V)

Food is included in the luxury lodge experience and is considered part of the 'basics', and was seen as part of setting the stage at the lodge. Many of the guests discussed the 'meal experience' as being the highlight or one of the highlights of their stay. As Lodge Guest G stated:

"Dinner is one of the ultimate experiences of Gamma* lodge. Meals are all made of local produce, and many ingredients are out of the Gamma* garden. The meal is an experience in itself, each course is explained fully before it is served and there is a wine match with every course. So to me this is a true dining experience." (Lodge Guest G)

*Pseudonym

6.3   Ethos of the property – Theme expressed by all participants

Regardless of whether the property was a hotel or lodge, there was consensus among managers, employees and guests that the creation of the luxury hotel and lodge experience relies upon the ethos of the property. The Ethos of the property is seen as the vision or mission statement that the business or owners espouse in order to indicate to guests and staff what they can expect to experience during the duration of their stay or employment.

6.3.1   Managers

Hotel managers explained that because of the size and hierarchy of their hotel companies, there are many layers and people involved in executing their vision/mission statement. But they did suggest that they would do everything within their means to ensure guests are happy. As illustrated by Hotel Manager I:

"My understanding of a luxury hotel is that 'no' is not part of our guest services vocabulary: it's all about being customer service focused." (Hotel Manager I)

Hotel managers knew what their hotel's vision/mission statements are, and they knew that they have to deliver what those statements promise to their guests, employees and themselves. As highlighted by Hotel Manager L:

"We don't say 'no'; people don't say 'no' in a luxury experience." (Hotel Manager L)

Lodge managers explained that their owners are very involved in how the lodge experience should be executed throughout the lodges, and owners see the lodges as an extension of their own homes, and that is exactly how they want their guests to feel – 'at

home', and that nothing is a problem to do or organise for them. They explained that this means that they cannot say 'no' to the guests (except in extreme circumstances, perhaps involving requests that were illegal). As indicated by Lodge Manager A:

> "*The owner and his perception of what he wants people to experience. And then you'll need the people that actually operate on what his vision is. And that is why we are so lucky with our owner – he's got a vision and he allows us to do that vision, he knows we don't say 'no', and that helps us make sure that everyone is on the same page.*" (Lodge Manager A)

Lodge managers who were interviewed all had a close and direct relationship with the owner(s) of the lodges, or were both the manager and the owner of the lodge. As illustrated by Lodge Manager S:

> "*We've got a philosophy that is 'we are all doing the same thing', and that stems down from the owners as well. Their philosophy of what they wanted people to experience and enjoy here is very similar to mine and I've got to convey that to all my team constantly, and we work as a team to be able to provide that.*" (Lodge Manager S)

6.3.2 Employees

Hotel employees knew that their hotels have official vision/mission statements that they have to live up to, and they have to be able to deliver to their guests what is promised by this statement. They saw this vision/mission statement being instilled into them via the training they received, and by seeing their managers leading by example. As illustrated by Hotel Employee A1:

> "*So there are people, starting from management, who talk about the vision and the mission to their staff. And human resource training, and the department managers keep up the mission and vision in the department.*" (Hotel Employee A1)

But hotel employees also saw an unofficial vision/mission statement – that luxury was being able to satisfy the guests by doing whatever it takes to make them happy. As explained by Hotel Employee L:

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> *"I have worked in a lot of luxury hotels and it doesn't matter what they want, you can always work it out. You say 'yes' more often, and it's not very many things you can say 'no' to really."* (Hotel Employee L)

Lodge employees were very clear as to what the vision of the lodge is, and that is keeping the guests happy at all times, no matter what it takes. As highlighted by Lodge Employee A:

> *"What they've experienced here is superior because of the people and the service. They get the relaxed atmosphere, they call it a 'home away from home'. That's the owner's philosophy and we work to create that for them – a friendly, approachable, nothing is too much of a problem attitude."* (Lodge Employee A)

Lodge employees had many examples of things that they are asked to do to keep guests happy (one example was holding an umbrella over a couple in an outdoor spa, because it was raining, while serving strawberries and champagne at midnight). Lodge employees did comment that sometimes what is asked of them is quite challenging, and some even noted that sometimes what was asked for is illegal (and in these circumstances they do have to say 'no'). As Lodge Employee D stated:

> *"Our mission statement, I mean Eric's* mission statement – 'we never say no' – is a challenge at times, but we get there."* (Lodge Employee D)

> *Pseudonym

6.3.3 Guests

Hotel guests saw the owners of the hotel, or the company that owned the hotel, as having an overall vision as to how the hotel wants the luxury hotel experience to be conducted. As explained by Hotel Guest J:

> *"The designers, the managers, the staff and the owners, basically everyone involved in providing the services and structure of the hotel. I think team effort and great ethics help create a luxury hotel experience as well as a passion in providing the best possible service and assistance."* (Hotel Guest J)

With the international chains, there is an official vision/mission statement that the guests see on the website and in information supplied by the hotel. Guests saw managers and employees engaging in what the vision/mission states, and being able to

deliver what was promised by this statement. This is illustrated by the following comment by Hotel Guest L:

> *"All staff are involved, front and back of house employees. They are able to create the experience, but they have to have some kind of vision or guidelines from the owners as to how they see the experience being for people."* (Hotel Guest L)

Lodge guests saw a connection between the vision of the lodge and how their experience was executed. Guests talked about the general manager or other managers having a creative input into the overall vision of how the lodges are run, and that it came from owner(s) and was implemented by the managers and employees in the lodges. As explained by Lodge Guest A:

> *"That's back to my creativity. It takes the whole lot of them … when there's not kinda one mind or one person behind it. It's really the whole level – plus the owners, the designer, the GM, the GM is huge. It has to be a vision, and then you need a team to execute the vision."* (Lodge Guest A)

Guests in the lodge that was managed and owned by the same people explained that they could see how they were turning their vision into a reality as it had been discussed at their shared dinner with the owner/managers. As illustrated by Lodge Guest F:

> *"I think Hank* and Mike* have created paradise, and I think they have a dedicated team who make their vision a reality."* (Lodge Guest F)

> *Pseudonyms

6.4 The actors' performance – Theme expressed by all participants

Regardless of whether the property was a hotel or lodge, there was consensus among managers, employees and guests that the creation of the luxury hotel and lodge experience relies upon the actors' performance at the hotels and lodges. The actors' performance was seen as being how the managers and employees (staff) function in the hotels and lodges. Managers, employees and guests saw how important the staff are at the hotels and lodges, and that they play an important part in the creation of the luxury hotel and lodge experience.

6.4.1 Managers

Hotel managers saw everyone as being involved in the guests' experience, and that it is not an individual effort but a team one. They explained that they are very aware that if one member of the team does something negative, that it will have an adverse impact on the guests' experience. As explained by Hotel Manager J:

> "*It's not an individual effort, no one's got to stand out and be the best person. They've all got to be, 'we're all equal', and that's right down to the maintenance and the housekeeper. We all have to work together to give that final experience.*" (Hotel Manager J)

Hotel managers saw their employees as all having an equal share in the experience and that there is not anyone who is more important than anyone else. Managers explained that there is a lot of training involved in having great teams delivering outstanding service. This was illustrated by Hotel Manager X:

> "*It's all down to constant training, which can be hard at times, but it is something you need to do, and having the right people in the right roles, the right person to run that outlet or that operation or front office or guest relations. So they have to be in the right place, and we all have to have the right skills to do the job.*" (Hotel Manager X)

Lodge managers saw their employees and themselves as an essential aspect of the delivery of the lodge experience. They saw their employees and themselves as working as a team, and managers explained that it is their job to find, train and retain great teams of people to look after the guests in the lodges. As highlighted by Lodge Manager F:

> "*People, people, people. People who are kind, who are thoughtful, who understand what they are looking for, and who know how to respond to their requests and to exceed their expectations. There is nothing as important as people.*" (Lodge Manager F)

Lodge managers stated that they depend on their teams to provide the guests with an outstanding experience, and that the guests' feedback to the lodge managers supports this belief. As stated by Lodge Manager A:

"At the moment guests are saying it's the staff who are making it. You know the experience they are getting is good, the food is good, everything that they are getting at the moment is living up to their expectations and up to the money that they are paying for it." (Lodge Manager A)

6.4.2 Employees

Employees knew that it is 'people' (employees and managers) that is the important factor in the guests' experiences, and they realised that it is they themselves who make the difference. As explained by Hotel Employee N:

"It's the staff and how they treat the guest, from the moment they walk through the door until they leave and everything that happens in the middle." (Hotel Employee N)

Hotel employees saw that it is their energy, their culture, and their positivity that is the driving force in creating the guests' experiences. This was illustrated by Hotel Employee Q:

"I think every staff member creates that experience, as well as the property. So the property is amazing, but the experience is only going to be as good as the people inside of the property. So all that energy, all the culture, that's what fuels the experience." (Hotel Employee Q)

They saw the managers and themselves working together as a team, and that everyone is as important as everyone else. They realised that everyone is depending on each other to do their job and that there is no room for any errors. As explained by Lodge Employee D:

"Staff, location, pretty much all the staff. Everyone is as important as everyone else. There is no one more important than any other. Everyone has a finger in the pie of making sure that the guests' stay is perfect, from the dishwashers, to the housekeepers, to the receptionists, it's everyone." (Lodge Employee D)

Lodge employees also talked about the lodge's high staff-to-guest ratio and how this makes it easier to give the guests more personalised attention. As illustrated by Lodge Employee S:

"I think it's a lot to do with the staff, you know, guests have a great time while they are here. They're just pampered and pandered to and well looked after. It

isn't a chore, because we have a lot of staff and only a few rooms." (Lodge Employee S)

6.4.3 Guests

The performance of the managers and employees was seen on many levels by guests, and they highlighted the importance of service from staff. They were also of the view that it was not always the frontline staff that made the biggest impression on them. As explained by Hotel Guest X:

> "*Again, a five-star hotel should excel in all areas – the rooms, the dining, the gym, the pool, have good Internet connections. But in this very small market of five-star hotels, staff and service is more important than anything else.*" (Hotel Guest X)

Hotel guests suggested that hotel managers and employees have to be friendly and helpful, and show that nothing is too much trouble to sort out. As stated by Hotel Guest Q:

> "*The who? – would have to be the staff. They have been really friendly and helpful, nothing seemed to be too much of a problem. So I think that they create the experience by doing what they are doing.*" (Hotel Guest Q)

One of the most talked about subjects by lodge guests was staff. They saw staff as having one of the biggest influences on their lodge experience. As stated by Lodge Guest D:

> "*You gotta have the staff. Without the staff there is no luxury experience, period. They can even make or break it.*" (Lodge Guest D)

They felt that the staff that they encountered during their stay were knowledgeable, accommodating, hospitable and passionate. As explained by Lodge Guest I:

> "*All interactions with staff are fabulous. We were made to feel so welcome and spoilt by such a wonderful group of staff all very knowledgeable and passionate about what they are doing. Everyone is outstanding with their service.*" (Lodge Guest I)

6.5 Co-creation – Theme expressed by all participants

Regardless of whether the property was a hotel or lodge, there was consensus among managers, employees and guests that the luxury hotel and lodge experience is materialised through a process of co-creation, involving managers, employees and guests. Participants saw co-creation in the many different forms of interaction happening between the participant groups (managers, employees and guests). They also saw interaction happening outside of the hotel and lodge with external parties, and felt that this can have a positive or negative effect on how the luxury hotel and lodge experience is created.

6.5.1 Managers

Hotel general managers pointed out that there are many instances when co-creation happens in the hotel. For example, they try to make an appearance during check-in to meet and greet as many guests as they can, to interact with the guests and to engage with them as soon as they arrive, to enable them to take part in the hotel experience. They also try to make an appearance at check-out to maintain that engagement with guests so that they leave feeling that they had a great experience. Other managers talked about getting out and about during busy times (e.g. at breakfast) to engage with as many guests as they can. As illustrated by Hotel Manager O:

> "*We get out and about, and we will engage with the guests at breakfast, to just walk past and if they look as if they are ready to engage then we'll engage with them and have a chat to see how the holiday is going and if there is anything else we can do to make it better.*" (Hotel Manager O)

All managers were very aware that the outcome of a not so fantastic interaction between a staff member and a guest can be a negative write-up on a website such as TripAdvisor. So managers saw interaction as involving every member of their team, and that every interaction with guests is very important – they encourage their teams to be able to approach the guests and talk to them. As explained by Hotel Manager A1:

> "*Also, I think here it's important in the services the ease of the team talking to the guests as there's a lot of people that travel on their own – they might be in the bar having a coffee or a glass of wine, and I want there to be a real natural feeling for our guests that they get the same mature discussion with the staff as they would with their partners at home, or their colleagues, so they don't feel lonely or sort of out of place.*" (Hotel Manager A1)

Lodge managers saw themselves, the employees and the guests co-creating experiences during the guest's stay. The general managers were adamant that every single member of staff interacts with the guests, and also interacts with other members of staff and managers to ensure there is constant communication. As illustrated by Lodge Manager R:

> "*It's the interaction with the people and the staff. And that's probably, in all honesty, the biggest thing … the people here. It's from the owners to myself and the rest of my team, and the rest of the co-workers. It's everyone they interact with, and that's what makes the difference here.*" (Lodge Manager R)

Other managers believe that co-creation for them was that they and their employees work closely together to produce exceptional experiences in and out of the lodge for their guests. They felt it was important to connect with their guest to produce experiences for them. This is illustrated by the following comment from Lodge Manager N:

> "*Co-creation in regards to the lodge setting is a combination of the owner's vision for the lodge and the staff's execution of that vision seems to create that package, what we are selling is an experience and not just a room for the night.*" (Lodge Manager N)

6.5.2 Employees

Hotel employees saw co-creation between themselves, guests, managers and outside organisations as an important factor in creating the guest experience. For example, one set of employees talked about a recent visit to a winery that enabled them to talk much more confidently about certain local wines to the guests. As illustrated by Hotel Employee J:

> *"Last weekend I was shown around one of our supplier's wineries. It was amazing. When I went back to work I was really able to talk about the wine to the guests."* (Hotel Employee J)

Employees pointed out that interaction is everyone's job and that it can make or break a guest experience, and that it only takes one bad interaction to ruin the experience. They also noted that this interaction can be between themselves and guests, and can even involve guests with other guests. As highlighted by Hotel Employee N:

> *"There's the other guests in the hotel – if they're having a good experience it's going to reflect on other guests. If they've having a bad experience it's going to reflect. So absolutely everybody is involved."* (Hotel Employee N)

One set of employees talked about partaking in 'journey ambassador shifts'. They do this for a couple of hours in the morning and at night, three times a month, and it involves wandering about the property, approaching guests and asking how their stay is going, and if there is anything they can do to exceed the guests' expectations. And if the feedback is negative, they then have an opportunity to 'wow' guests by sorting out their problem. As explained by Hotel Employee P:

> *"We do journey ambassador shifts for a few hours in the morning and again at night three times a month. We wander around the village interacting with guests. Generally the feedback is very positive, but some time you get to 'wow' the guest by sorting a problem right away."* (Hotel Employee P)

Lodge employees saw managers, owners and themselves as being very interactive with the guests and that this is expected of them all the time. As explained by Lodge Employee A:

> *"I'm in touch with them as soon as they wake up in the morning, all the way through to lunch. I ask them how last night's dinner was, what are their plans for the day. If they go out for the day I'll have something ready for them when they come back. I am in touch with them a lot so I think that's very important."* (Lodge Employee A)

Employees saw managers and owners taking on the role of hosts during the canapé and cocktail hour, and they saw how hosts encourage guests to mix and mingle with each

other. Managers and owners also host guests at their tables during dinner, again encouraging the mixing and mingling of owners, managers and guests. As explained by Lodge Employee R:

> *"The hosts and the restaurant staff are very one-on-one with guests. When the owners are here they dine with guests – the GM does it every night. So all of that coming together gives everyone quite a good experience here."* (Lodge Employee R)

Employees interact with guests during mealtimes when they serve them, in the gardens, at the lodge's facilities (e.g. swimming pool), in or around their rooms, and so on, and they felt it is their responsibility to know where the guests are without intruding, and making sure that they have everything they want and need during their stay.

6.5.3   Guests

Hotel guests talked of employees and managers being friendly, approachable, dedicated and helpful. They also talked about the hotels getting the interaction right, in order for them to go away and tell their family and friends about their experience. Getting it wrong can result in bad reviews on social media, and guests often talk to other guests about their bad experience while they are still at the hotel. As highlighted by Hotel Guest M:

> *"If the hotel gets the right amount of interaction from its staff, it will make people want to come back for more and tell their friends about the experience they had. Get it wrong and no one will want to experience your luxury hotel."* (Hotel Guest M)

Some guests talked about staff interacting with their children and how this made the children feel special, while others pointed out that staff greeted them and stopped for a chat as they knew that they were by themselves and thought that they may like someone to talk to. As highlighted by Hotel Guest I:

> *"Two things: the staff interactions, and the fantastic comfortable bed. The staff are nice, they stopped and had a chat with me, which was lovely, and there is a comfortable bed for you to climb into at the end of the day."* (Hotel Guest I)

Lodge guests saw co-creation happening with the owners, managers, staff and other guests at various stages of their stay at the lodges. Interaction would happen from the initial welcoming of the guests through to their final farewell. The owner-managers or the general manager were generally the first people that the guests met on arrival at the lodges, and the owner-managers, general managers and other managers would also host guests during the canapé and cocktail hour before dinner – this was also a time for guests to interact with each other. Lodges offered guests various dining options, and these could be a private dinner for one through to a group meal for 16. How much interaction guests wanted to engage in was very much up to them, although guests did note that interaction between owners, managers and other guests is very much encouraged. As explained by Lodge Guest S:

> "*We enjoy talking to the staff and the other lodgers, and this is something that we don't always do. We like to be by ourselves or with our family, but everyone is so interesting, engaging, warm and welcoming.*" (Lodge Guest S)

Interaction with the rest of the staff could take place during mealtimes, while walking in the gardens or sitting on the terraces or gardens (reading or having a coffee), while they were being driven somewhere, or while they were just sitting in one of the general seating areas. This is illustrated by the following comment by Lodge Guest R:

> "*I think there is a lot in creating an experience. I think that you would need staff who are discreet, professional, knowledgeable and extremely hospitable.*" (Lodge Guest R)

6.6 Guidance – Theme expressed by all managers and hotel employees

Managers from lodges and hotels and hotel employees suggested that the creation of the luxury hotel and lodge experience relies upon the guidance of the management within the properties. Guidance is seen by all of the managers as the ways in which they are able to manage their staff, and therefore the guests, in order to create the luxury experience. Managing staff involves managers explaining to their staff what is expected

of them, and being able to elicit feedback from the guests to see if the experience is

being created correctly, and if not, having that authority to do something about it.

6.6.1 Managers

Hotel general managers saw themselves as the figureheads of their hotels, and with that

came the responsibility of the 'buck stopping' with them. They knew that guests will

look at them as the one person they will complain to or offer praise to. They saw

themselves as team players and that they 'lead from the top' in order to set an example

to the rest of the hotel managers and hotel employees. As explained by Hotel Manager

H:

> "*I think that too often hotel general managers are in the back office doing accounts and writing reports for head office rather than getting out there and actually interacting with their guests.*" (Hotel Manager H)

Other hotel managers talked about their management style and how they manage their

employees, and they realised that how they manage the hotel employees affects their

relationships and reflects on the productivity of their employees. As illustrated by Hotel

Manager H:

> "*People, and helping manage people. I need to enable the people, my direct reports, to do their job. I need to appoint them, give them the skills, and let them do their jobs, and assist them in making good decisions. And then they build their teams, and hopefully they run their teams in the same way that I'm running them.*" (Hotel Manager H)

Lodge managers felt that working with smaller teams makes managing employees

harder (because there are fewer layers of supervisors and other lodge managers),

although they did feel they are more hands on as managers with employees and guests.

This was illustrated by Lodge Manager F:

> "*Managing people – it all goes back to people. It all goes back to people, and now it's the hardest part of my job, it is the most time consuming, and it is often the most surprising. Any person, who runs a hotel and tells you that there is part of their job that is more difficult or more important than managing people is*

lying, or just not switched on. It's just what you do. Eighty per cent of my day is managing my guests and managing folks here." (Lodge Manager F)

Because they have smaller teams, lodge managers feel that dealing with their staff is important as they can directly tell them exactly what needs to be done, and there is no middle layer of management where the instructions can get misconstrued. Unfortunately, having no middle layer does mean that all that responsibility is on them, and that can make the job very hard. As stated by Lodge Manager G:

"*The most important aspect of my job is also probably the hardest – managing staff.*" (Lodge Manager G)

6.6.2 Hotel employees

Hotel employees felt that they are guided and looked after by their management team and their general managers. They felt that their management team are open with them and they know exactly what is expected of them. As explained by Hotel Employee I:

"*We are very well looked after as staff; we have got great bosses here. The GM looks after us so well, and they organise days out for us, and treats, and we know we are appreciated.*" (Hotel Employee I)

If employees see an alternative way of doing something or introducing something new to improve the guests' experience, the managers take an interest in this and pursue it further if they feel it should be implemented. This was illustrated by the following comment by Hotel Employee X:

"*Especially the management style – it's slightly different. Everyone here is like colleagues, it's like we are like friends and we are listened to if we suggest any alternatives to the norm.*" (Hotel Employee X)

6.7 Owner-managers – Theme expressed by lodge managers

One of the lodges is owned and managed by a couple, and interviewing this couple was different from interviewing the other managers of the lodges who answer to an owner. The owner-managers themselves found it a difficult role as they have such a huge vested interest in the lodge, and they could see that it is sometimes difficult for their employees, as their manager also owns the building they are working in. But they saw it

as an advantage for the guests, as they can speak directly to the owners and dine with them at night-time, which is very much encouraged by the owners. As stated by Lodge Manager F:

> "*It is very different, though, having an owner who does this professionally on a day-in and day-out basis, and I think that the experience for the guests is very much linked to enjoying meeting the people behind it. And I don't think in any way I mean that egotistically. I don't think there is probably a question that I couldn't answer better than any of my team.*" (Lodge Manager F)

6.8 Being a host – Theme expressed by lodge managers

There was a consensus among the lodge managers that the creation of the luxury lodge experience relies upon the hosting that is performed by the lodge managers. As stated by Lodge Manager G:

> "*So we have a lot of people, especially from America, who have travelled to New Zealand before and know that these luxury lodges are very much a hosted environment in New Zealand. They like that staff interaction.*" (Lodge Manager G)

Hosting guests was seen as a huge way to interact with the guests every day, especially at the canapé and cocktail hour before dinner, and again at dinner. Lodge managers saw hosting starting from the moment that the guests arrive at the lodge. Whoever is on hosting duty hosts the guests at the welcome drinks, and then shows them around the property (as there are no signs in the lodges to indicate where the restaurants or rest rooms are). Lodge managers saw hosting as being more hands on with the guests, and being able to facilitate their stay. As illustrated by Lodge Manager G:

> "*I think this is more hosted – it's more a hands-on personal kind of experience, somewhat similar to going to stay with someone in their house.*" (Lodge Manager G)

6.9 Comparison of properties – Theme expressed by everyone at the lodges and hotel managers

There was consensus among all the participants at the lodges and the hotel managers that the creation of the luxury hotel and lodge experience relies upon knowing the

contrasts between hotels and lodges. There are certain differences between hotels and lodges, and between the individual properties themselves. All of the properties have different ways of creating the luxury experience for their guests, and these were noted by the participants – this was the properties' point of difference as to how they created their own luxury experience.

6.9.1 Managers

Hotel managers felt that the main difference between a lodge and a hotel is money, and that lodges can offer more of a luxury experience because of the amount of money that lodges inject into their operation. As stated by Hotel Manager H:

> "*So the lodges offer more of a luxury experience, but they charge for it. It's pretty simple, if you have the money coming in you can have those offerings.*" (Hotel Manager H)

Lodge managers were very quick to point out the differences between a lodge and a hotel. They felt that hotels are very good at all of the technical aspects of the guests' stay but they did not think that a hotel can deliver an experience because it is not their job, and it is not what they are there for. As explained by Lodge Manager B:

> "*If you go to a five-star city hotel you have a lovely room and you know that the food will be good, the breakfast is this and that. All those bits are all the technical aspects to your stay, and they will be spot on, and you usually pick the brand hotel. What they usually don't deliver is an experience because that's not their job; that is not what they're there for.*" (Lodge Manager B)

Lodge managers also felt that guests cannot make themselves feel at home in a hotel because of the size and complexity of a hotel compared with the small and friendly nature of a lodge. As illustrated by the following comment by Lodge Manager D:

> "*I think the attraction is that it takes away the pretentious and gives that closeness of feeling at home compared to a hotel.*" (Lodge Manager, D)

6.9.2 Lodge employees

Lodge employees felt that lodges can focus more on guests' needs than a hotel, and that guests come back to lodges as they exceed their expectations. As explained by Lodge Employee B:

> "*A lodge is a lot more – normally smaller of course – comfortable. A guest once told me if they wanted all gold and sparkle tiles there are plenty of hotels around the world they can go to. But the lodge just gives that home away from home feeling, which they preferred, also the added care and attention to detail.*" (Lodge Employee B)

Size was seen as an important difference, and that lodges are able to give more personalised service because they are small, and that they are not as busy as hotels. As illustrated by Lodge Employee S:

> "*Luxury hotels are a bit bigger where lodges are more personal and have less of the hustle and bustle of a hotel.*" (Lodge Employee S)

6.9.3 Lodge guests

Lodge guests compared the staff of the lodges with the staff of hotels, suggesting that lodge staff are better at making them feel at home, give them more personalised service and are more professional in their manner. As explained by Lodge Guest D:

> "*The calibre of staff too. When you get to a luxury facility you expect it to be perfect. The calibre of staff is dramatically different than in a normal hotel and much more personal attention.*" (Lodge Guest D)

They also compared the rooms and the food, suggesting that the lodges' bedrooms are better decorated than those at a hotel, and that their food is far superior. As illustrated by Lodge Guest G:

> "*My understanding of a luxury lodge would be that the rooms would be sumptuous, the service is exemplary, and the food would be out of this world, that the staff would make you literally feel at home, but with the professionalism that big brand mega starred hotels can only dream of.*" (Lodge Guest G)

6.10 Domestic and international comparisons – Theme expressed by hotel managers and guests

There was consensus among the managers and guests of hotels that the creation of the luxury hotel experience relies upon domestic and international comparisons. Managers and guests saw travelling as a reason why the experience can or will get better, because people are travelling and experiencing new things and expect those things to be available at the next property they visit. Hotel managers and guests saw domestic and overseas influences helping hotels to continually improve the luxury hotel experience.

6.10.1 Managers

Hotel managers felt that because of their experience either working in different countries or travelling to different countries they understand their guests better. They felt that it is important to understand what travellers want when they come to stay at their hotel. As explained by Hotel Manager H:

> "*I think that the fact I have travelled and that I ran hotels in different parts of the world and therefore have different expectations. I think that probably has been the difference for us here.*" (Hotel Manager H)

Hotel managers also felt that people who travel want different things, and that what people want when they are travelling has changed, and that it is up to the hotel to stay up to date with what it is that their guests want or need. This was illustrated by the following comment by Hotel Manager A1:

> "*For this particular hotel, I think it's a non-traditional aspect to it. The style of service is quite close, so while we don't necessarily have it spot on, it's a lot more in tune with what these types of travellers want – they want all the things that a luxury product provides, but they don't necessarily want all the fluff and puff around it.*" (Hotel Manager, A1)

Hotel managers compare their hotels with overseas hotels that they have either worked in or visited. Managers suggested that if there was a star rating system that worked properly internationally, then there would not be the six- and seven-star hotels that are

now springing up everywhere: this did not give hotels an even playing field. As stated by Hotel Manager X:

> "*That's a challenge for today's traveller because in some countries they'll say I have to stay at a six- or seven-star hotel to get your service, whereas in others they could get the same service in a four-star hotel. So that really is a challenge.*" (Hotel Manager X)

Managers suggested that even though countries like India and China have huge numbers of employees in their hotels, this does not necessarily give guests a luxury experience. As highlighted by Hotel Manager X:

> "*You can have an outstanding product and average staff and you will not create a luxury experience, and I've seen that time and time again in China.*" (Hotel Manager X)

6.10.2 Guests

Hotel guests saw staying at luxury hotels as a way to reduce all of the hassle and stress of travelling domestically and internationally. As explained by Hotel Guest Z:

> "*For me it's got to be anything that reduces the hassle out of travel. I travel a lot and stay in a lot of luxury hotels, so I need accurate and fast check-in and check-out, valet service (I always have a lot of luggage), and having technology up and running as soon as I get in my room. If that is all going well, then that to me is a luxury hotel experience.*" (Hotel Guest Z)

Guests also explained that they look forward to their travel, that they had travelled both domestically and internationally, and that they compare hotels because the rating systems are not always the same. As stated by Hotel Guest O:

> "*Before I go travelling I dream about where I am going to be staying, sleeping and relaxing. I have travelled a lot around the world and I always get excited about what the hotel will be like. But not all luxury hotels are the same.*" (Hotel Guest O)

6.11 The brand's values and beliefs – Theme expressed by hotel managers and employees

There was consensus among the managers and employees of hotels that the creation of the luxury hotel experience relies upon the values and beliefs of the hotels. Managers

and employees saw great strength in being part of an international chain, and the values

and beliefs that are instilled in them enables them to create a luxury experience – a

luxury experience that is standard throughout the brand.

6.11.1 Managers

Hotel managers held strong values as to how guests should be treated. If, for whatever

reason, guests were not treated as they should, the managers felt extremely disappointed

that they had failed the guest. As stated by Hotel Manager X:

> *"The biggest frustration I have is mistakes happening. I don't get frustrated by
> mistakes; I get frustrated when we make a mistake. It's just that we know better.
> In general making a mistake is disappointing." (Hotel Manager X)*

Managers felt that they were there to uphold the values of their hotel/company/brand,

and ultimately that was to give the guest a luxury experience within their hotel.

Managers knew that they have to value the guest to show the guest that the hotel cares,

thereby hopefully gaining the guest's loyalty to the hotel/company/brand. As explained

by Hotel Manager Y:

> "*So it's the whole experience that has to be perfect. So all the teams of each
> department, they are representing the hotel, so if one department stuffs up, the
> whole experience will be ruined. And that's when I come in. I fix the ruined
> experience – which is so hard, and that's when the service recovery starts.*"
> (Hotel Manager Y)

Hotel managers saw guests coming to their hotels because of their brand and what it

represents. Managers explained that the culture of the company comes through the

branding of the company, and that this is instilled in staff throughout the hotels. As

explained by Hotel Manager L:

> "*They really drive the brand, and then on site it's all about the team members
> and their training of the culture – the culture of the company that we create
> within the teams and that therefore delivers the experience.*" (Hotel Manager L)

Managers talked about the pressure that the brand demands from them and their staff in order to create great teams and to be able to deliver a great experience for their guests. As stated by Hotel Manager L:

> "*Well the brand is the biggest instigators, I mean they basically set the standards. We have very strict standards, so all guidelines are implemented.*"
> (Hotel manager L)

6.11.2 Employees

Hotel employees felt that guests want to be valued, to feel valued while they are staying at the hotels, and to get value for money. As explained by Hotel Employee O:

> "*I would like to think that guests are looked after, cared for, valued, that they have an enjoyable stay here.*" (Hotel Employee O)

Employees explained that the values of how guests should be treated while they are staying at the hotels are instilled into them via their training, and that it is important to value every guest they serve. This was illustrated by the following comment by Hotel Employee J:

> "*Guests wanna get what they paid for, get their expectations met, and of course there can't be any mistakes. I think that's something really important these days and it's drummed into us during any training session.*" (Hotel Employee J)

Hotel employees saw the brand attracting guests to come and stay at their hotels, and they felt that the brand is recognised internationally and that the reputation is what guests come for and trust. As explained by Hotel Employee N:

> "*It's a great location – that always helps. I think they come to the Delta* because it is a thoroughly reputable brand internationally, so for a lot of international guests they see the Delta* and they know it's familiar and they come here.*" (Hotel Employee N)
>
> *Pseudonym

Employees also saw the brand as setting the standards that employees have to uphold at all times while they are serving their guests. As illustrated by Hotel Employee X:

> *"It's the value, it's the value behind the brand name: the service, the privacy, the safety, and the quality of food, and the quality of service."* (Hotel Employee X)

6.12 Projecting an image – Theme expressed by everyone at the lodge

There was consensus among all the participants at the lodges that the creation of the luxury lodge experience relies upon projecting an image of the lodges. Creating a luxury lodge experience begins when guests look at the properties' websites, brochures, press releases or articles in magazines or online. Participants saw projecting an image as a way to start, and also maintain, the luxury lodge experience throughout the guests' stay.

6.12.1 Managers

All of the lodges' general managers undertake overseas trips to promote their lodges at various trade shows and forums. Lodge managers felt that projecting an image starts from the minute that potential guests log onto their website or go to see a travel agent, as they are starting to build a picture in their mind about the lodges. As highlighted by Lodge Manager R:

> *"Experience – it's the whole package. So from the moment their experience starts, from the moment they either go to the travel agent or they log onto the website or they're speaking to someone who has been here, and so they build that picture up in their mind, to the moment they engage with the frontline staff, to the point that they leave the lodge."* (Lodge Manager R)

So they saw projecting an image of the lodge as an important and powerful tool that has to convey the correct images and messages to all potential and regular guests. This was illustrated by the following comment by Lodge Manager Q:

> *"I think discerning travellers have found out about us, or have heard of us. Like you would promote any business, we do the same – we obviously do it through different channels depending on what you are promoting. But if people are after this sort of product then we provide it, and we provide it well."* (Lodge Manager Q)

6.12.2 Employees

Lodge employees knew that guests had seen their lodge on websites, in brochures, in newspapers and in magazines before they came to the lodge, and that they were not disappointed with the lodge when they got there. As stated by Lodge Employee G;

> "*I think the experience starts from your marketing when you suddenly see this place in a pamphlet, you suddenly think 'wow'. Or the website. You then make your booking and we contact you personally.*" (Lodge Employee G)

Lodge employees realised how important projecting an image of their lodge is and that their general managers work hard to promote them overseas. Guests frequently tell them that their lodge looks even better than what they had seen in the media. As explained by Lodge Employee R:

> "*A lot of people are part of SLH [Small Luxury Hotels of the World], so they would have seen us on the website and in the books and that sort of advertising, or seen us on TV, and word of mouth. A lot of people have met our GM overseas.*" (Lodge Employee R)

6.12.3 Guests

Lodge guests had either seen or heard about the lodges in various forums before going to stay at the lodges. Guests had looked at the lodge's website, and read articles in magazines or newspapers. As illustrated by Lodge Guest T:

> "*Doing a lot of research and finding out what the places offer so you know that you are going to be looked after when you get there, and you get feedback from other people so you know what you should expect.*" (Lodge Guest T)

Lodges had also been recommended to guests by their friends or family because they had been impressed by the lodges. As explained by Lodge Guest F:

> "*Friends recommended Beta* lodge. After hearing how impressed they were and looking at the excellent website, our expectations were very high. We also read several articles published in Australia over the last 12 months.*" (Lodge Guest F)

> *Pseudonym

6.13 Model Two – How the luxury hotel and lodge experience is created
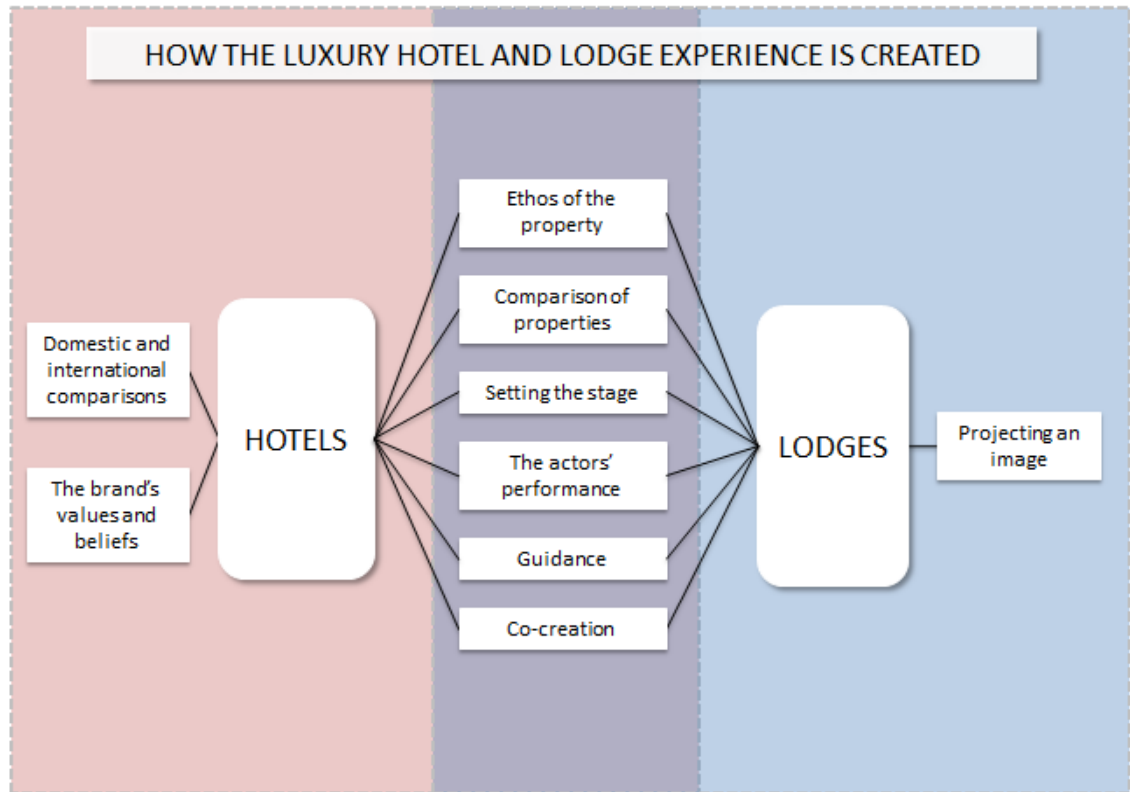
Figure 3: How the luxury hotel and lodge experience is created model

Figure 3 presents the model of how the luxury hotel and lodge experience is created, based on the findings of the empirical research. The centre of the model represents the participants' collective opinion on what they consider to be the six essential elements required to create a successful luxury hotel or lodge experience. One may consider this a holistic 'blueprint' for building the luxury accommodation experience. On the left are two additional elements that are considered unique to the hotels studied, and on the right is one additional element that is considered unique to the lodges studied.

The central block commences with the element *ethos of the property*, and this represents the philosophy behind the founding of the property, be it a luxury hotel or a lodge. Management of the property begins with a vision or mission statement, declaring expectations, intentions, promises and guarantees affecting both the employees and the guests. Participants agree on the need for a *comparison of properties*, as luxury

properties need to be capable of positively promoting their differences from comparable properties. After an idea of the luxury property has been created, *setting the stage* is now required. The stage here is everything a luxury property offers materially: all the aspects that guests will interact with physically, such as the rooms, amenities and facilities. All these base requirements are deemed essential to guests' comfort, nourishment and entertainment, and there is no room for deficiencies in availability, quality or quantity.

Once the stage is set, the actors (managers and employees) have to play their roles in a professional, calm and cohesive fashion, and as in a play, the audience (guests) watch *the actors' performance*. In order to ensure success, the audience has to be engaged and become part of the overall performance. Thus, the guests are an integral part of the whole luxury stay experience.

Participants suggested that, for continuing success and maintenance of quality standards, the *guidance* of staff, including all management staff, should be a continuous commitment. Well-trained and informed staff at all levels likely experience self-confidence, a more meaningful sense of responsibility and positive decision making. *Co-creation* is a business strategy that focuses on customer experience and interactive relationships. Co-creation permits and indeed encourages a more active involvement from the customer.

The two unique elements associated with luxury hotels are *domestic and international comparisons* and *the brand's values and beliefs*. Managers and guests agree that wider global travel has revealed new options for the creation of the luxury hotel experience. Broadly speaking, guests will be impressed initially with enhanced levels of luxury, but it takes little time experiencing different hotels before those same guests become a little blasé and expect comparable levels of luxury wherever they stay. Managers and employees see the great advantage of being part of an international group that instils in

them the same established standards, values and beliefs, and in turn enables them to create the same luxury hotel experience.

The perceived unique element of the luxury lodge is *projecting an image*. Lodge guests will often consult multiple media – hard copy, websites and social media – prior to choosing a lodge; thus, lodge participants are of the opinion that projecting an attractive image, coupled with comprehensive information, is critical for guests. In fact, participants feel that the whole luxury lodge experience starts at the point of first contact with the lodge as portrayed in media.

6.14 Conclusion

In conclusion, having discussed the themes identified in the data, a conceptual model has been presented. The model presents visually how the luxury hotel and lodge experience is created. It also fulfils the final aim of this research, which was to propose a conceptual model explaining the process of creating the luxury hotel and lodge experience, using case studies from New Zealand. The following chapter will compare and contrast the themes that have been highlighted in this and the previous chapter with themes that were identified in the literature review in Chapter 2.

Chapter 7: Discussion

7.1   Introduction

Two conceptual models were proposed in Chapters 5 and 6 that provide a visual explanation of what the luxury hotel and lodge experience is and how it is created. This chapter will discuss how these models support or challenge the existing literature that was reviewed in Chapter 2. The first section of this chapter will compare and contrast the themes that are highlighted in Model One (see Figure 2, Section 5.14) with themes identified in the literature review, while the second section will compare and contrast the themes that are highlighted in Model Two (see Figure 3, Section 6.13) with themes identified in the literature review.

7.2   What is the luxury hotel and lodge experience?

The first section of this chapter will discuss what the luxury hotel and lodge experience is using the themes that are presented in Model One (see Figure 2), and will compare and contrast them with the extant literature.

7.2.1   Essences of the luxury hotel and lodge

O'Neill (2004) suggested that luxury hotel brand values are changing, and the only way he could explain the difference between standard and luxury hotels was by providing a retail comparison: "Luxury hotels are about as different from the average hotel as a Prada bag is from a duffel bag" (p. 30). Hotel managers show they agreed with this comparison by also comparing themselves to luxury goods, suggesting that if guests like 'premium' motoring, they buy a luxury car, and if they want to stay in a 'premium' place for an experience, they would stay in a luxury hotel.

Luxury hotels are part of the 'experience economy' (Gilmore & Pine, 2002; Johnston, 1999; Tosti, 2009), and this experience is delivered by employees as part of their relationship with each other and the guests (Brien et al., 2012). Hotel employees see it

as part of their job to produce an experience for the guests, believing that the luxury hotel experience starts the minute the guests arrive and lasts until the minute they leave. All employees see outstanding service as being the first thing that guests want in the luxury hotel and lodge experience – guests want to receive amazing service and know that it will be consistently of a high standard. The employees also believe that guests should feel as if they are individuals and should receive personal service from staff in the form of being welcomed by name and having employees focus on them, especially if any problem occurs. Lodge employees also feel that the lodge has a more intimate and homely feel to it, and are very aware of their role because the managers or manager-owners are very clear as to what the philosophy is at the lodges – that it is their responsibility to make sure that guests have the best experience possible.

In the late 1980s, Bell (1989) suggested that because of the highly competitive market, mid-priced and luxury-level accommodation operators thought that it was essential for them to add more and more amenities to their rooms (e.g. well-known brand soaps, shampoos, conditioners and hand/body lotions). Eleven years later, Kandampully and Suhartanto (2000) highlighted that these amenities were no longer considered luxury by guests, and that the use of hotel facilities such as bars, restaurants and nightclubs were also no longer seen as luxury – for many people, these services had become an integral component of their lifestyle. This finding is now 15 years old, and yet it is clear that the hotel guests that were interviewed for this study still expect to have a certain quantity and quality of amenities and facilities in a luxury hotel in order to view it as a luxury hotel, and excellent service is seen as an essential component of a luxury hotel. Lodge guests are aware that the lodges wanted to give them a 'homely feel' while they were staying at the lodge, and they feel that they did have a 'home away from home' experience. Guests feel that the luxury lodges are places to stay in order to celebrate a

special occasion, relax and experience decadence, and that the lodges have an intimate feel, are warm and comfortable, and have the best of everything.

7.2.2 Location and setting

When the initial hotel selection is being made, location is consistently identified as the primary criterion (Rauch, Collins, Nale & Barr, 2015). Kiessling et al. (2009) state that a guest's motivation for booking into a luxury hotel is strongly influenced by the property's location – location is a very important demand driver for a luxury hotel and contributes significantly to the exclusivity and uniqueness of the guest's experience. Hotel managers state that their surroundings, location and country are all important drawcards for the guests, and managers see the scenery and views from the hotels as an important marketing tool. Managers feel that making sure their surroundings are clean and tidy all of the time gives the guests a good first impression of their property. One hotel involved in this study is situated in a city and does not have scenic views, but staff feel that their location more than makes up for that, being located near places their business and leisure guests want or need to be near. Having access to tourist attractions, business venues and transportation facilities is seen as an important factor that influences the building of hotels in certain locations (Li, Fang, Huang & Goh, 2015).

Hotel employees see the outstanding aspects of where their hotels are located. As previously stated, one hotel is located in a city centre, and employees feel that where they are located is the biggest drawcard for guests coming by car, as they can go straight from the hotel onto one of the main highways taking them north or south. The other two hotels are located in the countryside but near large towns, and employees feel that the surrounding areas gives guests amazing scenery and views from their bedrooms. Egan and Nield (2000) agree that location is important, suggesting that because of their client group, which is the affluent traveller and the affluent business traveller, luxury hotels are preferred in a central location.

Hotel guests gave various reasons why they choose to stay in certain hotels. Guests often conduct research prior to choosing a hotel, and look at websites to aid in their decision. Location and beautiful scenery factor into their decision, and they feel that the location is important as it can act as a springboard to other places to visit, but also because there are many activities to do at the locations. Visiting New Zealand is given by guests as a reason for their travels; in synchrony with this, all employees feel that they are representing New Zealand and that if it is the first, last or only place guests visit, it is up to them to give the guests a positive and warm welcome or goodbye from the country.

7.2.3 Opulence

As previously explained in Chapter 1, the term of reference that is used for luxury for this thesis is derived from the Latin word *luxus*, which signifies soft or extravagant living, opulence, sumptuousness and overindulgence (Dubois et al., 2005). The terms *opulent* and *opulence* are also used to describe the properties discussed in Chapter 4.

Opulence is an interchangeable term for luxury, yet as Kapferer and Bastien (2009) state, the word luxury has lost its meaning. Lodge managers agree and feel that luxury is a very overused word in the hospitality industry, which makes it hard for guests to determine what luxury is. And yet the word is still used to describe hotels and lodges. Nueno and Quelch (1998) state that throughout the centuries, the concept of rarity and scarcity has always been associated with luxury. Luxury has also been associated with status, quality and exclusivity (Atwal & Williams, 2009). Academics suggest that there are several key components or characteristics of luxury: there is recognition by others of its extra value, it has a strong connotation of status and high quality, and it is in very limited supply (Mortelmans, 2005; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). Hotel managers highlight that luxury requires a lot of money, it involves going beyond the ordinary and it entails excellent service. Both sets of managers see luxury existing in two different

contexts: traditional and contemporary. Traditional luxury is seen as 'very formal', 'old world' and 'old-fashioned', whereas contemporary is seen as 'relaxed', 'new world' and 'modern'.

The word luxury is hard to define, and so is the term luxury hotel, but there is one aspect of a luxury hotel that is clear – Brien et al. (2012) suggest that luxury hotels are service intensive and maintain a high ratio of staff-to-guest to ensure high interpersonal guest contact within an opulent environment. Kucukusta et al. (2014) expand on this further by stating that having well-trained staff is an indication that a hotel is of a high standard. Lodge employees agree by suggesting that the luxury aspect of the lodge requires having a different calibre of staff who are able to provide highly personalised service.

Lodge employees also suggest that there are two forms of luxury: one form is the fine fixtures, gilded rooms, marble bathrooms and chandeliers, and the other form is something real and authentic, with an attention to detail. Hotel employees feel that luxury is expensive and can only be experienced by guests that have money. Both sets of employees realise that in order for their properties to be deemed luxury, they must go above and beyond their guests' expectations, and that requires a high staff-to-guest ratio.

There are many explanations of the concept of luxury, and how its definition has changed over the past 20 years. One of the reasons for the changing definition is that the behaviours of luxury consumers have changed, and this started with the 'baby boomers' coming of age – they have always been seen as a generation who challenge authority, reject the status quo and go their own way (Bernstein, 1999; Danziger, 2007).

Lodge guests state that their 'behaviours' as consumers have changed from their parents' generation: they have rejected their parents' idea of luxury and developed their

own ideas of what they expected luxury to be. Hotel guests are clear as to what they think luxury is: something you pay for and you should always get what you pay for.

Another reason the concept of luxury is forever changing is that the extraordinary becomes ordinary (Danziger, 2007). Guests echoed this by explaining that luxury is more than just the ordinary, and that the concept of what ordinary is has changed in their lifetime. Lodge guests state that their expectation of luxury includes decadence and indulgence, that staff will be of a high calibre, and that everything throughout the lodges will be just perfect.

This thesis looks at the luxury hotel and lodge experience, and it attempts to describe what luxury is and what it means. The word opulence came through as a very strong term that encapsulates what luxury is; this is not something that came through in the literature. Therefore, it is proposed that *opulence* as an element of the luxury hotel and lodge experience is a new finding of this thesis.

7.2.4 Indulgence

Grout (2005) states that women list dining, shopping, luxuriating in a spa and luxury as being part of their 'girlfriend getaway' trips while staying at up-market hotels. Kiessling et al. (2009) indicate that within the travel and tourism industry, a trend has arisen of a younger clientele with high net worth seeking indulgence and high-luxury products, and also note that luxury is an indulgence and an enjoyment of comfortable, rich and sumptuous living – something that is considered an indulgence and not a necessity. All managers agree that their guests want to be looked after, to be made to feel special, to be pampered, to be spoilt – just to be indulged while they are staying at the properties. Managers feel that their guests do not want to think about anything, and would prefer that everything is there for them to just enjoy, and that they are made to feel special.

All employees want their guests to feel relaxed and happy, and to enjoy themselves without having anything to worry or stress about. They want their guests to feel cared

for and valued, to know that everything is being taken care of – for the whole experience to be pleasurable. They see their guests coming to the properties (hotels and lodges) to get away from daily life and to enjoy some relaxation, and to have some indulgence and pampering.

Lodge guests feel they were escaping reality – when they arrived at the lodges, they were able to check into a new 'reality'. Lodge guests talk about the location and surroundings of the lodges and that it is important to get away from the real world for a while. Lodge guests talk about tranquil environments and amazing landscapes, and that the lodges themselves have an attention to detail that takes luxury to the next level. Lodge guests talk about the facilities and amenities that the lodges have, and that they enjoy using them while they are there.

7.2.5 Sensations and emotions

Every day managers face the challenge of building and maintaining positive customer relationships, and this task is becoming increasingly difficult as consumers now have greater access to information and a wide array of other choices of hotels (Torres & Kline, 2006). Managers recognise the importance of how they feel and how their emotions can impact on how the guests feel. Managers see themselves as being 'people orientated' and able to interact with guests easily, and they recognise that how they feel can influence guests' emotions; for example, feeling positive or negative can 'rub off' on the guests. Managers explain that starting off the experience well by giving guests a friendly warm welcome can set the tone for the guests' experience while staying at the property.

Employees who are capable of delivering customer delight are more likely to be motivated, highly satisfied and committed to a particular organisation (Keiningham & Vavra, 2001), and these employees are more likely to show different personality characteristics than those who can merely satisfy customers (Torres & Kline, 2006).

Lodge employees state that they feel a wide range of emotions and sensations when they are serving their guests, and how they feel during this engagement can enhance or sour the guests' experience. Employees realise that their disposition can affect their guests in either a positive or a negative manner, depending on how they are feeling when they are serving the guests. This was also identified by Barsky and Nash (2002) when they explain that emotions experienced during an accommodation stay may be triggered by a positive (or negative) encounter with another employee or guest.

Understanding the emotions that guests go through throughout their experience (before, during and after) is certainly not a new concept, and has been highlighted by a number of researchers. The concept of *consumption emotion* refers to the set of emotional responses guests have during consumption experiences (Westbrook & Oliver, 1991). Guests explain that they anticipate how their experience will unfold during their stay, and that the emotions and sensations they experience during their stay at the properties shape how they felt their overall experience went. Guests can see that it would be important for properties (the management and employees) to pre-empt these anticipations and expectations, and to make sure they know exactly how to fulfil these guest expectations. It may be that guests' feelings are excited by the upbeat rhythm of a downtown property's environment, or inspired by grand architecture. On the other hand, a lack of facility cleanliness, a sloppy-looking member of staff, or a disorganised check-in or check-out may make guests feel unhappy about their stay (Barsky & Nash, 2002).

7.2.6 Being in the moment

Experience has been defined as something that customers find unique, memorable and sustainable over time (Pine & Gilmore, 1998, 1999), and 'being in the moment' is about living an experience as it happens. All managers see experience as being defined in two ways: the experience of staying at the property (hotel or lodge) and the experiences that guests can participate in, in and outside of the properties (hotel or lodge). The

experience of staying at the properties is seen as the 'luxury hotel experience' or the 'luxury lodge experience', and for the luxury lodge experience this also includes the 'meal experience'. And while managers see themselves as the facilitators of the guests' experience, guests also see that they have their part to play in their own experiences. Alcántara-Alcover et al. (2013) agree with these two beliefs, explaining that the success of hospitality experiences from a managerial point of view is based on the host-guest connection and also the willingness of the guest to engage in the hotel experience. Hotel managers see guests taking an interest in the local furnishings, local produce and local staff, and feel that all of these elements are involved in creating the whole experience for the guests. Pine and Gilmore (1998, 1999) also agree with this when they suggest that experience can be seen as being active across two dimensions: the first dimension corresponds to the participation of the customer, while the second dimension involves the connection, or environmental relationship, that unites the customer with the performance or event.

Knutson and Beck (2004) suggest that what represents a guest's real-time experience includes all the encounters throughout the guest's journey with an organisation, and for a hotel, this includes everything that is involved, from the initial booking to the actual stay, right through until the billing at the end of the stay. Lodge managers agree, explaining that they view the guests' experience as starting with the initial contact and continuing until the last email that enquires about the guests' experience. They see the guests' luxury lodge experience as involving everything and everyone at the lodge.

All managers explain that being in the moment also includes activities guests participate in outside of the property, noting that these activities are either suggested by the property or organised by the property. In the lodges, external activities for guests are contracted out, or the lodge has a number of local guides permanently on the payroll and every lodge guest is matched with a specific guide to ensure that they have the best

experience possible. In hotels, experiences outside the properties are suggested or organised by a concierge team who 'man' an office somewhere in the hotel.

Employees of both lodges and hotels define experience as doing something for the first time, going through a process, having knowledge, doing something different, and having new feelings and emotions, and they also see experience as involving the actual property or outside activities. Employees see being in the moment as what the guest experiences while staying at the hotel or lodge, and they see how important it is for staff to help guests to organise trips outside of the properties, because when the guests return to the lodges or hotels, the guests relive the experiences by telling the staff about the amazing experience they had that day. Bitner (1992) suggests that how customers experience activities is important, as this is crucial to their perception of value. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004a) take this suggestion further by highlighting that value is now central to the consumer's experiences.

Shaw and Ivens (2002) suggest that an experience or experience dimension is a blend of many individual dimensions that come together, and that these dimensions may involve the consumer physically, emotionally and intellectually (Mossberg, 2007; Walls et al., 2011). All guests see a luxury hotel and lodge experience as something that they will want to remember, like having a daydream, and that being in the moment is so enjoyable that they will remember the property because of that feeling. Guests see the experience starting as soon as they start looking for a property, and believe that it involves a large number of people and a large amount of emotion.

This thesis looks at the luxury hotel and lodge experience, and it attempts to describe what experience is and what it means, the phrase *being in the moment* came through as a very strong phrase that encapsulates what living an experience is, and this is something that was not found during the review of the literature for this thesis. Therefore, it is

proposed that *being in the moment* as an element of the luxury hotel and lodge experience is a new finding of this thesis.

7.2.7 External activities

It is interesting to note that hotel managers feel that what guests do outside of the hotel can have a positive or negative effect on the overall luxury hotel experience because the guests are unable to separate the external activity from the rest of the luxury hotel experience. Managers feel that it is the responsibility of the hotel concierge team to be able to recommend activities that guests can participate in when they are staying at the hotels.

Hotel employees see the weather as something that can have an effect on the guests, especially if they are participating in external activities, and employees note that they are involved in organising distractions for guests when it rains or snows non-stop for several days. Employees enjoy reliving their guests' external activity when they get back to the hotel and tell the employees all about it. Employees are also involved in organising and booking guests' activities outside of the hotels, making sure that they pick the right company or tour guide for the guests.

Hotel guests of the city centre hotel do not talk about the scenery or views, but they do talk about the ease of getting to many places outside of the hotel, and they talk about the activities and events they can participate in while they are staying in the hotel. Guests of the other hotels talk about the scenery and views as well as the weather and how it increases their enjoyment of the activities they can participate in outside of the hotel during their stay.

7.2.8 Guests' desires and expectations

Hotel managers see guests wanting the hotels to display an attention to detail, and they feel that guests expect to receive personalised service and have all of their needs and wants attended to. They also recognise that guests have certain desires and expectations

as to what the luxury hotel experience will be, including that any problems that appear will be dealt with quickly with a positive outcome. Personalised service is highly valued in the judgement of luxury hotels, and there are differences in the service that guests expect due to their nationality and culture (Mattila, 1999c; Prayag & Dookhony-Ramphul, 2006; Radder & Wang, 2006). Managers feel that the personalised service that guests receive should always take into account the guest's nationality and culture, and some of the hotels in this research promote their own staff members' nationalities by incorporating their country's flag on their name badge.

Sandström et al. (2008) suggest that in service, where the service encounter is important to how the customer experiences the service being offered, the employee has the potential to influence the value-creating experience by interacting with the customer. Hotel employees see themselves as working closely with the guests, and believe that it is important that they are able to read or anticipate guests' needs and wants during their stay. Employees feel that guests want friendly staff who will do as much as possible for them to ensure they have an enjoyable luxury hotel experience. Khoo-Lattimore and Ekiz (2014) suggest that because of the intangibility characteristic of the industry, provisions and tangible cues play an important role in enhancing the overall guest experience. Hotel guests are very clear as to what they expect from a luxury hotel; they feel that they were paying for a service that should be personalised, and that staff should be able to realise what they want and need during their stay. Walls (2013) explains that human interactions are significant to the guest experience because they demonstrate attentiveness and caring, and through sincere problem-solving, they work towards understanding guest needs.

7.2.9 Physical surroundings

It has been argued that in order to reflect uniqueness and exclusivity, and to visually differentiate themselves, luxury brands are converting historic buildings into hotels and

therefore adding an aura of charm to their property (Kiessling et al., 2009). One of the lodges involved in this study is a converted homestead that dates back to the 19th century – the owner-managers specifically chose this homestead to convert because of its historical features. Kiessling et al. (2009) also argue that the facilities and services of a hotel should project luxury, and that luxury is also perceived in the visual aspects of the hotel, such as its interior and its exterior. Lodge managers feel that the physical surroundings of the lodge are something that needs to be meticulously maintained as they are the first thing that guests see, especially if they arrive by helicopter. Managers see the surroundings as an extension of the lodge and that the location matters to guests because this is the reason why they have come to that particular lodge.

Lodge employees feel that the surrounding views and scenery certainly add to the guests' experience and that they often come to the lodge because of its location – and they feel helpless when the weather makes outside activities difficult for the guests, as this can impact the guests' overall experience at the lodge. Lodge guests see the attraction of New Zealand as a destination, and believe that the scenery and views from the lodge's bedrooms and main areas, and the location of the lodge were deciding factors in choosing to stay there. The reputation of the lodges and what they can offer the guests is another reason why guests chose to stay at certain lodges.

7.2.10 Delivering tailored attention

Hemmington (2007) suggests that hospitality businesses should design their guest experiences to include lots of little surprises, similar to what good restaurants do, and that businesses should be using the creativity and ideas of their staff to stimulate and excite their guests during their mealtimes. Delivering the service that guests expect is considered very important by the lodge managers, and they achieve this by being able to read or anticipate the guests' needs, which constantly surprises and delights the guests.

According to Surprenant and Solomon (1987), 'good service' is seen as having more 'personalised service', and they expand on this by defining 'personalised service' as any behaviours occurring in the interaction intended to contribute to the individuation of the customer. Research conducted by Ariffin and Maghzi in 2012 suggests that 'personalisation' is caring about the feelings of the guests, and that hotels must treat them as important guests by knowing them by name or other personal information. Lodge managers explain that they see themselves as facilitators of the guest's stay and it is up to them to organise anything that the guest requests, and be able to tailor their attention to them exactly, and make sure they are feeling happy throughout their stay.

Bharwani and Jauhari (2013) explain that to effectively deliver hospitality services and products, it is important for hospitality establishments to focus on the customers' perspectives while designing the customers' experiences. Lodge employees suggest that understanding the guest is very important and that 'whatever the guest asks for we get it for them'. This is viewed as a constant challenge, but it is one that employees know they have to take on board because the managers, owners or owner-managers depend on them to make the guests happy and be satisfied with their entire stay.

Ariffin et al. (2013) suggest that there is a need for hotel employees to anticipate, and subsequently meet, all of the requests given by their guests – they see it as personalising the service – and that the employees should try to form 'special relationships' with the guests in order to achieve this. Lodge guests recognise that attention to detail is there from the first welcome, right through to the last goodbye. They know that they are being made to feel special, and that it is the staff that give them this tailored attention. For some regular guests, they feel they are part of the lodge 'family'.

7.2.11 Hospitableness

Hospitableness comes from the hospitality that is shared between the host and the guest, and can be identified by four characteristics: it is given by a host to a guest who is away

from home; the host provides for the guest's physiological and psychological comfort and security; it involves interactions between provider and receiver; and it involves a mixture of tangible and intangible factors (Ariffin & Maghzi, 2012; Hepple et al., 1990). Lodge participants have a similar view: managers and employees feel that looking after their guests' well-being is shown through their hospitableness, and guests see the managers and employees working together to give them a level of hospitableness that is outstanding.

Hospitableness of hotel services is described as coming straight from the heart – how guests are treated by the hotel service personnel. This hospitableness is seen throughout the guests' journey, from checking in right through to checking out and everything in between (Ariffin & Maghzi, 2012). Hospitableness is seen by the lodge participants as something that is given by staff and received by guests, and as how to treat guests and how guests feel when they are being looked after.

Lodge managers see hosting as a way to show hospitableness to their guests and also as an important aspect of their roles, and they see the job of hosting guests starting as soon as the guests arrive at the lodges. This hosting starts with welcome drinks; they then show guests around the property so that they know where everything is, and then finally escort them to their rooms. As O'Gorman (2007) states, hospitality creates an impression of hosting and hospitableness, which gives the image that the guest experience is the first and foremost priority. This hosting continues during mealtimes – for example, at breakfast, managers are on hand to talk to guests to see if there is anything they can do to help them organise something for the day. As explained by O'Gorman (2007), hospitality occurs within the lived experience and it is described as a gift given and shared between the 'host' and the 'guest'. Hosting continues at the canapé and cocktail hour when managers try to encourage guests to interact with one another. Owners and general managers also host guests during dinner by dining with

them, again encouraging interaction with other guests and themselves. The true gift of hospitality has been described as an act of kindness that the 'guest' experiences, and that this act of kindness is turning a stranger into a friend for a short space of time (O'Gorman, 2007).

As previously mentioned, the success of a hospitality experience is based on the guest-host connection and the actual willingness of the guest to engage in the hospitality experience proposal (Alcántara-Alcover et al., 2013). Lodge employees see the managers, owners or owner-managers hosting the guests throughout their stay. Lodge employees see the importance of this hosting duty, as they feel it shows guests that the hosts care about their well-being. Lodge guests see the guest-host connection in the hosting they received during their stay, in being made to feel at 'home' and in the staff looking after their well-being, and for regular guests, in being made to feel part of the 'lodge family'.

7.3   How the luxury hotel and lodge experience is created

The second section of this chapter will discuss how the luxury hotel and lodge experience is created using the themes that are presented in Model Two (see Figure 3, Section 6.13), and will compare and contrast these with the themes that were identified in Chapter 2 – the literature review.

7.3.1   Ethos of the property

An exploratory study conducted by Anthonisz (2014) revealed that the terms 'innovation' and 'creativity' appear regularly, or are embedded, in the company values and philosophy of several five-star hotels in Dubai. Hotels and lodges acknowledged that they have an official and an unofficial vision or mission statement. The official vision or mission statements are quite clearly found on their websites and documentation (such as the hotel or lodge brochures), and are a promise of what guests and staff should expect while staying and working in these hotels or lodges. These

statements are seen as a declaration of and a commitment to the company's objectives and goals. Sarros and Santora (2001) take this suggestion further as they feel that an important element of a manager's leadership is to raise the workers' consciousness of the organisation's vision and mission in order to encourage their commitment to the organisation's vision. But it is interesting to note that employees and managers explain that often the unofficial vision or mission statement can be more important, and that they do everything within their power and within the law to ensure that the guests have a great experience while staying in the hotels and lodges. However, the unofficial vision or mission statement 'we never say no' produces challenges for the employees and they feel sometimes it can be hard to fulfil it.

7.3.2 Comparison between properties

Luxury hotels with several hundred bedrooms concentrate on the experiences of the physical environment, whereas small boutique hotels might focus on social interaction dimensions (Cetin & Dincer, 2014). Managers, employees and guests in the lodges are quick to point out that there are differences between lodges and hotels. One major difference that is highlighted is the size of the lodges – all three participant groups believe that lodges are a lot smaller than hotels, and do not have any more than 20 bedrooms and suites in order to maintain an intimate feel to the lodges. Lodges make the guests feel at home or have a homely feel to them, and guests question how hotels can do the same.

The only participants of the hotels who note a difference between hotels and lodges are the hotel managers. They see the main difference relating to how much money lodges have compared with hotels, and that the money enables the owners of the lodges to offer the guests a lot more in the way of experience, as money is seen as a way to buy experiences.

7.3.3   Setting the stage

All of the participants of the hotels and lodges suggest that there have to be certain building blocks in place – a foundation or springboard the luxury hotel and lodge experience can be built on. Setting the stage enables managers and employees to perform their jobs, and as a result, guests will enjoy the luxury hotel and lodge experience. Setting the stage includes the accommodation (rooms), fixtures and fittings, amenities and facilities, food and beverages, and service. In their luxury hotel study conducted in Malaysia, Khoo-Lattimore and Ekiz (2014) identified the top five components of a hotel experience: the room and in-room amenities, staff, food, services and location. Rooms are seen as the core component of the property's hospitality and of upmost importance to the tourist's overall holiday experience (Khoo-Lattimore & Ekiz, 2014). All participants see the importance of the guests' bedrooms, and feel that everything connected to this has to be perfect, especially on the first entrance by the guest. All properties have standards and procedures to make sure that the bedrooms are always presented to the best of their ability because the guests spend the majority of their time there.

Other studies highlight further contributing factors that have significant and positive impacts on the tourist's experience, and these are convenient parking, exterior aesthetics and interior décor, the value of the food in the restaurant, and courteous and prompt service (Poon & Low, 2005; Walls, 2013). One of the main differences between the lodges and hotels relates to the food aspect, as what guests eat at the lodges is decided for them, and is described by them as a 'meal experience' and not to be missed. In contrast, hotel guests have to pay extra for food, and they can therefore decide whether they want to eat at the luxury hotel or not – but the consensus from guests was that luxury hotels must be able to provide a variety of diverse foods to accommodate the guests staying at the hotel.

Service encounters with guests can be divided into two elements: indirect and direct services. Examples of indirect services are the check-in and check-out process in hotels, whereas direct services include the concierge service, parking and facilities, among others (Pizam & Ellis, 1999). Employees and managers know that guests expect their lodges and hotels to provide them with both indirect and direct services and that they are the building blocks from which the luxury hotel and lodge experience are built. Guests expect all of these building blocks to be perfect and expect they will never encounter any problems with the basics.

7.3.4   The actors' performance

The actors' performance pertains to the service personnel within the hotels and lodges. Baum (2006) suggests that service personnel within the context of luxury hotels need to be able to have informative conversations with their guests about sport, music, politics and any other conceivable topic, often from an international perspective. And this requirement presumes that service personal will have a certain level of cultural exposure and prior education as well as a commitment to remain up to date in these areas (Baum, 2006). All participants of both hotels and lodges highlight that service personnel play an important part in how the guest experience is created. Lodge managers and employees also explain that they feel closer to their guests because, in general, guests stay at the lodges and dine there three times a day, and as previously discussed, managers often dine with the guests in their capacity as hosts, enabling them to build relationships with the guests by engaging in conversation with them during these times. Lodge managers and employees state that because of the small number of service personnel, they need to work closer together to deliver the service to the guest, and they feel that, as they have a high guest-to-staff ratio compared with hotels, they can offer a more personalised service to their guests. In contrast, hotel managers and employees explain that there is a

clearer division of labour between themselves, but they still see themselves as working in a team to create the guest's experience.

In the service industry, where the service encounter is critical to how the customer experiences the service that is being offered, service employees have the potential to influence the value-creating experience by interacting with the customers (Sandström et al., 2008). The hospitality industry is a 'people business' – people are serving people – and this creates additional challenges in creating customer satisfaction. The 'inseparability' or simultaneous production and consumption of services (hotel guests and staff must be present at the same time in the same place) also increases the opportunities for failure (Colgate & Norris, 2001; Ekiz et al., 2012). Managers and employees realise that they depend on each other and that team work is relied upon to produce an experience for their guests. All managers and employees know how important all contact is with their guests and that it takes only one negative interaction to adversely affect the guest's experience.

How staff deliver service within the hospitality industry is important and makes the hospitality industry different from any other. Dawson et al. (2011) suggest that it is the manner in which the hospitality employees provide service, as opposed to the actual service itself, that matters (Ekiz et al., 2012). Walls et al. (2011) point out that the four important factors that can affect the guests' stay are the employees' attitude, proactive service, professional behavioural and appearance. All managers and employees state that it is important that they are well groomed and presented, as this reflects on the property. They also state that good recruitment and training is essential, as this maintains the service that the properties provide the guests.

Participants in research conducted by Walls et al. (2011) suggested that human interaction is a crucial point of the luxury hotel experience, but they made a distinction between human interactions with other guests staying at the hotel and those with the

hotel employees. Human interactions are important to guest experiences because they demonstrate caring through genuine problem-solving, working to understand guest needs, providing individual attention to each guest, and genuinely caring about hotel guests (Walls et al., 2011; Walls, 2013). Guests suggest that staff members are one of the most important aspects of both hotels and lodges, and can have a very positive or a very negative impact on their experience. As previously discussed, lodge guests note that they were encouraged to interact with each other during the canapé and cocktail hour and dinner, and lodge guests also comment on the amount of hosting that was conducted by the general managers, managers, owners and owner-managers.

7.3.5 Guidance

Employees, especially frontline employees, are the ones who deliver the service and maintain the product that directly impacts on the guests' experience, so with this in mind, managers must carefully select and hire the 'correct' employees (Torres & Kline, 2006). The 'correct' employees are those who have personalities that are predisposed to delight customers, and once they are hired, the managers must support their employees through training programmes and the culture of the organisation (Torres & Kline, 2006). Managing staff is an issue that managers of both the hotels and the lodges see as an important component of their job, and they all suggest that the recruitment and retention of staff is a critical part of their roles. Managers also feel that they are not only managers, but also part of a team – lodge managers see themselves working more with their employees in a team environment, while hotel managers see themselves as team members and team leaders, and this is because they have more levels of hierarchy than the lodges. Hotel employees are the only employees who talk about the management within their properties, and they see their managers as part of the management team and also part of their team, as they feel they can relate well to them.

Chain hotels may present some degree of participative leadership, whereas privately owned properties are more decentralised, and frequently characterised by an autocratic style of leadership (Zhenpeng, Wang & Marnburg, 2013). It has been suggested that the overall performance of an organisation depends on the extent to which owner-managers can mobilise all of the knowledge resources held by teams and individuals and turn these resources into value-creation activities (Castanias & Helfat, 1991; Salem, 2014). One of the lodges that participated in this study is owned and managed by the same managers who were interviewed (they are a couple); a definite difference is noted between these owners-managers and all other lodge managers. This couple has a huge vested interest in their lodge, more than the managers who merely work for the owners of the lodge. They feel that their employees know exactly what is expected of them as it is the owners who directly express how they feel the guests' experience should be executed by the staff. They also feel that the guests have the unusual experience of spending time with them (the owners), and that they can find out exactly what the guests want from their luxury lodge experience and how they can execute it, as they were looked upon as 'staff' by the guests.

7.3.6 Co-creation between participants

Companies stage an experience whenever they engage customers, connecting with them in a personal and memorable way (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Lodge managers see the lodge as a place where a play takes place, and their guests and staff are all taking part in this play in order to produce the experience, but they highlight that this can only take place because of the high staff-to-guest ratio. McIntosh and Siggs (2005) suggest that specialised accommodation establishments may be in demand for the experiences of comfort, luxury, uniqueness, history, the more personal touches that they can provide, and host-guest interaction. Bharwani and Jauhari (2013) took this comment further by suggesting that human interaction has emerged as an important dimension that

influences guest experiences in the hospitality industry. Lodge managers see interaction in various forms among guests, staff, themselves and the physical aspects in and out of the lodges. Examples of interactions outside of the lodges are guests enjoying morning or afternoon tea in the gardens, having a picnic on the lawn, having a garden tour or taking part in an activity away from the lodge. Interaction happens when managers first welcome the guests, when they talk to the guests about themselves and about their lives in order to create a connection, when they open the doors for them, when they help them with their luggage, when they drive them somewhere in one of the lodge's vehicles, and so on. Hotel managers see guests interacting with the facilities and amenities of the hotel and with the staff, for example, having a meal in the restaurant and engaging with the food and beverage attendants, or enjoying a swim in the hotel swimming pool and talking to the leisure staff.

Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2000) suggest that companies have to recognise that the customer is now becoming a partner in creating value and that they have to learn how to harness customers' competences. One aspect of this is engaging customers in co-creating personal experiences (Rowley et al., 2007), but in order for organisations to co-create unique customer experiences, they must co-create an empowered employee experience 'inside' the actual organisation (Ramaswamy, 2009). Hotel employees recognise the importance of interaction among themselves, guests, managers and other organisations outside of the property. For example, one set of employees highlight a recent visit to a vineyard that then enabled them to talk much more confidently about those wines to the guests. Lodge employees see interaction as being everyone's job, and that it can make or break a guest experience, and that it only takes one bad interaction to ruin the experience. Binkhorst and Den Dekker (2009) suggest that there is a strong belief that co-creation is so important that it will increase value for human beings in the experience economy. And as previously discussed, luxury hotels are part of the

'experience economy' and it is up to the employees to deliver the experience as part of their relationship with each other and the guest (Brien et al., 2012).

Walls's study in 2013 explains that the staff's professionalism, reliability, attentiveness and guest-to-guest relations impact the guests' hotel experience. Hotel guests note that interaction is something that happens among themselves, the staff, the managers, the owners and other guests. At the lodges, guests explain they are encouraged to interact during the canapé and cocktail hour before dinner and also during dinner – lodge guests are also encouraged to eat together or eat with the managers or the owners or the manager/owners. Guests see interaction as mainly talking to the staff and other guests, sharing a drink or meal with the other guests or managers, and using the property's facilities or services.

7.3.7 Domestic and international comparisons

Various studies of hotel attributes have been conducted to identify what guests take into consideration when making a hotel choice decision. These attributes include both the intangible and the tangible components of the hotel service, such as cleanliness (Atkinson, 1988; Knutson, 1988; Saleh & Ryan, 1992); comfortable, spacious and well-maintained rooms (Cadotte & Turgeon, 1988; Knutson, 1988; Saleh & Ryan, 1992); convenient locations and accessibility (Ananth, DeMicco, Moreo & Howey, 1992; LeBlanc & Nguyen, 1996; Rivers, Toh & Alaoui, 1991); safety and security (Ananth et al., 1992; Atkinson, 1988; Knutson, 1988; Cadotte & Turgeon, 1988); and room facilities such as safety features in the bathrooms, better lighting and supporting mattresses (Poon & Low, 2005; Ruys & Wei, 1998). Guests who travel domestically and internationally have a set of expectations as to how a hotel creates a luxury experience, and so fixtures, fittings, amenities and facilities are regularly maintained to ensure that they are at their best, and that guests are not dissatisfied with their experience because of the tangible aspects of their stay.

The expectation of hospitality received by guests is also influenced by hotel characteristics such as the star ratings, and guests infer that hotels with higher star ratings will provide higher levels of hospitality (Ariffin & Maghzi, 2012). Hotel managers compare overseas rating systems with New Zealand's rating systems, and they also compare overseas hotel service to New Zealand hotel service, suggesting that even though many countries have higher numbers of service staff in their hotels, this does not necessarily mean that guests have a better luxury experience.

7.3.8 The brand's values and beliefs

Hotel managers and employees talk about their brand's values and beliefs that exist throughout the hotels. These values and beliefs are that guests should have a great experience in the hotels and that managers and employees should uphold these values and beliefs in order to create great experiences. Managers and employees feel that they should value their guests and make them feel valued, both domestically and internationally. As highlighted by Torres et al. (2014), creating a great experience on the global stage can be quite daunting for hotels entering foreign markets, as they find themselves operating in entirely new cultures. Trying to understand what makes a customer experience can be a difficult aspect for hotels when they have entered the global market and are seeking success (Torres et al., 2014).

In the hospitality industry, the growth of brand equity can be attributed to both the guests' indirect experience (which originates in advertising and word of mouth) and their direct experience (which is generated by service performance). Hotel guests choose a particular brand of hotel because of the implied promises made about the service that guests should expect (Xu & Chan, 2010). Managers and employees see strength in being part of international chains and their brands being internationally recognised. They suggest that their guests come to their hotels because of the organisation's reputation and they are well aware of what is expected of them, and that

the brand had guidelines and standards as to how the luxury hotel experience should be executed within their hotels.

7.3.9   Projecting an image

Projecting an image is seen by all lodge participants as a way to promote the lodges, and this marketing is undertaken in various forms. General managers of the lodges travel overseas to promote the lodges, and this is done on an individual basis. In contrast, hotels market themselves within their company policies, and this is conducted via a more central forum. Lodge employees see marketing as something that starts as soon as guests decide they want to stay somewhere. Lodge guests see marketing in the printed format, via word of mouth from their family, friends and colleagues, and in online platforms such as TripAdvisor. This concurs with Ekiz et al. (2012), who state that online platforms (places to post reviews and feedback) have recently emerged as one of the most preferred outlets for guests to post comments and share their experiences. Yet, despite the copious amount of hospitality literature published on the subject of the use of the Internet, there has been a comparatively small amount written on how guests use the Internet as a medium to share their experiences (Ekiz et al., 2012).

The most important characteristic of the experience is leaving guests with images that will last in their minds, and it is very important that all staff remember that the combined effect of their actual experience with the physical image, goods and services, public relations, advertising and word of mouth will be a big influence on the guest's mind (Brunner-Sperdin & Peters, 2009; Normann, 1991; Pine & Gilmore, 1998, 1999). It can be seen that the authors above are suggesting that successful experiences are those that the guest would want to build upon and repeat and promote enthusiastically via word of mouth. Lodge employees see this happening when they attract and keep their guests – turning them into regular guests. Employees explain that regular guests promote the lodges to their colleagues, family and friends, thus promoting the image of

the lodge – so, essentially, marketing is conducted via word of mouth. Lodge employees see large numbers of guests returning to the lodges and becoming regular guests because of their previous experiences at the lodges.

7.4   Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has discussed how the two proposed conceptual models support or challenge the existing literature that was presented in Chapter 2. The first section of this chapter discussed the themes that are highlighted in Model One (see Figure 2, Section 5.14), comparing and contrasting them with the extant literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The second section discussed the themes that are highlighted in Model Two (see Figure 3, Section 6.13) by comparing and contrasting each of these themes with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The following chapter will conclude the thesis.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

The creation of experiences within a hospitality context has interested academics for over 60 years, and yet, despite this, there is still a distinct lack of literature on how hotel and lodge experiences are created within the luxury sector. This study set out to explore how the luxury hotel and lodge experience is created by exploring the perceptions of the three main groups of participants – managers, employees and guests – using case studies from New Zealand. Six properties and 81 participants took part in this study. An interpretive qualitative case study approach was applied, data were analysed both in-case and cross-case, and finally, two conceptual models were produced that, firstly, describe the luxury hotel and lodge experience and, secondly, identify how it is created. This final chapter revisits the research objectives, provides a summary of the findings and discusses the contribution to knowledge. The chapter concludes by presenting industry implications, noting the limitations of the study and identifying opportunities for further research.

8.2 The research objectives

The aim of this study was to examine and evaluate the creation of the luxury accommodation experience using case studies within New Zealand. The research question for this study was:

What is the luxury accommodation experience, and how is it created?

The aims of this study were:

1. To examine and explain managers', employees' and guests' perceptions of what the luxury hotel and lodge experience is.

2. To identify and interpret managers', employees' and guests' perceptions of how the luxury hotel and lodge experience is created.

3. To analyse and compare managers', employees' and guests' perceptions of what the luxury hotel and lodge experience is and how it is created.

4. To propose a conceptual model that explains what the luxury hotel and lodge experience is from a guest, employee and manager perspective.

5. To propose a conceptual model that explains how the luxury hotel and lodge experience is created from a guest, employee and manager perspective.

8.3   Summary of the findings

Before a summary of the findings is presented, an interesting observation that was identified while analysing the data and the literature is worthy of discussion. The observation was that guests had far less to say about the luxury experience than the managers and employees. It was not that guests were not interested or did not want to say anything, it was just that they had not given the creation of the luxury hotel or lodge experience much thought, probably because, as guests, the experience is all laid out for them; that is, they do not have to concern themselves with its creation. Like any guest at a function, they may have been involved in the process or planning of the function, but they are not privy to the amount of work that is involved in running the function itself. This is very much like the luxury hotel or lodge experience, where guests do not see how much detailed work goes into planning, creating and delivering their experience.

8.3.1   Managers', employees' and guests' perceptions of the luxury hotel and lodge experience

Managers and employees see the luxury hotel and lodge experience involving everyone and everything, from the moment the guests make initial contact with the property until they receive their welcome home email enquiring about their experience, and everything in between. In contrast, guests see the luxury hotel and lodge experience as a journey that encompasses just the stay, starting from the moment they gain their first impression of the property until the end. It could be said that suggesting the luxury hotel and lodge

experience involves everyone and everything is a very broad statement, but it can also be seen as a very accurate statement. Managers see themselves in some way as the facilitators of their guests' stay, and that it is important for them and the employees to 'read' their guests to make sure that they can adjust the experience to whatever the guests desire. Employees see themselves as the ones who are there, not only to meet, but to exceed their guests' expectations of the luxury hotel or lodge experience.

All participants see the luxury hotel and lodge experience as escaping from daily life to enjoy some relaxation, and to have some indulgence and pampering within an opulent environment. Managers and employees know that their guests expect to be indulged by having their needs and wants attended to during their stay, and that it is their responsibility to do that. Guests feel that the luxury hotel and lodge experience is being able to check into a new reality, visiting somewhere special – somewhere to experience some tranquillity, privacy, exclusivity, to be spoilt and to feel special, to stay somewhere where every comfort and convenience is provided for within an opulent environment.

Participants see the location and setting of the properties as part of what the luxury hotel and lodge experience is. Firstly, being a New Zealand luxury hotel or luxury lodge is seen as a drawcard by participants, as New Zealand is seen as offering its own form of luxury experience. And secondly, although the settings are either in the city or in the countryside, all of these properties are situated in beautiful, tranquil and amazing settings (even the city hotel has its own stunning setting). So the location and setting is also seen as an integral part of the luxury experience.

Participants all experience certain emotions during their luxury hotel and lodge experience. For example, guests' emotions include excitement, delight, surprise, amazement, happiness, bliss, feeling lucky to experience the level of luxury that they are receiving and feeling satisfied because they are being looked after and all their needs

are being met. Managers and employees want their guests to feel relaxed and happy, to enjoy themselves, to have no worry or stress, to be cared for and just to feel that everything is taken care of, and for the whole experience to be pleasurable. Their own emotions include feeling a great deal of pleasure, happiness, joy, excitement, gratitude, disappointment in themselves if something goes wrong for their guests, and feeling lucky they are working at this level of luxury and that they are looked after by their owners and management team.

Hotel managers and employees acknowledge that the luxury hotel experience does not always have to be on the property, and that undertaking an external activity is part of the overall luxury hotel experience. So they are very aware of what activities are available for their guests to participate in outside of the hotels, and when guests express an interest in any particular external activity, then their concierge teams can organise these for the guest. Guests themselves see part of the luxury hotel experience as partaking in activities outside of the hotel, and that they rely on the concierge team to enable them to engage in these activities. Managers and employees are aware that external activities can have a positive or negative effect on the rest of the luxury hotel experience because external activities cannot be separated from the overall luxury hotel experience in the minds of their guests.

Lodge participants see the physical surroundings of the entire lodge as an environment that affects everyone who works and stays at the lodge. Guests see the scenery and having a fantastic view from their bedroom and while they are eating as an important part of the luxury lodge experience. Managers and employees feel that the weather can affect the luxury lodge experience as there are many weather-dependent activities conducted outside of the lodge.

Lodge participants see delivering tailored attention as part of the luxury lodge experience, where nothing is overlooked, and there is no need to ask for anything as

everything has been thought of, and everything is there for the guests and all they need to do is turn up. Guests feel that the lodges have an attention to detail that takes luxury to the next level. Lodge participants also see hospitableness as part of the luxury lodge experience, where guests see that they are being made to feel at home – maybe not so much that the property is their home, but that there is a sense of being made comfortable and experiencing all of the staff's hospitableness (this includes managers, owners and the owner-managers of the properties). Managers and employees see themselves as hospitable and friendly and that they develop a 'family'-like bond with their guests, and that they care for the guests' well-being while they stay at the lodge.

Finally, participants see the luxury hotel and lodge experience as something that they will want to remember, like reliving a dream. Managers and employees realise that the only thing that the guests will take away with them is their memories, so they know that they need to make the luxury hotel and lodge experience so memorable that the guests will want to repeat the experience. Therefore, they concentrate on the guest 'being in the moment' during their luxury hotel and lodge experience.

8.3.2 Managers', employees' and guests' perceptions of how the luxury hotel and lodge experience is created

All participants see the creation of the luxury hotel and lodge experience within the ethos of the property, and that the ethos comes from the vision or mission statement that the business or owners create and promote to the guests. It is this vision that indicates what guests should expect from their luxury hotel or lodge experience during the duration of their stay. Managers and employees are aware of what their property's vision or mission statement is, and they know that this statement shows how they are committed to delivering their property's luxury experience to the guests. All of the properties have different ways of creating the luxury hotel and lodge experience for their guests, and participants explain that their hotels or lodges promote what the point

of difference is between themselves and other hotels and lodges via their vision or mission statement. Properties promote this point of difference as their competitive advantage to entice guests to experience their luxury hotel or lodge experience.

All participants see the creation of the luxury hotel and lodge experience as involving setting the stage. Setting the stage is a list of aspects that are needed as a foundation or springboard so that the luxury hotel and lodge experience can exist, and if this foundation is not there, the luxury experience cannot be executed. Managers, employees and guests see setting the stage in slightly different ways, but essentially, accommodation, food and beverages, amenities and facilities, and service enable the setting of the stage. Managers feel that the accommodation is the rooms, and that they should be large and spacious, have the most comfortable beds possible and have beautiful linen. Employees feel that the standard of the rooms is important and that they should always be clean and well presented, they should be large with lots of space, they should have the best linen on the best beds, the best toiletries, and a turndown service once if not twice a day. Guests feel that the accommodation should offer spacious, comfortable rooms, lovely suites, beautiful fireplaces, high-quality comfortable bedding, and enormous bathrooms with heated flooring and huge bath tubs.

Lodge managers and employees feel that guests should have a great selection of food and beverage, and have different dining venues and private dining venues to choose from. Lodge guests feel that the food should be of an exceptional standard (with perfect wine matching), the meals should be better than would be expected from top restaurants in major cities, and they should be able to eat anywhere on the property. Hotel managers and employees feel that there should be good food, great restaurants, good in-room dining, and fantastic food and beverage service. In contrast with the lodge guests, hotel guests can choose whether they eat at the hotels because it is not inclusive in the tariff (as it is at the lodges), and the option to eat out of the hotel might be important to some

guests. Managers, employees and guests feel that spa pools, swimming pools, health and fitness centres, and day spas are also part of setting the stage for a luxury hotel and lodge experience.

The actors' performance, which refers to managers and employees seeing themselves and the service as being part of how the luxury hotel and lodge experience is created, is delivered by their being friendly, being helpful, having a good attitude towards their guests, creating novelty for their guests, caring about their guests, looking after them, making them feel comfortable, being unobtrusive and having a high level of expertise.

Managers describe service in many ways, for example, a high degree of professional service, fantastic service, good service and personalised service. Employees describe themselves as being discreet, being friendly, being part of a team, being able to anticipate guests' needs, being able to exceed guests' expectations, and going above and beyond the call of duty. Employees see service as being one of the first things that guests want in a luxury hotel or lodge experience, and they believe that guests should receive amazing service, and that this should be of a consistently high standard. Guests should feel as if they are individuals and should receive personalised service, from being welcomed by name to having any problems sorted promptly.

Guests see service and the 'right' staff as a way to create the luxury hotel and lodge experience; guests described service in many ways, including prompt service, best of service, high standard of service, efficiency in the service, generous service and personalised service. There are many examples of personalised service, including staff having a personal touch, staff giving special attention to guests, guests being taken care of, guests being looked after, and guests having their needs and wants taken care of. Guests see the 'right' staff as friendly, professional, skilled, having a 'can do' attitude and being interactive, but not pretentious.

Lodge and hotel managers see guidance as the ways in which they are able to manage their staff in order to create the luxury hotel and lodge experience for the guests during their stay. Guidance is seen as how managers manage their staff, and this involves them explaining to their staff what is expected of them, and creating an environment to enable them to execute a luxury hotel or lodge experience. Employees were very clear as to what their managers expect from them and how it should be done. Managers also see guidance as enabling them to gain feedback from the guests about their experience to see if the experience is being created correctly, and if not, having the authority to do something about it.

All participants see co-creation happening in many different forms of interaction: they see it happening between themselves at the hotels and lodges, and see that it could be between two or more of the participant groups (managers, employees and guests). Guests at the lodges mention being hosted by the managers, the owners or the owner-managers. This hosting is conducted during the cocktail and canapé hour before the degustation meal, and also while managers, owners or owner-managers eat with their guests. Managers see their duty as hosts as to encourage interaction between the guests themselves. Participants also see interaction happening outside of the hotel and lodge with outside parties, and that this can have a positive or negative effect on how the luxury hotel and lodge experience is created.

Hotel managers and guests see international experience as a reason why the luxury experience could be improved to meet or exceed international standards. As people travel and experience new things, their expectations rise and they expect more in their subsequent visits. Hotel managers and guests see domestic and overseas influences helping hotels to create and improve the luxury hotel experience. Managers and employees see great strength in being part of an international chain, and that the values

and beliefs that are instilled in them enable them to create an international luxury hotel experience, and that this luxury hotel experience is consistent throughout their brand.

Lodge participants feel that creating a luxury lodge experience starts the very first time guests look at the lodges' websites, their brochures, press releases or any article that is published in magazines or online. Participants see projecting an image as a way to start creating the luxury lodge experience before the guests arrive at the lodge by showing them photographic images of the lodge, articles that are written about the lodge and the awards they have gained. This projected image then has to be maintained throughout the guest's stay by not letting these standards slip at any time, so the guest has the best possible luxury lodge experience.

8.3.3 Differences and similarities – managers', employees' and guests' perceptions of 'what' and 'how' the luxury hotel and lodge experience is created

Aim 3 of this research was to analyse and compare managers', employees' and guests' perceptions of 'what' and 'how' the luxury hotel and lodge experience is created. Table 13 shows clearly the differences and similarities between the three participant groups in terms of their perceptions of what the luxury hotel and lodge experience is. It can be seen that the four themes that all participants agreed upon was *setting the stage*, *ethos of the property*, *the actors' performance*, and *co-creation*. The theme of *projecting an image* was agreed upon by all of the lodge participants. But the remaining six themes contained quite a few differences of opinions, and *owners* and *being a host* were only talked about by the lodge managers – this is why these did not feature in the final model. *Guidance* was talked about by all of the managers and only the hotel employees. *Comparisons of properties* was talked about by all the lodge participants, but only the hotel managers. *Domestic and international comparisons* were talked about by hotel managers and hotel guests, but not the hotel employees. The *brand's values*

and beliefs were talked about by the hotel managers and hotel employees, but not the hotel guests.

Table 13: Differences and similarities of managers', employees' and guests' perceptions of the luxury hotel and lodge experience

	Hotel managers	Lodge managers	Hotel employees	Lodge employees	Hotel guests	Lodge guests
Setting the stage	√	√	√	√	√	√
Ethos of the property	√	√	√	√	√	√
The actors' performance	√	√	√	√	√	√
Co-creation	√	√	√	√	√	√
Guidance	√	√	√			
Owner-managers		√				
Being a host		√				
Comparisons of properties	√	√		√		√
Domestic and international comparisons	√				√	
The brand's values and beliefs	√		√			
Projecting an image		√		√		√

Table 14 shows clearly the differences and similarities between the three participant groups in terms of their perceptions of how the luxury hotel and lodge experience is created. It can be seen that the two themes that all participants agreed upon was *being in the moment* and *opulence.* All hotel participants agreed on the themes of the *essence of the luxury hotel, location and setting, sensations and emotions, external activities* and *guests' desires and expectations.* But the one theme that the hotel participants differed

on was *indulgence* – hotel managers and employees talked about this, but hotel guests did not. All lodge participants agreed on the *essence of the luxury lodge, indulgence, physical surroundings, delivering tailored attention* and *hospitableness*. There were two themes that the lodge participants differed on – *location and settings*, which the managers and employees talked about but the guests did not; and *sensations and emotions*, which the lodge employees and guests talked about, but the lodge managers did not.

Table 14: Differences and similarities in managers', employees' and guests' perceptions of how the luxury hotel and lodge experience is created

	Hotel managers	Lodge managers	Hotel employees	Lodge employees	Hotel guests	Lodge guests
Being in the moment	√	√	√	√	√	√
Opulence	√	√	√	√	√	√
Essence of the luxury hotel	√		√		√	
Essence of the luxury lodge		√		√		√
Indulgence	√	√	√	√		√
Location and setting	√	√	√	√	√	
Sensation and emotions	√		√	√	√	√
Physical surroundings		√		√		√
Delivering tailored attention		√		√		√
Hospitableness		√		√		√
External activities	√		√		√	
Guests' desires and expectations	√		√		√	

8.4 Contribution to knowledge

8.4.1 Conceptual models

Managers', employees' and guests' perceptions of what the luxury hotel and lodge experience is and how it is created have been examined. A conceptual model of what the luxury hotel and lodge experience is was produced, and a second conceptual model providing an insight into how the luxury hotel and lodge experience is created was developed.

8.4.1.1 What the luxury hotel and lodge experience is
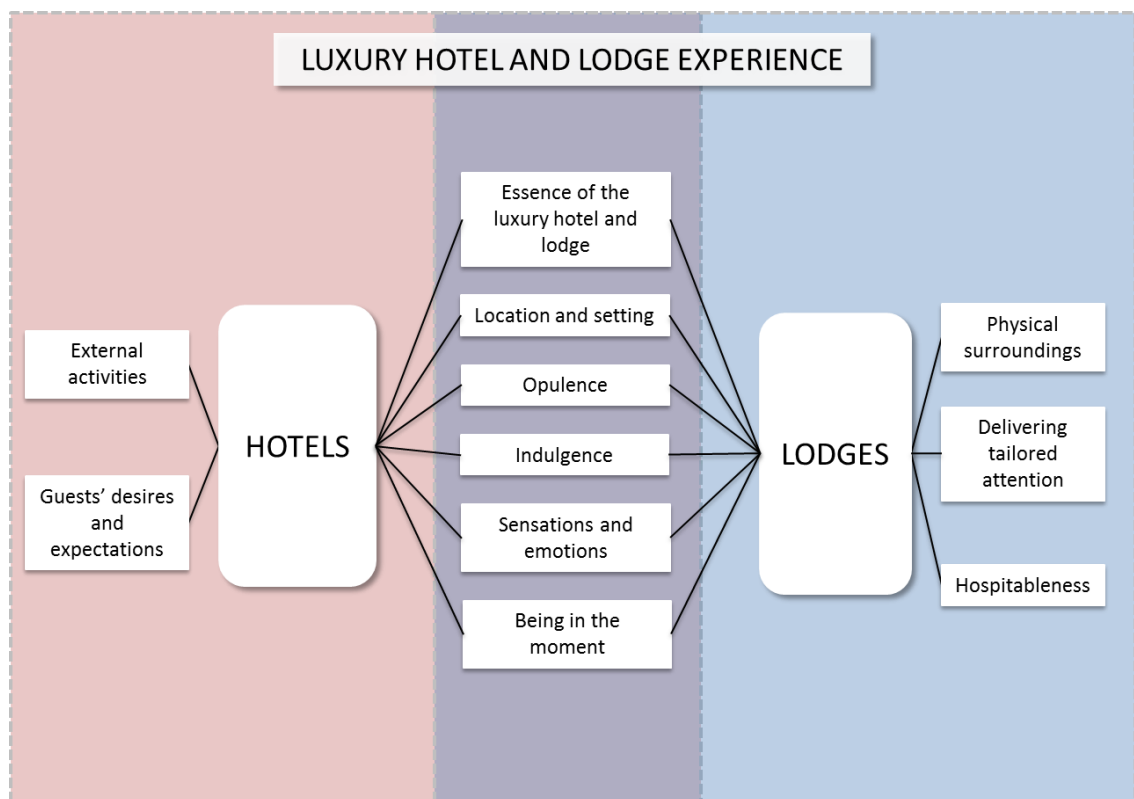
Figure 2: The luxury hotel and lodge experience model

Figure 2 presents a model of the luxury hotel and lodge experience, based on the empirical research undertaken. The centre of the model represents the participants' collective opinions on what they consider the most essential elements in a successful luxury hotel or lodge experience. Essentially, one may consider this a holistic 'blueprint' for building the perceived successful business venture. On the left are two

additional elements that are considered unique to the hotels studied, and on the right are three additional elements that are considered unique to the lodges studied.

The central block commences with the element *essence of the luxury hotel and lodge*, and this includes all the foundation aspects of the properties, including the exceptional standards that are the point of difference between an ordinary hotel or lodge and a luxury hotel or lodge. *Location and setting* in this model relates to luxury hotels and lodges being located in attractive sites with beautiful surroundings, whether city or countryside based. The participants conceded the fact that New Zealand has a distinct advantage as it is already globally recognised by the more discerning tourists as a unique holiday destination for its diversity of landscapes, locations and entertainment, and as having an established luxury status. *Opulence* encompasses the various special components that define a luxury venue; venues missing some or all of these components would be considered 'ordinary'. The degree of opulence defines the standard of the luxury experience.

Indulgence is the confluence between the guests' expectations, desires and requirements and the staff's capability and willingness to satisfy their guests – guests can be made to feel special, pampered and spoilt with the input and cooperation of the entire staff. Participants described the emotional aspects associated with peer interactivity and guest interaction, and being able to provide excellent standards of service by having the 'right tools' and operating environment. 'Getting it right' enhances their own sense of satisfaction and personal fulfilment. The guests' *sensations and emotions* are experienced from a different perspective; here, they are judging the property, the staff and all the tangible aspects promoted and supported by the hotel or lodge. And in the end, and most importantly, the client never felt 'short-changed' or neglected. Finally, the remaining element, that of *being in the moment*, involves how the guests view the luxury hotel or lodge as a 'lived experience', which does not include any preconceived

ideas or retrospective judgements. Hospitality and accommodation are lived experiences, and there is an inseparability that means that the production and consumption of these services are interconnected. They are perishable because they are services that cannot be stored for sale at a later opportunity, so the properties have only one opportunity to impress their guests – there are no second chances.

The two unique elements of luxury hotels are *external activities* and *guests' desires and expectations.* External activities, often listed by hotels as 'things to do', refer to activities conducted outside of the hotel environments. In probability, the activity will be arranged by the hotel concierge team and outsourced to a third party, a business neither owned nor controlled by the hotel. Regardless of whether the activity is conducted by a third party or not, an unfavourable outing will often have a negative impact on the overall luxury hotel experience. Hotels in general are deemed prescriptive experiences, and are dedicated to delivering what their guests expect and desire as interpreted by the hotel's operating standards and performance specification, providing those expectations and desires can be satisfied while operating within the hotel's guidelines.

The three unique elements of luxury lodges are *physical surroundings*, *delivering tailored attention* and *hospitableness*. Luxury lodges are often located in relatively remote sites with rugged topography and stunning scenery. The facilities, on the other hand, are anything but rugged or Spartan; in fact, most are the last word in luxury. It would also appear that staff in these facilities are able to exercise a greater degree of autonomy, and as a consequence, have greater flexibility, so they can effectively deliver tailored attention to individual guests, further enhancing the luxury experience. Hospitableness is a general concept implying that all guests are well catered to and that their well-being is a paramount feature of the luxury lodge experience. To be a

successful luxury property, the guests must recognise and acknowledge these
endeavours.

8.4.1.2   How the luxury hotel and lodge experience is created
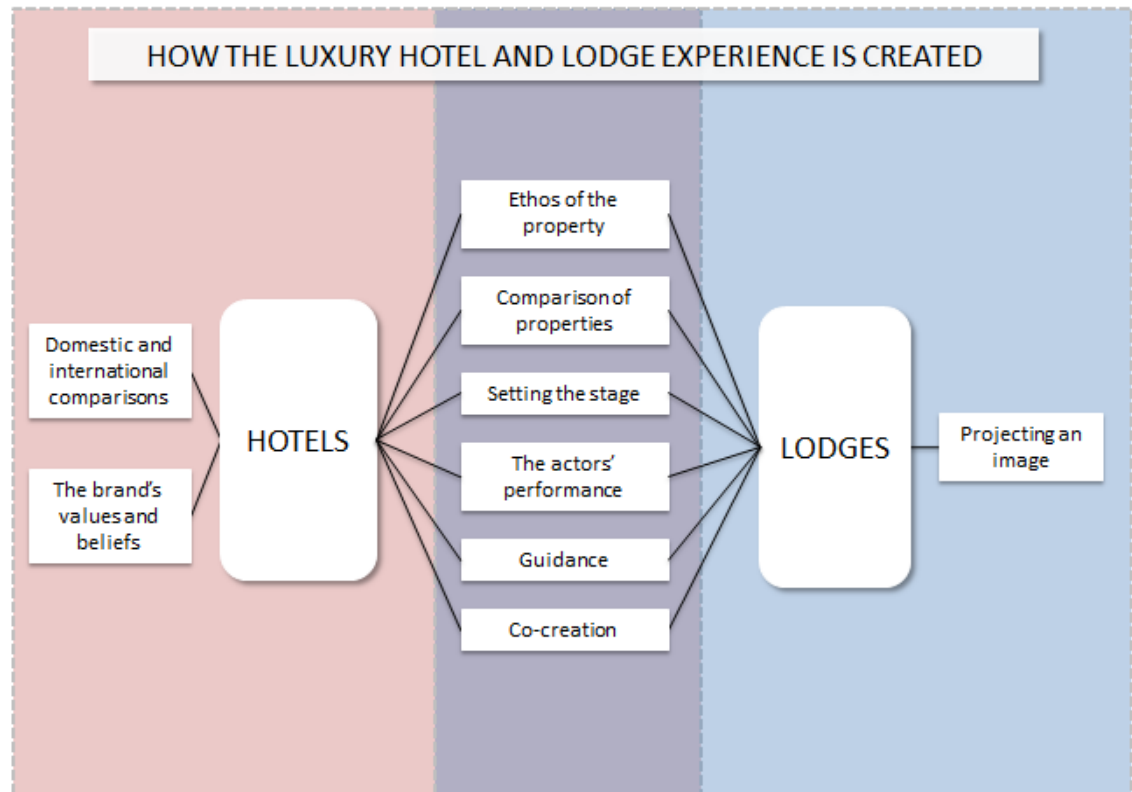
Figure 3: How the luxury hotel and lodge experience is created model

Figure 3 presents the model of how the luxury hotel and lodge experience is created,
based on the findings of the empirical research. The centre of the model represents the
participants' collective opinion on what they consider to be the six most essential
elements required to create a successful luxury hotel or lodge experience. Essentially,
one may consider this a holistic 'blueprint' for building the perception of being a luxury
accommodation property. On the left are two additional elements that are considered
unique to the hotels studied, and on the right is one additional element that is considered
unique to the lodges studied.

The central block commences with the element *ethos of the property*, and this represents
the philosophy behind the founding of the property, be it a luxury hotel or a lodge.
Management of the property begins with a vision or mission statement, declaring

expectations, intentions, promises and guarantees affecting both the employees and the guests. Participants agree on the need for a *comparison of properties*, as luxury properties need to be capable of positively promoting their differences from comparable properties. After an idea of the luxury property has been created, *setting the stage* is now required. The stage here is everything a luxury property offers materially: all the aspects that guests will interact with physically, such as the rooms, amenities and facilities. All these base requirements are deemed essential to guests' comfort, nourishment and entertainment, and there is no room for deficiencies in availability, quality or quantity.

Once the stage is set, the actors (managers and employees) have to play their roles in a professional, calm and cohesive fashion, and as in a play, the audience (guests) watch *the actors' performance*. In order to ensure success, the audience has to be engaged and become part of the overall performance. Thus, the guests are an integral part of the whole luxury stay experience.

Participants suggested that, for continuing success and maintenance of quality standards, the *guidance* of staff, including all management staff, should be a continuous commitment. Well-trained and informed staff at all levels likely experience self-confidence, a more meaningful sense of responsibility and positive decision making. *Co-creation* is a business strategy that focuses on customer experience and interactive relationships. Co-creation permits and indeed encourages a more active involvement from the customer.

The two unique elements associated with luxury hotels are *domestic and international comparisons* and *the brand's values and beliefs*. Managers and guests agree that wider global travel has revealed new options for creation of the luxury hotel experience. Broadly speaking, guests will be impressed initially with enhanced levels of luxury, but it takes little time before those same guests become a little blasé and expect comparable

levels of luxury wherever they stay. Managers and employees see the great advantages of being part of an international group that instils in them the same established standards, values and beliefs, and in turn enables them to create the same luxury hotel experience.

The perceived unique element of the luxury lodge is *projecting an image*. Lodge guests will often consult multiple media – hard copy, websites and social media – prior to choosing a lodge; thus, lodge participants are of the opinion that projecting an attractive image, coupled with comprehensive information, is critical for guests. In fact, participants feel that the whole luxury lodge experience starts at the point of first contact with the lodge as portrayed in media.

8.4.2 Adding to the body of existing literature

There is a distinct lack of literature on the luxury lodge experience, both internationally and here in New Zealand – however, there is an abundance of literature on eco lodges, Native American sweat lodges, and safari lodges. The literature on eco lodges has concentrated on the increase in the number of eco lodges (Erdem & Tetik, 2013), the issues and problems of having luxury lodging near world heritage sites, such a Machu Picchu (Maxwell & Ypeij, 2009), and how to improve ecotourism planning in order to meet the demand of these customers (Torres-Sovero, Conzález, Martín-López, & Kirkby, 2012). The literature on sweat lodges has concentrated on reporting on native and non-native participants in transpersonal experiences at sweat lodges (Garrett, Torres-Rivera, Brubaker, Portman, Brotherton, West-Olatunji, & Grayshield, 2011; Hibbard, 2007), and unfortunately some of the research has highlighted that these sweat lodges have been responsible for the increase in respiratory illness in Native Americans (Mace, 2014). The literature for safari lodges has concentrated on wastewater issues that South Africa luxury lodges are facing (McCarthy, Gumbricht, Stewart, Brandt, Hancox, McCarthy, & Duse, 2004), food supply linkages to luxury lodges, stating that

only 60% of the food used in luxury lodges in Zambia is from Zambia itself (Rogerson, 2011), and evaluating the current web marketing approaches of South Africa luxury lodges (Meintjes, Niemann-Struweg, & Petzer, 2011).

But as previously discussed, this thesis looks at the luxury lodge experience in New Zealand from three different perspectives (managers, employees and guests). One of the themes of the luxury lodges experience is the *essence of the luxury lodge,* which is seen by managers as the lodge itself having an original, authentic, and genuine feel. Employees saw the lodge as a being a home away from home, while guests also saw the lodge as a home, or that it had a homely feel. So it is proposed that this thesis makes a significant contribution to the literature on luxury lodges, not only here in New Zealand but also internationally.

There are many papers and studies outside of the tourism and hospitality field that offer a broader perspective on the topic of luxury, but this thesis has taken the perspective from a hospitality stance, with the aim of adding to the existing hospitality literature in order make this body of knowledge stronger. The word *luxury* is interchangeable with the word opulence, and was a word preferred by lodge managers due to the overuse of the word luxury and its lack of a clear definition – Brun and Castelli (2013) stated that researchers and practitioners are still unable to agree on an unambiguous definition for the term luxury. Employees saw opulence as requiring a lot of staff, while guests noted that their idea of luxury/opulence had changed from their parents' generation. On the other hand, hotel managers and employees stated that to obtain an opulent environment you needed money, and guests stated that opulence was something that you paid for. Market experts (e.g. Altagamma, 2008) stated that due to the lack of an operational definition of luxury, the best option is to identify a set of product features that luxury companies view as desirable (Brun & Castelli, 2013). So this thesis proposes that using

the word opulence instead of luxury as a product feature would make luxury accommodation more desirable.

In this thesis, luxury is also viewed in the context of the luxury accommodation experience, and it could be said that a luxury experience is very different from a luxury good. But this is not to say that there aren't any similarities – it could be argued that they both project the status of the person who is staying in a luxury property or the person who owns a luxury good. Also it could be seen that these people are pampering themselves, or rewarding themselves. It could also be said that a luxury accommodation experience relates more to luxury experiences rather than luxury goods, because the luxury accommodation experience includes a number of experiences people would call luxury, for example, fine dining, spa treatment, extraordinary activities, and the superior bedrooms. One of the important aspects of the luxury accommodation experience is the level of service that guests receive due to the high ratio of staff to guests (in order to produce the 'luxury' part of the experience), and the expectations of the staff from the management team. Luxury hotels are service intensive and maintain a high ratio of staff-to-guests to ensure high interpersonal guest contact within an opulent environment (Brien, et al., 2012). The findings of this thesis in relation to luxury within the luxury accommodation experience add to the present body of knowledge.

All the research conducted for this thesis was undertaken during the 'lived experience'. Hospitality exists within the 'lived experience', and being in the moment is about living an experience as it happens. Overall, there is a shortage of research on customer experiences in the hospitality field, and more empirical studies need to be conducted (Knutson et al., 2009; Torres et al., 2014; Walls et al., 2011). One of the themes of the luxury lodge experience is *being in the moment* as this was felt to encapsulate what living a lived experience is. Lodge managers saw themselves as facilitators of their

customers being in the moment, and hotel managers felt that their guests taking an interest in local staff, furnishings, and produce would help to create these moments. Certin and Walls (2016) stated that how the managerial perspective converts into actual and successful guest experiences is still not clear and requires further attention – that they had not seen any empirical research that had explored guest experiences through the eyes of managers, and thus they felt there was a void in the literature (Certin & Walls, 2016).

All employees saw how important they were in creating and helping their guests to be *in the moment* in their properties. Guests were asked about being *in the moment* and they felt that it involved a large number of people and a large amount of emotion. Although there is literature available on 'a moment of being' and 'in-the-moment' from disciples such as nursing (Cunningham, 2016), education (Wilhelm, Sherrod & Walters, 2008), and photography (Hoban, 2001), there is little existing analysis on experience within the luxury accommodation experience. Therefore it is proposed that *being in the moment* as an element of the luxury hotel and lodge experience is a new finding, and so contributes to hospitality and tourism literature.

Blain and Lashley (2014) and Lashley (2015) stated that although there is a growing body of work on 'hospitality', few authors study the nature of 'hospitableness' as a distinct concept. Their study sought to understand the traits of hospitableness through a motive-based model, and then to use this conceptual framework to develop an instrument that would be able to measure individual hospitableness. After two phases of research, and finally testing this instrument on 33 participants, Blain and Lashley (2014) and Lashley (2015) suggested that this instrument was ready to be tested in an array of settings such as hospitality, tourism and leisure. In this thesis, *hospitableness* was seen by lodge managers in the way that they hosted their guest (thus showing

hospitableness), employees saw the hosts as a way to look after the guests' wellbeing, and guests felt part of the lodge family and that staff were looking after their wellbeing. This finding is an element of how the luxury hotel and lodge experience is created, and therefore adds to the literature on the topic of hospitableness.

There is a distinct scarcity of literature on co-creation in hospitality as a whole. Recently, Campos Mendes, Valle and Scott (2015) wrote a paper entitled *Co-creation of tourist experiences: a literature review*. Within this they stated that, to date, there had been only six studies completed within hospitality on co-creation: two of these papers were conceptual, two were conducted in pubs/venues, and the other two focused on the use of IT and software within hotels. Overall there are very few empirical studies that have examined customers' co-creation activities and their consequences for organisations within the travel and service sector (e.g. Auh, Bell, McLeod, & Shih, 2007; Carbonell, Rodríguez-Escudero, & Pujari, 2009; Li & Petrick, 2008; Prebensen, Vittersø, & Dahl, 2013; Shaw et al., 2011).

This thesis concluded that co-creation was seen as a process, and that interaction was part of that process – all managers saw this in various forms, namely among guests, staff and themselves. All employees recognised the importance of this interaction as part of the process of co-creation in order to make their guests' experiences even better. Guests saw interaction in the form of talking to staff and other guests, and using the property's facilities and services, and that this had made their stay better. This finding adds significantly to the body of knowledge of hospitality and tourism in relation to how co-creation is involved in creating the luxury hotel and lodge experience.

8.5   Industry implications

This study has researched not only what the luxury hotel and lodge experience is, but also how that experience can be created. As discussed in Chapter 3, qualitative research can play an important role in helping a researcher create theories that can have practical and immediate implications for hospitality managers (Walsh, 2003). Based on the findings of this research, a number of recommendations can be made to enable managers to create a luxury hotel and lodge experience.

Properties have to deliver what is promised by their vision or mission statement. It is imperative that the vision or mission statement is instilled in all managers and employees, and that a monitoring system is set up to ensure that what is being promised is executed. Knowing the property's point of difference and using this as a competitive advantage is important – managers need to identify what makes their property different, then highlight and emphasise this to potential and regular guests. Properties need to set the stage for guests, as this is the foundation that enables managers and employees to create the luxury hotel or lodge experience. Setting the stage is accomplished by making sure that all the tangible and intangible aspects of the hotel or lodge are present and correct for each and every guest. Properties may need to devise checklists to enable this. Setting the stage relates to the 'building blocks', without which nothing can be achieved in terms of the luxury experience – it is the foundation on which the whole experience is built.

Properties need to focus on selecting, training and retaining managers and employees who are able to create and execute a successful luxury hotel or lodge experience. This may involve re-evaluating the selection, training and retention policies that hotels and lodges may or may not have in place. Managers and management teams need to clearly explain to employees what is expected of them in order to execute a luxury hotel or

lodge experience correctly, and this may involve revisiting or producing a blueprint of how to create and execute a successful luxury hotel or lodge experience.

Properties need to encourage more co-creation between the participating groups, and may need to investigate the different forms in which this co-creation takes place at the properties. Co-creation can happen between two or more of the participant groups (managers, employees and guests), and it can also happen outside of the hotel or lodge with outside participants. Encouraging more co-creation to take place can have a positive effect on how the luxury hotel and lodge experience is created – for example, encouraging staff to visit producers of local products and wine will enable them to talk informatively to the guests about these topics. Having dedicated staff members interacting with guests throughout their stay will help to ensure engagement between guests and staff, which will enable them to create a luxury hotel or lodge experience. And properties need to continually improve the luxury hotel or lodge experience by comparing their own property to domestic and international equivalents.

Hotel brands need to make sure that their values and beliefs are followed through with by their managers and employees so that these then filter through to the guests: maintaining and sustaining the values and beliefs requires continual training and support for the managers and employees. Properties need to not only maintain but also sustain the property's image via their website, brochures, press releases, articles in magazines or online. The image of the property starts to create the luxury hotel or lodge experience by photographic and verbal communication to potential guests.

The two conceptual models that were produced could be given to luxury hotels and lodges to visually show what the luxury hotel and lodge experience is and how it can be created.

8.6 Limitations

The first limitation of this research was that the properties were unwilling for the researcher to collect demographic data on their managers, employees and guests, and although they were happy for interviews to be conducted, no 'personal' information was to be asked. The second limitation was that one potential source of evidence for the case study data collection, participant observation, was unable to be collected: the researcher did not participate in any of the hotels or lodges, so no data were collected this way – all of the properties were unwilling for this information to be collected. The third limitation is that the sample size could be seen as being small, with only six properties taking part in this study. Finally, it could be seen that only using case studies from New Zealand is a limitation itself, because the luxury hotel and lodge experience could be different in other countries around the world.

8.7 Opportunities for further academic research

This research has sought to develop an understanding of what the luxury hotel and lodge experience is and how it is created, using case studies from New Zealand. Two conceptual models have been proposed to illustrate this (see Figures 2 and 3). Further research may seek comparative studies to be conducted in other countries in order to identify similarities with and differences from the New Zealand luxury hotel and lodge experience and how it is created. Future models could be produced to show the similarities and differences between countries, which could eventually lead to an international benchmarking system identifying the criteria of what a luxury hotel and lodge experience entails and how it can be created. The two conceptual models could also be tested using deductive quantitative methods, and be applied to other types of luxury accommodation.

This research has demonstrated that for many managers, employees and guests, the luxury hotel and lodge experience is very personal, emotional and complex. If industry

managers have a better understanding of this, it will be easier for them to successfully

create a luxury hotel and lodge experience for their guests and deliver a positive and

memorable experience of their property.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Documentation as sources of evidence

The 2012 annual reports of all the properties were read and notes were taken from them.

Press briefing and media from the following publications were found and read:

- Andrew Harper's Hideaway Report
- Angeleno
- Architectural Digest
- Audi Magazine
- Australian House & Garden
- Avenues
- Bon Appetit
- Brides
- Business Traveller
- CEO Magazine
- Cigar Aficionado
- CNN
- Coast
- Conde Nast Traveller
- Country Life
- Cuisine
- Dallas
- DC
- Delicious
- Departures
- DestinAsian
- Destination I Do
- Dish
- Elegant Bride
- Elite Traveler
- Financial Times
- Forbes Travel Guide
- Gallivanter's Guide
- Garden Design
- Gentleman's Quarterly
- Golf Australia
- Golf Vacations
- Gourmet Traveller
- Harper's Bazaar
- Hawai'i
- Herald on Sunday
- Herald Sun
- Homefront
- Homes & Gardens
- Houston

- Il Tridente
- Indagare
- Inspire Magazine
- Islands
- Jezebel
- Kia Ora Air New Zealand Magazine
- L'Ame & L'Esprit
- Lexus Magazine
- Living
- Los Angeles Confidential
- Los Angeles Times
- Luxury Travel
- Luxury Travel Advisor
- Mail on Sunday
- Marin Magazine
- Miami
- Mindfood
- National Geographic Traveler China
- Neue Zuercher Zeitung
- New Zealand Gardener
- New Zealand Herald
- New Zealand House & Garden
- New Zealand Listener
- Old House Journal
- Our Homes TODAY
- Platinum Magazine
- Private Clubs
- Qantas
- Queensland Homes
- Riviera Orange County
- Riviera San Diego
- Robb Report
- Santa Barbara
- SeaSpray Magazine
- Southbay
- Sydney Morning Herald
- Taste
- Tatler Travel Guide
- The Age
- The Atlantan
- The Australian
- The Australian Financial Review
- The Charlotte Observer
- The Globe and Mail
- The London Sunday Telegraph
- The New York Times
- The Press
- The Sunday Star Times
- The Sunday Times

- The Sydney Morning Herald
- TIME
- Town & Country Travel
- Travel & Living
- Travel + Leisure
- Vancouver Sun
- Virtuoso Insights
- World
- Your Weekend

Travel guides were read and notes were taken from the following:

- AA New Zealand Travel Guide
- DK Eyewitness Travel Guide
- Fodor's Travel Guide
- Forbes Travel Guide
- Frommer's
- Luxe City Guide
- Mr & Mrs Smith

Brochures of the properties were taken at the time of the fieldwork and notes taken

Appendix B – Archival records

Management information

- Operating procedure manuals were read and notes were taken from them at all six properties.

Previous surveys and questionnaires were read and notes were taken from them at all six properties.

Websites were read and notes were taken from them; websites that were consulted were:

- The properties' own websites
- TripAdvisor

Appendix C – Physical artefacts – Photos

Appendix D – Observation checklist

Observation	Comments
Standard of dress of employees	
Standard of dress of managers	
Standard of dress of guests	
Grooming of staff	
Grooming of management	
Cleanliness of property	
Guests' reactions	
Ambient music	
Noise level	
Temperature of area	
Facilities of lobby	
Written information available	
Visual information available	
Interactions – staff–manager	
Interactions – staff–guests	
Interactions – staff–staff	
Interactions – managers-guests	
Interactions – manager–manager	
Interactions – guests–guests	

Appendix E – Observation protocol

How people will be recruited

There will be no formal recruitment process – interaction between guests and staff (and vice versa) will be observed, along with general observations of the surroundings and facilities of the hotel or lodge. This will be undertaken at random when the researcher is frequenting the public areas of the hotel or lodge that is taking part in the research. Permission to observe in the public areas of the hotel or lodge will be confirmed with the hotel or lodge before observation commences.

How people will be informed about the observation

A letter or email will be sent to all of the hotels and lodges that will take part in the research, explaining that the researcher will be observing the interaction between guests and staff (and vice versa) while in public places i.e. the hotel or lodge lobby, reception, restaurant, bar, etc. The researcher will also consult with hotel and lodge management, while they are at the hotel or lodge conducting the interviews, that they will also be observing the interaction between staff and guests (and vice versa) while in public areas. If required by the hotel or lodge, a notice and or badge will be with the researcher indicating they are observing or that observation is taking place. An explanation sheet of the observation that is being undertaken will be available to anyone to read if required.

What will be observed and what data will be collected

Interactions between staff, managers and guests
General observations of the surroundings and facilities of the hotel or lodge

How the data will be collected

By pen and paper – notes taken by the researcher

How any deception involved will be managed

The researcher does not perceive any deception to be involved as they will be frequenting the public areas of a hotel or lodge, which any member of the general public can frequent, and do not have to be a guest or a staff member of that certain hotel or lodge to be there. But as a precaution (as previously stated), documentation and consultation will be undertaken by the researcher, before and during the data collection period so that no deception will occur.

The data collection instrument

Pen and paper and an observation checklist

Appendix F – Qualmark criteria for luxury lodges

To be a New Zealand Luxury Lodge …

"To provide the inspired and unique New Zealand luxury experience that is a stay at a New Zealand Luxury Lodge to all international, and an increasing number of discerning domestic, travellers."

These 'entrance criteria' by themselves are not sufficient as there is also a requirement that guests experience unsurpassed quality in the interactions with a New Zealand Luxury Lodge – in a very recognisable New Zealand way that also recognises the various expectations of international visitors from all corners of the world.

Entry Requirements

- Is in an outstanding New Zealand location and/or a property that is deemed to be of distinctive ambience and architecture

- Has a professional and dedicated lodge manager onsite

- Has no more than 25 accommodation rooms

- Holds the appropriate licences (as required by the Territorial Local Authority)

- Offers onsite fine dining with a suitably qualified chef

- Provides a unique hosted experience by the owners and/or general managers

- Has unique New Zealand experiences available to guests

- Has a minimum inclusive high-season rack rate in excess of $400 per person per night

- Has made an annual financial commitment to international marketing of New Zealand, and its own property, off shore. Further, the lodge is prepared to work in an integrated manner with the retail and wholesale travel trade at commissionable rates

- Participates in the Tourism New Zealand International Media programme

- Is committed to being legally compliant with all relevant national and regional legislation and certification

Appendix G – Letter ascertaining interest and availability

Dear

Research into Luxury Accommodation Experiences in New Zealand

My colleague Tracy Harkison, who is a senior lecturer in the School of Hospitality and Tourism, is conducting an important research project about the co-creation of luxury hotel and lodge experiences in New Zealand. This study is also part of her PhD. Her research requires fieldwork in a sample of luxury hotels and lodges and I am writing to you to ask whether your hotel or lodge would be interested in being part of this research. In return for participation in the research project we would be happy to provide you with a report of the project findings as they relate to your hotel or lodge. These findings will provide a valuable perspective on the guest experience at your hotel or lodge and would support your ongoing commitment to excellent guest experiences. If you are interested in the project, or would like more information, please contact Tracy on 021969701 or email her at tracy.harkison@aut.ac.nz

Tracy will contact you within a few weeks to discuss whether you would be interested in participating in this research.

Thank you for your time and help in advance.

Yours sincerely,

Nigel Hemmington

Appendix H – Follow-up email ascertaining interest and availability

Research into Luxury Hotel Accommodation in New Zealand

My name is Tracy Harkison, and I am a senior lecturer in the School of Hospitality and Tourism. I contacted you via letter regarding an important research project I would like to conduct about the co-creation of luxury hotel and lodge experiences in New Zealand. This study is part of my PhD. My research requires fieldwork in a sample of luxury hotels and lodges and I am writing to you to ask whether your hotel or lodge would be interested in being part of this research. In return for participation in the research project we would be happy to provide you with a report of the project findings as they relate to your hotel or lodge. These findings will provide a valuable perspective on the guest experience at your hotel or lodge and would support your ongoing commitment to excellent guest experiences. If you are interested in the project, or would like more information, please contact Tracy on 021969701 or email her at tracy.harkison@aut.ac.nz

Thank you for your time and help in advance.

Appendix I – Participant information sheet

Date Information Sheet Produced:

10 October 2011

Project title

How is a luxury accommodation experience co-created?

An invitation

My name is Tracy Harkison. I am a senior lecturer in the School of Hospitality and Tourism at AUT University, and I am currently in the process of completing a PhD. I am conducting research on how the luxury accommodation experience is co-created, and have consulted with hotel or lodge management to determine what was the best manner in which to recruit participants and I would like to invite you to participate in this research. Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time during the data collection process.

What is the purpose of this research?

This proposed research will investigate and evaluate key stakeholders' perspectives on creating the luxury accommodation experience in New Zealand. Qualitative methods of data collection will be undertaken utilising interviews. The research will explore what elements are essential in creating the luxury accommodation experience, and the results of this research will be written up in my PhD thesis, "Co-creation of the luxury accommodation experience – New Zealand case studies".

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

All employees, managers and guests of this luxury hotel or lodge are considered potential participants. An email or letter has been sent to this hotel or lodge inviting all employees (although it is preferred that the employees are frontline staff – due to their more direct contact with guests) and managers to participate in the research. The main criterion for participants is that they are willing to be interviewed. I have consulted with this hotel's or lodge's management to determine what the best method was for recruiting guests: having a letter of invitation placed in guests' bedrooms seems to be the best way to recruit guests, as they would have time to read and decide if they would like to take part in the research. The main criterion for guests will be a willingness to be interviewed.

What will happen in this research?

You will be interviewed for 20–30 minutes, during which time you will be asked a few questions on how you think a luxury accommodation experience is created. These interviews will be digitally recorded, and the data collected will only be used for my PhD research, enabling me to write my thesis, and ultimately gain my PhD qualification.

What are the discomforts and risks?

There will be no discomfort or risks to you as a participant.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

If you feel any discomfort or risk at any time during the interview you are welcome to stop the interview and leave.

What are the benefits?

I would like to contribute to the understanding of hospitality and tourism in New Zealand by investigating part of the visitor journey – how the luxury accommodation experience is created in New Zealand. This is a sector of the market that has shown considerable growth over the last 10 years. The research will define what co-creating the luxury accommodation experience means from a multiple stakeholder perspective, and an outcome of the research will be insight into how the luxury accommodation experience is created, how staff and managers create the luxury accommodation experience, and how customers also help to create the luxury accommodation experience. Each of these dimensions is important to understand in order for stakeholders to be able to co-create the luxury accommodation experience in New Zealand, and be able to maximise the benefits from this crucial sector of the economy. The results of this research will enable me to complete my PhD thesis and ultimately enable me to gain my PhD.

How will my privacy be protected?

Confidentiality and privacy of all participants will be assured. You will be given an alias or number to hide your identity and the names of the participating hotels or lodges will not be reported in any report of the research.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

There are no monetary costs involved in participating in this research. The only cost relates to your time – interviews will each take 20–30 minutes.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

Dates and times of when the research will be conducted are attached to this Participant Information Sheet. You have until that time to consider whether you would like to accept this invitation to participate in the research.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

You will need to complete and sign the consent form that is attached to this Participant Information Sheet, and hand it to me before the interview commences.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

If you would like feedback on the results of this research you will need to complete the section 'Contact Details' on the Consent Form, and feedback on the results of this research will be sent to the Contact Details that you provide.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to my project supervisor, Professor Nigel Hemmington, Pro Vice-Chancellor International, Dean Faculty of Applied Humanities, Nigel.hemmington@aut.ac.nz, 9219999 ext 9280

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee, Dr Rosemary Godbold, *rosemary.godbold@aut.ac.nz* , 921 9999 ext 6902.

Who do I contact for further information about this research?

Researcher Contact Details:

Tracy Harkison, Senior Lecturer, School of Hospitality and Tourism, Faculty of Applied Humanities, tracy.harkison@aut.ac.nz, 9219999 ext 8491

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Professor Nigel Hemmington, Pro Vice-Chancellor International, Dean Faculty of Applied Humanities

Nigel.hemmington@aut.ac.nz, 9219999 ext 9280

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 10th

October 2011

Appendix J – Interview guide

General

What do you understand by the term "luxury hotel, luxury lodge"? *(Aims 1,2,3,4,5)*

Probes
Can you give me an example?
What do you mean by that?
Could you explain that a little more?

What do you understand by the term "experience"?
(Aims 1,2,3,4,5)

Probes
Can you give me an example?
What do you mean by that?
Could you explain that a little more?

What do you understand by the term "co-creation"?
(Aims 1,2,3,4,5)

Probes
Can you give me an example?
What do you mean by that?
Could you explain that a little more?

Who or what do you think is involved in the "luxury hotel, luxury lodge experience"? *(Aims 1,2,3,4,5)*

Probes
Can you give me an example?
What do you mean by that?
Could you explain that a little more?

What do you understand by the phrase "luxury hotel, luxury lodge experience"? *(Aims 1,2,3,4,5)*

Probes
Can you give me an example?
What do you mean by that?
Could you explain that a little more?

What is the attraction of a luxury hotel, luxury lodge? (Aims 1,2,3,4,5)

Probes
Can you give me an example?
What do you mean by that?
Could you explain that a little more?

Guests only

What emotions did you experience before and during your stay at this luxury hotel, luxury lodge? (Aims 3,4,5)

Probes
Can you give me an example?
What do you mean by that?
Could you explain that a little more?

What is the relative importance of the luxury hotel, luxury lodge in relation to your other holiday pursuits? (Aims 3,4,5)

Probes
Can you give me an example?
What do you mean by that?
Could you explain that a little more?

Which part of your stay was most memorable? (Aims 3,4,5)

Probes
Can you give me an example?
What do you mean by that?
Could you explain that a little more?

What part of your stay contributed most to the experience? (Aims 3,4,5)

Probes
Can you give me an example?
What do you mean by that?
Could you explain that a little more?

Employees and managers only

What emotions do you experience when you are serving your guests? (Aims 1,2,4,5)

Probes
Can you give me an example?
What do you mean by that?
Could you explain that a little more?

What do you think is the most important parts of the luxury hotel, luxury lodge experience for guests? *(Aims 1,2,4,5)*

<u>Probes</u>
Can you give me an example?
What do you mean by that?
Could you explain that a little more?

What do you think you add personally to a guest's experience? *(Aims 1,2,4,5)*

<u>Probes</u>
Can you give me an example?
What do you mean by that?
Could you explain that a little more?

Why do you think guests come and stay here? *(Aims 1,2,4,5)*

<u>Probes</u>
Can you give me an example?
What do you mean by that?
Could you explain that a little more?

What is the most important aspect of your job here? *(Aims 1,2,4,5)*

<u>Probes</u>
Can you give me an example?
What do you mean by that?
Could you explain that a little more?

Appendix K – The original interview guide

Interview guide

What do you understand by the term "luxury accommodation"?

Who or what do you think is involved in the "luxury accommodation experience"?

What do you understand by the phrase "luxury accommodation experience"?

What is the attraction of a luxury accommodation?

What do you understand by the term "experience"?

What do you understand by the term "co-creation"?

What emotions did you experience before and during your stay at this luxury accommodation?

What is the relative importance of the accommodation in relation to your other holiday pursuits?

Which part of your stay was most memorable?

What part of your stay contributed most to the experience?

What emotions do you experience when you are serving your guests?

What do you think are the most important parts of the luxury accommodation experience for guests?

What do you think you add personally to a guest's experience?

Why do you think guests come and stay here?

What is the most important aspect of your job here?

Appendix L – Changes to the interview guide

It was decided to put the questions into sections under general, managers and employees and guest.

It was decided to put probe questions after each question to gain more of an answer from the participant.

It was decided to put the questions into a different order so the questioning would have a better flow.

The word accommodation was changed to hotel or lodge.

Appendix M – Consent form

Project Title: *How is a luxury accommodation experience co-created?*

Project Supervisor: *Professor Nigel Hemmington and Dr Ken Hyde*

Researcher: *Tracy Harkison*

○   I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 10th October 2011.

○   I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.

○   I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.

○   I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.

○   If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information, including tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.

○   I agree to take part in this research.

○   I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one):

Yes○ No○

Signature:...…………………………………………………

Name:...…………………………………………………….

Contact Details (if appropriate):

…………………………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………………………………

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 10th October 2011 AUTEC Reference number 11/263

Note: You should retain a copy of this form.

Appendix N – Themes from each participant group for each property

Property One – Lodge A

Luxury – Theme expressed by everyone

Managers

> "*The difference is, a luxury hotel will be spot on with all the technical aspects, but what they don't deliver is an experience because it's not their job, that's not what they're there for. People come here because they want to be here. So a luxury lodge provides something out of the 'want' list as opposed to the 'need' list. We can create that with attention to detail and with informality. Yet high attention to service with our staff and the relationships that we build up with guests creates the experience.*" (Manager B)

Managers defined luxury in a variety of ways – for example, luxury is commonly described as having that attention to detail and the right level of service to make guests feel at home. Managers noted that luxury is not the same for all of their guests, and that it is tailored to individuals to give them the personal touch. A luxury lodge experience was described as involving everyone and everything, from the moment the guest makes contact with the organisation until they leave, and everything in between.

Although luxury is seen as more than just spending money, it does involve a monetary aspect: it is only for those guests who can afford luxury; as managers pointed out, their lodges are expensive and in the high end of the market. But it takes more than money to produce luxury, and managers suggested that many organisations want to throw money into having more staff, more marble, more gold taps, and so on, but all that is going to achieve is an expensive experience as opposed to creating a luxury experience, and there is a difference.

Employees

> "*The experience here at a luxury lodge – I think it's very different from every hotel, every luxury hotel, so the experience here is to feel like home. So we really try that the guests feel like that – just focusing on their needs more than any normal hotel. And their names, like just paying attention to who they are, why they're coming and, just like how you say, exceed their expectations.*"
> (Employee A)

Employees defined luxury in many ways: luxury is something you do not have at home or enjoy in your daily life, so you have to go somewhere to experience it. Luxury is in the views and surroundings, the quality of service, the dining, the room, being pampered, everything being 'top of the line' and a feeling of total decadence.

Luxury is more than spending money. The employees noted that although the lodge is expensive to stay at, the feedback they have from guests is that they stay at the lodge because it feels like home, and that all the gold and sparkly tiles in the world would not necessarily make a lodge a luxury lodge.

Guests

> *"You just know that somebody was thinking about your experience for a long time to make sure they got it just right, so that you can sit here and not have to think about anything but enjoy the experience. And I think that's rare – really rare to find in a hotel or a luxury lodge."* (Guest D)

Guests described luxury in various ways, but they pointed out that luxury has changed, believing that what they describe as luxury is not what their parents would think luxury is. Guests described luxury as entailing an attention to detail, highly personalised attention, authenticity, taking things to the next level, expectations being met and exceeded, and the calibre of staff. And the more luxurious an experience is, the more memorable it becomes.

Guests believed that the luxury lodge experience involves three things: accommodation, food and the outdoors. Guests believed that there are two main differences between a lodge and a hotel: the calibre of the staff, which has to be perfect in a lodge; and the degree of personal attention, which is higher in a lodge than it is in a hotel.

Experience – Theme expressed by everyone

Managers

> *"If your staff aren't up to standard or not everyone is on the same page, the experience that the guests will get won't be the same. Because there are so many beautiful places, so many expensive places all over the world, you need to have*

something that will stand out. And people will only remember the staff. I would say making sure that they are happy and I think that's where it sort of starts and ends." (Manager A)

Luxury experience was seen as something out of the ordinary, enveloping the guest, engaging their senses in order for them to embrace something unique. The lodge was seen as an experience for the guests, and everything that is done for the guests inside and outside of the lodge adds to their experience. Managers viewed the guests' experience as starting with the initial contact, followed by the initial greeting, and continuing until the last goodbye. Managers saw the guests' luxury lodge experience as involving everything and everyone at the lodge. Managers spoke about being dramatic, and setting the stage for the fantasy that is the lodge experience, where the guests and the staff are the actors in the same play, in order to give the guest an experience.

Employees

"The people and the establishment create their experience to be more than what they expected – above their expectations. And they all say 'we've been around the world, we've stayed in some wonderful marvellous beautiful establishments, hotels, lodges', but we regularly get that – what they've experienced here is superior because of the people, the service, they get the relaxed atmosphere, they call it that, it feels like a home away from home. That's the owner's philosophy and we work to create that for them – friendly, approachable, nothing is too much problem." (Employee B)

Employees defined experience in many ways, such as doing something for the first time, going through a process, something going from the beginning to the end, having knowledge, doing something different, and having new feelings and emotions. Employees noted that in order to be able to create an experience, they believe that all the staff have a part to play, and that those staff members themselves have to have experience of the lodge itself to enable them to give the guests an exceptional experience.

Guests

> *"What sort of experience you have, what you give me feels worth doing, when I go home and tell somebody – that you have to see their outdoor set-up – that's what you're always looking for, it's one of these tiny little treasures that makes something memorable rather than again expensive, which is what you thought when creating the experience, you wanted connection."* (Guest B)

Guests described the luxury experience in various ways: doing something you would not normally do at home, taking something home with you that you can try to reproduce (e.g. the number of outdoor eating experiences that the lodge has), the elevation of your senses and telling people when you get home about what you did. Guests pointed out that there are many things to experience at the lodge and it is hard to know where to start because you want to experience everything.

Guests explained that they want to find out the story behind the places and people that they encounter, the result being that a connection is made. Guests pointed out that these connections developed through the experience make staying at the lodge special. Guests explained that experiences inspire you to make a connection with your surroundings, making you want to engage in everything at the lodge – for example, going to the garden, listening to the gardener, picking tomatoes for dinner that night and knowing while you are eating dinner that you picked those tomatoes.

Interaction – Theme expressed by everyone

Managers

> *"Well, I think that the experience is co-created by the staff and the guests … So actually – both the guests and the staff are actors in the same play."* (Manager B)

Managers saw the luxury lodge experience as including all of the technical and physical aspects of the hospitality stay, what guests see, taste and touch – the surroundings in which they can walk around, sit, eat and sleep. The level of service given by staff members was viewed by managers as an essential element of the luxury lodge experience. Luxury service has to be of an exceptional level and quality, and be able to

be sustained at all times. Managers felt that they have a calling – to serve guests: serving is seen as 'the job' and 'what I am here to do'. The well-being of guests is paramount to managers.

Employees

> "*I guess co-creation here – you've got an establishment and then you've got the people who make that establishment what it is, your chefs, your service, they co-create to bring about a whole meal experience, the whole service experience. The accommodation, you've got your housekeeping staff they create a beautiful room – keep that going – so that it creates a sanctuary and people want to be in there.*" (Employee B)

Employees felt that their service for guests is very personal and that this helps to create the guests' luxury experience. Employees pointed out that they take real pride in receiving good compliments about their service, and feel very frustrated about not being able to do anything about it when guests leave feeling dissatisfied. Employees knew what is expected of them, and what they expect from other staff members: being friendly to guests and staff, knowing where the boundaries are (and sticking to them) and being well trained in their job. Employees knew that it is they who make a difference to the guests' experience: because the organisational structure is pretty flat, they felt that everyone is as important as each other in the process.

Guests

> "*A thousand drawings couldn't show you how beautiful it is here – we are cold right now but we honestly like being outside. It's about being outside, listening to the water, and being able to smell the smoke from the wood. We have put on the fire, and enjoy looking at that scenery.*" (Guest B)

Guests saw the luxury lodge experience as being made up of all of the physical interactions – things they can taste, touch, see and smell in the form of food, the room and the surroundings that they have access to, where they do some form of activity. They pointed out that the food and beverages at the lodge are fantastic, and explained that it is a dining experience and they like the fact that you are able to eat anywhere you

want to (e.g. you can have a picnic on the lawn in front of the river or have a five-course dinner in a gazebo on the riverbank).

Luxury lodge – Theme expressed by everyone

Managers

> *"That people come here to get a little bit spoilt, to feel – for us here at Alpha* lodge, is make people feel at home, so you're away from home but you are coming home, so just to feel comfort, just to feel good and that's how we try to let the guests have that feeling."* (Manager C)

> *Pseudonym

The general manager saw the lodge as his own home and that he welcomes the guests into his actual home. Other managers felt that they welcome their guests home, as if they were welcoming the guests back to their actual home. Managers want their guests to have the feeling of being at home when they are staying at the lodge – to have a home away from home experience.

Managers explained that guests, while staying at the lodge, are taken on a journey, and that that journey starts from the time of their arrival, and continues through until they depart. There are three major components involved in this journey: the scenery, the food and the staff. Managers explained that they create close bonding relationships with guests and staff members, and that generated the feeling of 'family'. The lodge itself also provides a family feel, as it is 'child friendly' (not all lodges are).

Employees

> *"I think we're a very good team, I do feel like it is a home away from home, I have a very beautiful office, I get to try everything, I learn a lot, and meeting all the guests, I've got to learn so much about places, about what they do – I don't know, it's just a real experience for me with the team and with the guests. I have met a lot of interesting people."* (Employee A)

The employees saw getting the first impression of the lodge and the welcoming of the guests right every single time in order to give the guests that 'wow' factor and to make them feel as if they have come home. Employees saw the luxury lodge experience

starting the minute the guests arrive and continuing through until the minute they leave. Employees believed that the lodge has a family feel about it, and that they and the guests are part of a big family.

Employees felt that the lodge has a homely feel to it. Employees defined luxury as something that you would not have at home or something that you would not experience in your daily life. Employees explained that the feeling of 'home' is due to the lodge being small and comfortable, the owner's philosophy (that nothing is too much of a problem and that staff never say no), and the staff being friendly and approachable.

Guests

> "*When you walk in, you see a space and you say to yourself 'I can't wait to sit there, or have a meal there, or have a drink there or just be'. I think that's when you know that the designer nailed it. You just say to yourself 'I want to experience that, I want to sit there' and that's the way you felt when you walked into the accommodation. It just feels like the place you want to be.*" (Guest D)

Guests believed that their experience is like a journey and that it starts when they arrive, and that at that point it is very memorable. Guests explained that their welcome to the lodge made them very happy, and they sat in the lodge room with glasses of champagne and thought that this is a great way to be welcomed. Guests pointed out that their welcome did not stop there – they were shown around the lodge and then taken to their rooms. Guests noted that they felt excitement and delight, and thought their rooms were gorgeous.

Understanding guests – Theme expressed by managers and employees

Managers

> "*Our owner wants to create an experience and they have that first initial idea of what they consider an experience, or luxury lodge, and it goes on from there. You gotta have the right architect, the right interior designer, you've gotta create those levels, you've gotta create something that gives you the basis for the experience. And then from then on you've got to get everything right within that, so you've gotta get the service personnel, kitchen staff, backroom staff and all the support systems, maintenance, housekeeping and everything like that, and create an environment where they enjoy working and getting on with each other.*

And from there out, you send out all the right signals to the people that come into that environment (which obviously are potential guests) and from them you get the feedback very quickly whether they are enjoying it or not, or if they are engaging in the experience that you want or need to provide. So all the different aspects I would say have to come together to create that experience of the luxury lodge that the owner had at the beginning, you know, his idea." (Manager E)

The managers talked about an unofficial mission statement that the owner of the lodge has: 'we never say no'. Managers explained that this has been related to them as meaning 'whatever the guest asks for we get it for them', so whatever it is that the guest needs, managers commit to making sure it is delivered to them as promised. Managers believed that they and their staff are committed to delivering quality to their guests in the form of the food they serve, the service they provide and the surrounds that they occupy.

Managers said they should be able to read or second-guess what their guests want or need. Managers felt that they have an intuitive knowledge of what their guests need, and that they also listen to what the guest both is and is not saying. They felt that guests should not need to think when they are staying at the lodge, and that all of their needs and wants should be attended to without them having to ask for them.

Managers pointed out that there is a need for an attention to detail no matter how big or small, believing that everything requires their careful attention, and they rigorously enforce this by having a number of checks and balances. For example, reservation details are checked three times (during the booking, before arrival and when the guests arrive) to ensure that everything in the guests' reservation is correct (e.g. their dietary requirements).

Employees

"The most important part, I would say, really, is having all their needs met, and nine times out of 10 times without them having to ask." (Employee E)

Attention to detail is displayed by staff knowing the guests by name, knowing why they have come to the lodge, and giving them personal attention and service. Employees said that this is possible because the lodge is small. Employees felt that second-guessing guests is part of paying attention to what guests like, and being able to do it for them before they ask for it. Employees noted that the lodge is positioned at the high end of the market, and their guests expect quality in all aspects. Having very high standards throughout the lodge was viewed by the employees as something they always strive to maintain. This can be seen in many ways, such as the lodge and the grounds being kept in immaculate condition at all times and the rooms being serviced twice a day in order to keep them looking beautiful at all times.

Employees knew that their guests have high expectations, and it is their duty to deliver what has been promised to them. Employees said that more often than not guests believe that the lodge is better than expected because of a combination of the food, the setting, the accommodation, the service and the location. Employees felt that it is the reputation and consistency of their reputation that makes guests want to stay and come back.

What guests want – Theme expressed by guests

> "*I'm guessing that what I feel is that with any luxury feature you have anticipation as to what it is going to be, but when you are here there is amazement, and our heightened expectations have been delivered.*" (Guest A)

Guests felt that the lodge has a vision of what they expect their guests to experience. They explained that attention to detail at the lodge is stunning – whatever position the guests find themselves in they see that attention to detail, and see that it is taken to the next level. Guests pointed out that there is a high level of quality throughout the lodge and that this can be seen in many places; for example, in all of the enchanting places to have dinner, someone has taken the time to make them look absolutely fantastic.

Guests noted that the lodge has a good reputation and that there is consistency in the service – both a consistency within one stay and, for the guests that had previously stayed there, a consistency across stays. Guests believed that the lodge staff are very good at reading guests and second-guessing them, as they do not have to think about anything; they only have to enjoy the experience at the lodge. Guests explained that the promised level of expectations were delivered; for example, they wanted something real and authentic, and they feel they got much more. Guests pointed out that luxury lodges should be authentic and not set in a skyscraper or have marble bathrooms, so guests were not disappointed.

Indulgence – Theme expressed by everyone

Managers

> "*In this place we have museum pieces on the wall, I've got more Goldies here than the Auckland Art Gallery, you have antique Maori cloaks all over. We have a collection of art here that is unrivalled in NZ European art, NZ art, etc. So the environment is really important. You have to – you have to have beautiful things.*" (Manager B)

The managers talked about guests entering the serenity of the lodge, and the importance of making sure that they have a seamless transition from the 'real' to the 'surreal'. They wanted to make sure that their guests are being pampered, being looked after, being spoilt and experiencing that feeling of indulgence, almost as if the guests are in a dreamlike state. Managers believed that guests staying at the lodge have a 'want' not a 'need' when they stay, in contrast to guests who stay at a hotel because they need to.

Managers talked about wealth and elitism in the form of guests arriving in chauffeur-driven limousines, guests arriving in helicopters that land outside the lodge on the lawn, guests being served champagne on arrival, and so on. Managers noted that it is not possible for a luxury lodge to be run inexpensively, and it is only a certain type of guest that can afford to stay at the lodge as it is extremely high budget. Managers pointed out

that they make sure that guests get value for money, and they believed the lodge is not

exploitive and lives up to the monetary value that is associated with it.

Employees

> "*The fact that they feel they're in another world … People tell us they see it on their computers – they look on the website or the brochure – and it looks appealing or inviting. But when they get here they actually go 'it looks better', which is not normal. And it is just so relaxing and people also like the fact that it's easy to get to, a lot more accessible than most lodges (they're usually away from the main road and airports, it's a lot more travel).*" (Employee C)

Employees explained that they see guests physically change when they enter the lodge,

as if they have left the real world behind and entered into a surreal world. Employees

believed that guests come to the lodge to be pampered and to receive special treatment.

At the lodge guests can relax – they have total privacy, with no intrusions from the

outside world, so in some ways employees saw the lodge as a fantasy world or like a

dream for guests. Employees believed that they focus on the needs and the wants of the

guest by paying attention to what they are and are not saying. Although employees

pointed out that the lodge is a special place, guests pay the extra because of that, but that

enables rooms to be serviced twice a day, including a full turndown service at night.

Guests

> "*I think there's the group of guests that wants to 'check out' and that's what they want to do on their holiday, and there is the group that wants to 'check out' and 'check in' – we all checked into a new reality here and we want to do that.*" (Guest A)

Guests explained that there is a feeling of power in the lodge and that it is all around

them in various forms, for example, in the style and the opulence of the lodge's fixtures

and fittings. Guests pointed out that it takes money to produce a luxury experience and

with luxury you know it is going to be expensive. Guests explained that they are a

generation that are spoilt and craving more and more experiences (e.g. wanting to stay

in nice places such as luxury lodges).

Property Two – Lodge B

Luxury lodge – Theme expressed by managers

> "*So the people are coming for an experience, which is more than just a comfortable bed and a room – they want a kind of sense of wonder. They like the design element of a luxury hotel, they like the fact that there are different spaces for them to do different things, it's more than just a room, and it's not anonymous.*" (Manager G)

The managers of Property Two are also the owners of the property. The managers saw the lodge as an experience in itself, and they saw the lodge as playing its part in the guests' overall experience. The managers saw the lodge as having an attraction for the guests, starting even before the guest sets foot in the lodge itself. The managers thought the guests have a real sense of 'wow' when they see the lodge for the first time, and the managers felt that welcoming their guests personally on the front veranda of the lodge is one of the most important roles they perform (they felt that being welcomed personally sets the tone for the rest of the guest's experience).

The managers felt that guests come to have a luxury lodge experience and that many elements are involved in giving them this experience. They felt that providing hospitality and being hospitable is the start of this experience for their guests. Sometimes there are certain important 'milestones' or events that the guests decide to celebrate at the lodge, and they stay at the lodge in order to have that experience while celebrating their special occasion.

Experience – Theme expressed by guests

> "*Dinner is one of the ultimate experiences of Beta* lodge. Meals are all made from local New Zealand produce and many ingredients come from the Beta* gardens. We are able to choose where we want to dine every night – from a private turret room to other unique locations in the lodge, including the wonderfully opulent formal Victorian-era dining room. The meal experience in itself – each course is explained fully before it is served and wine is matched with every course, so to me this is a true dining experience.*" (Guest H)

*Pseudonym

The guests talked about the first impression of the lodge and sometimes they even have a 'wow' moment when seeing the lodge for the first time. Guests expressed many different definitions of experience, with many saying that they also see the lodge as an experience in itself. The guests felt that they engaged in their experience while staying at the lodge, and they also felt a connection to the lodge – and they made this connection while they were staying there. The guests experienced a range of emotions while they were staying at the lodge. Guests talked about feeling a 'sense' (atmosphere) around the lodge and the owners working hard to give the lodge this 'sense'. The guests said that they always feel at home, and that there is also a feeling of comfort, or being made to feel comfortable. There were certain important 'milestones' or events that the guests decided to celebrate at the lodge. Guests felt that staff met and exceeded their expectations when they were staying at the lodge.

Indulgence – Theme expressed by everyone

Managers

> "*But it is about knowing that what they're having is an experience that no one else, or very few people, can have. And it's important to understand that there is a bit of bragging power about it. There is a bit of something that we all like as humans, knowing that we're having something quite rare and special and different.*" (Manager, F)

Indulgence refers to what the managers promise to deliver to guests when they stay at the lodge: an attention to detail, highly personalised attention, that the property is unique and in a niche market (no children are allowed), and opulence is on display throughout the property in many forms (e.g. priceless artwork by overseas artists). The managers felt that the lodge must be able to deliver on what it promises – that the guests receive very tailored attention and that their needs will be attended to – because this is why they pay a top rack rate at the lodge. The managers felt that there is a certain type of person that will be attracted to the lodge: these people have a sense of power and

wealth, and may boast about their experience to other people. They have money and show their opulence in many forms.

Employees

> *"Everything is top of the range when people don't want have to worry about anything – I mean nothing is too much trouble – anything they want."*
> (Employee F)

Employees referred to indulgence as being able to meet and exceed all of the guests' needs and wants while they are staying at the lodge. They want guests to feel pampered, and they do this by giving them attention that is individually tailored to them. Employees know what is expected of them in regard to how to look after the guests while they are staying at the lodge. They give the guests a sense of being looked after, of being pampered and spoilt, and this takes place entirely in a surreal setting. This makes the guests feel as if they have entered a dreamlike state – just being indulged.

The employees are able to indulge the guests as there is a high staff-to-guest ratio, enabling the employees to provide very personalised attention to the guests (e.g. the head chef only has to cater for a maximum of 14 guests per night). Employees have an attention to detail and they give high-quality service all of the time to every guest that stays at the lodge.

Guests

> *"Your every need is met, and if by chance there is something else you require, it is simply a matter of asking one of the accommodation staff for it."* (Guest H)

Indulgence is what guests expect to receive during their stay at the lodge – they want all of their expectations, not only to be met, but to be exceeded, and their 'needs' and 'wants' to be satisfied. Guests want to experience something luxurious and grand, but also to feel at home. The lodge appeals to a certain type of guest, those who are wealthy and powerful, feel elite and will boast that they can stay at the lodge. These guests

expect to be pampered, to be looked after and to be spoilt by engaged and intuitive staff, all within a surreal dreamlike state – to feel indulged.

Co-creation – Theme expressed by managers

> *"Co-creation in regards to the lodge setting that's probably I would say the combination of the owner's vision for the lodge and what they would like to project and also the staff's execution of that vision seems to create that package, its seems to me what we are always selling is an experience and not just a room for the night."* (Manager N)

Managers were interested in co-creation, believing that it is about being able to interact and connect with the guests, and to create the experience for them. They saw co-creating as something that involves everyone in order to produce an experience: this is done in many formats. Managers felt that they do everything that they can to ensure a great guest experience at the lodge, and believed that they and their employees work closely together to produce exceptional experiences in and out of the lodge for their guests. Managers gave many examples of what they do in order to give their guests an unforgettable experience, for example, rose petal baths with champagne and strawberries.

Managers felt that it is very important to walk through the 'lodge experience' in order to be creating the experience for the guests. The managers felt that the guests should have some sort of connection to the lodge (to get a sort of 'buy in' from the employees, guests and themselves) by making lasting memories of their stay at the lodge, so they will return and be a source of public relations for the lodge to their friends and family.

Interactive with guests – Theme expressed by employees

> *"So I am not just cooking, I am entertaining people as well and explaining what I do, to give them a better experience. And you don't get that in a restaurant because you're sort of stuck out the back – you may go out to the tables, but rarely. In general I think that's a big part of the experience, and I know that sort of sounds overly confident, but I've been cooking for a long time, and I've been here for a long time, so I know what guests like. And it's like I said, it's quite personal, there's a level of communication that you won't get anywhere else."* (Employee H)

Employees saw themselves interacting with the guests in various ways. They felt that they are very interactive with guests in order to be creative when creating the guests' experiences in and out of the lodge. Employees felt that they work closely together with other employees, the managers and the guests themselves in order to produce experiences for the guests. Employees felt that there are many tangible and intangible parts of being interactive with the guests. Employees saw that they are partly responsible for the guests' experience while they are at the lodge: they saw it more from the implementation side, for example, the amount of service, knowing when they are needed and what they have to do.

Knowing what the guests want – Theme expressed by managers and employees

Managers

> "*I would say service and personality. So that for people to feel comfortable enough that they can ask for things or, you know, if something is not going right – or that if some things are going wrong, that they can express themselves well enough for our staff to anticipate what they might want and be able to offer it before they ask.*" (Manager G)

Knowing what the guests want refers to managers being able to read or second-guess what the guests want or need during their stay, and being able to satisfy them. Managers felt that things should be done for guests before they ask for them to be done. They want to delight their guests with things that they might not have thought of, and guests appreciate things more by being surprised by them without having to ask for them. Guests stay at the lodge because they want to stay there, not because they have to stay: they are there for leisure and not for business, which to them makes a difference.

Employees

> "*The service kind of covers all manner of sins, but it's like I said before, it is having the knowledge and foresight to be able to hydrate somebody in a 25 degree heat when they are sitting out by the pool and they've forgotten to take water or sunscreen; taking a cup of tea down to the drawing room while someone reads their book.*" (Employee G)

Employees felt that 'knowing what the guests want' refers to the employees knowing what is expected of them, being able to read or second-guess the guests, understanding their cues – guests staying at a lodge should not have to think and things should be done for them before they need to ask someone for it. Employees know what type of person stays at the lodge and they know what they are dealing with day in and day out. They know exactly what the guests expect from them, and they are there to provide any form of assistance to the guest in order for them to have the best experience possible. Employees felt that guests want the feeling of being at home and being surrounded by family or being part of the family.

Feeling at home – Theme expressed by guests

> *"It's a great challenge to operate a five-star facility while still making it feel like home, but this lodge accomplishes this with great ease. Our initial welcome when our car pulled up at the front door is particularly memorable – all the staff was there to welcome us."* (Guest F)

Guests felt at home in the lodge because it has the basics of a 'home' in regard to bedrooms and meals provided, but on a grander scale. Guests described having a home away from home experience, and one of the reasons for this feeling is that the staff make them feel at home, and that they are treated like family or the fact that the staff make them feel part of a family (the guests have the option of dining in the great dining room that holds 16 people, and the owners encourage this 'group' dining with the rest of the guests and themselves to make them feel at home and part of the family). Guests saw their stay in the form of a journey or a progression, from the arrival (they had a sense of being welcomed home or of being welcomed into someone else's home) to the departure, and everything in between.

Tailored attention – Theme expressed by guests

> *"Hosts being hosts, knowing how much attention you need – nothing has been too much trouble, the food and wine has been out of this world, perfect food and wine matching to suit everyone's likes and dislikes."* (Guest, I)

Tailored attention refers to the guests receiving personalised service, where every detail is meticulously thought of, and that the managers and staff are able not only to read, but also to anticipate what they want in order to tailor attention exactly to them (reading them or understanding their cues – guests staying at a lodge should not have to think). Guests liked the fact that the staff are so attentive, and said that this is one of the reasons why they come to the lodge. An example of this is the chef and butler knowing exactly what the guests want for every course of dinner, and which wine matches perfectly.

Luxury – Theme expressed by everyone

Managers

> "*I think for our guests the real luxury is in the experience and knowing that they are in a place where they are having an experience that is very rare and very unusual, and hopefully really, really special.*" (Manager F)

Managers had many different definitions of luxury but these are all given in the context of the lodge and what it has to offer its guests inside and outside – for example, a private audience with a New Zealand artist. They felt that the luxury lodge experience is giving the guests a sense of wonder within a hosted environment and high interaction with the staff.

Employees

> "*Exclusive, private, high-end, limited … (not limited in service), luxury accommodation is, I suppose, accommodation where you should want for nothing.*" (Employee G)

Employees had many different definitions of luxury, and these were given in the context of what they feel attracts the guests to the lodge. Examples of this luxury element are the service that the guest receives, having the best service, being treated like royalty, being waited on and making sure that everything was done for them. Within the guest rooms, it is having the best of everything, for example, high-quality linen and toiletries. Employees saw that the lodge and the tangible aspects come together to produce the luxury lodge.

Guests

> "*Luxury – the lodge itself – it is of historical and architectural importance – it has the perfect combination of history, luxury and yet quite modern bedrooms and all the amenities you need on hand. It has an amazing ambience, wonderful original artwork, period furniture and an outstanding library.*" (Guest H)

Guests had many different definitions of what luxury is: the guests saw the lodge and everything it has to offer as luxury. The guests felt that the lodge itself is luxurious in regard to how it is presented and maintained, and what it has to offer the guest was also seen as luxurious, for example, the food and wine matching, and the service.

Physical location and country – Theme expressed by everyone

Managers

> "*But I do have an amazing historic and horticultural environment. Two, the food and wine – our food and wine is a huge emphasis for what we do. It's very much around the gardens and what we grow organically on site, and that's a big point of difference. Three, the gardens themselves. A lot of our guests will take tours with our head gardener and understand kinda how the gardens relate to the property itself. And four, and not unimportantly, they are looking to do and experience things in this destination.*" (Manager, G)

The managers saw the physical location and country as something that helps to determine who comes to the lodge, and why certain people come to stay at the lodge. The lodge is located in the countryside, but within travelling distance of a city. Managers saw guests deciding on New Zealand as a destination, and the lodge is in one of the locations that they are interested in visiting. The managers know that they have advantages and disadvantages to their location and they know exactly how and where to market their lodge.

Employees

> "*Food, comfort, quality New Zealand wines, good service (which I've reiterated before), but also the access to parts of the country or an area that you may never have experienced before.*" (Employee G)

Employees could see that the physical location and country where the lodge is located can determine who comes to the lodge, and why they come to the lodge. They felt that

the lodge is in one of the most romantic places in New Zealand, with stunning exclusive grounds. The lodge has the responsibility to showcase New Zealand as a country and make sure it measures up to the rest of the world in regard to what it has to offer, for example, the service they give the guests.

Guests

> "*An idyllic location, comfortable rooms, great food and wine, these would be the three attractions to stay at a luxury lodge like this one.*" (Guest F)

Guests saw the lodge, the location and the country as determining factors in their choice when deciding where they want to stay. Guests may decide on New Zealand as a destination, and the location of the lodge may interest them enough to visit. There are many things that attract guests to stay at the lodge: its reputation, its consistency in winning awards, the amount of media it is featured in, and so on. Guests gave the lodge, the location and the country as reasons why they were staying there.

Physical surroundings – Theme expressed by everyone

Managers

> "*It's when you stand up here at the house and look down you have this sense of vastness of the lawn, and you can tell a lot of effort has gone into creating something special, to make a small amount feel like a special moment, imbue it with that sense of emotion.*" (Manager G)

Managers saw the surroundings of the entire lodge as an environment that affects everyone who works and stays at the lodge. The gardens are the actual grounds that the guests can walk around – one of the managers happily takes guests on regular garden tours. The lodge also has a produce garden that provides food for the lodge, and they are nearly self-sustaining, growing and producing 120 varieties of fruit and vegetables. They also breed, butcher and cure their own meat for the lodge.

Employees

> "*The gardens are the best – beautiful gardens. When you walk from the car up to here it's pretty peaceful surroundings.*" (Employee F)

Employees saw the grounds as making their workplace a nice place to be and somewhere the guests can walk around or just sit in and enjoy the picturesqueness and tranquillity. The head chef saw the produce garden as a place that provides food for the lodge – they like that they are nearly self-sustaining, noting that the food is the freshest it can possibly be; they also felt that being nearly self-sustaining makes producing the menu challenging but enjoyable.

Guests

> *"Everything is perfect, exceeds my expectations. But I do love the beautiful gardens, it was the first, and I think it will be my last, impression of this lodge – they are amazing."* (Guest I)

The guests saw the grounds as a beautiful place to walk around and enjoy. Guests enjoyed garden tours with the head gardener or the owner, or just being left alone to explore the grounds by themselves. Guests were impressed by the lodge's produce garden that provides food for the lodge, and at any mealtime they were able to talk to the owners and the chef about being nearly self-sustaining: guests were well aware of the lodge being almost self-sustaining and found this impressive, interesting and to be highly commended.

Elitism – Theme expressed by employees

> *"Exclusivity – exclusivity and I think also just not having to worry about whether it's gonna be up to standard, you know, so confidence that it's of a standard that you want."* (Employee G)

Employees referred to elitism as the amount of money that has been spent on the lodge and what that offers the guests. Elitism also refers to the amount of money the guests spend and what it buys them while they are staying at the lodge: exclusivity and opulence. Employees talked about guests knowing that they will be left alone and that the lodge is private – not a lot of people will be staying there, and they do not take outside diners. There is a certain type of person who stays at the lodge and they are in

certain social circles, they have airs and graces – a sense of the power and wealth and boast about it.

Property Three – Lodge C

Luxury Lodge – Theme expressed by everyone

Managers

> *"This is a pretty unique property. The focus here – to reiterate what the owners would say – is that this is an extension of their home for them and it is run, without going into too much detail, it is run differently than the other lodges we see throughout New Zealand. The focus here is different, we are a lot more focused, even more so on the one-on-one experience with the guests, and it comes through as a result of the personality of the owners and the way that they conduct themselves through the business and through us to project on the guests."* (Manager R)

Managers described the luxury lodge in terms of its strengths and its attractions. Managers felt that one of the attractions of the lodge is its uniqueness, that it is one-of-a-kind, special, that there is nothing like it, and no other lodge like it. Managers felt that there is a progression in terms of the guests' stay: they are taken on a journey from the moment they arrive until they depart, and everything in between. Although the lodge was built only 15 years ago, the managers felt there is an authentic feel to it, as it is a modern building with old features that give it a feel of an alpine ski lodge. The managers saw the lodge as being small and large at the same time – small because it only has 12 rooms, including suites and chalets, which gives the guests more intimate service, and large because there is so much space inside and outside of the lodge itself. Even though the lodge is very remote, the managers felt that the location invariably provides much more of a feeling of exclusivity (they look after a maximum of 24 guests, and they have no outside diners or cooking schools). They felt that it has a homely feel to it, and they want to make their guests feel at home. Managers want the guests to experience 'wow' moments throughout their stay, from the first impression of the lodge right through until they leave.

Employees

> "*I mean we have a lot of returning guests, and they come here because they know that they will have the hospitality that we give, and that everything is going to be the same. And we are, you know, of the same standard, and we are very discreet, you know they can come here and be private.*" (Employee R)

Employees described the luxury lodge, including its strengths and its attractions. Employees felt that one of the attractions of the lodge is its uniqueness and that it is something special because of its rare location. Employees felt that guests are taken on a journey from the moment they arrive until they depart (and everything in between). The employees saw the lodge as possessing an authentic feel, and they thought that it looks old even though it is a very modern building. Employees see many celebrities coming to the lodge because of its exclusivity, and staff have to sign 'non-disclosure statements', and they are not allowed to approach celebrities, but must engage in conversation if the celebrity starts a conversation with them, so celebrities know that they will be left alone and that the lodge affords them complete privacy.

Employees often see guests coming to the lodge to celebrate special occasions or milestones, and employees can certainly see the opulence or wealth of the guests because they arrive and leave by helicopter, and often take helicopter rides to other parts of the island (and the rest of New Zealand). They want to impress the guests and have them experience 'wow' moments throughout their stay, from the first impression of the lodge until they leave. The employees saw the lodge as being small (in terms of the amount of bedrooms that the lodges has), which affects how many guests can stay there at any one time, which then creates a positive staff-to-guest ratio.

Guests

> "*That is a hard one – there are so many different attractions to luxury lodges – and it really could depend on what it is that you want from that particular lodge. This lodge is extremely warm (it has a warm feeling to it), attention to detail, and staff who are professional and friendly without being pretentious.*" (Guest T)

Guests described the luxury lodge, including its strengths and its attraction for them. Attractions of the lodge are that it is a place to meet family, to have family celebrations or to celebrate something special to them (anniversaries, birthdays or honeymoons). Guests felt that they were welcomed into the lodge by the staff and management and that they were made to feel at home right at the start of their stay, and they saw the lodge as having a homely feel to it. The guests saw the lodge having the feeling of authenticity about it – in the building design and how it is decorated inside and outside. Guests explained that there is a lot of space inside and outside of the lodge, and that all aspects of the lodge have a quality factor.

Indulgence – Theme expressed by everyone

Managers

> "*They are going to have a very, very high expectation. They are spending a lot of money, and when you buy something and you've spent a lot of money, believe me, you have got all sorts of pictures in your mind about what is going to happen. So we have got to deliver what it is that they want, all of the time.*" (Manager S)

Managers saw guests having needs and wants that have to be satisfied (guests want to come to the lodge; they do not need to come). Managers saw that the luxury lodge has had a vast amount of money invested in it, and that the owners are continually spending money on the lodge. Managers felt that guests want to be looked after and receive value for their money, as they are spending a vast amount of money on their stay. Managers saw a certain amount of opulence, in the form of their guests having wealth, power and elitism, and boasting. Managers wanted their guests to be comfortable, but they also saw guests wanting to be pampered, looked after and spoilt – to have a feeling of indulgence or a dreamlike state.

Employees

> "*It's expensive and, well, you pay your money and you get high class and luxury – guests like the luxury treatment, having lovely food, being able to do what you want and when you want.*" (Employee U)

Employees saw guests wanting to be looked after; they want personalised attention, to be pampered, to be pandered to, to be looked after, to be spoilt and to be in a dreamlike state – to have the feeling of indulgence. Employees saw guests coming to the luxury lodge for various reasons. Employees saw that guests have needs and wants that they want satisfied (guests want to come to the lodge; they do not need to come). Employees defined what luxury is in the context of the lodge, and they felt that it is having an attention to detail and making guests feel comfortable during their stay at the lodge. Employees know that the guests want value for their money as they are spending a vast amount of money on their stay.

Guests

> "*Somewhere where you will receive outstanding service, friendly service, somewhere where nothing is too much trouble, somewhere where you know that you will be looked after, and that you relax and just take it easy as someone else is doing all of the hard work for you.*" (Guest S)

Guests noted that the lodge is remote and exclusive, and that it gives them privacy and a feeling of being special. They saw that 'serious' money has been spent on the lodge and that there is a sense of opulence in and around the lodge. Their opulence can be seen in arriving and departing the lodge by helicopter, and using helicopters as a general means of transport during their stay at the property. Guests defined their idea of luxury as a higher level of quality, feeling pampered, being more relaxed, getting personalised service, being looked after, being spoilt – to have the feeling of indulgence and experience a dreamlike state.

Tailored attention – Theme expressed by managers and guests

Managers

> "*I think when you stay in a hotel you expect that you have a room and you have somewhere that you sleep and shower and do all the rest of it. When you stay at a lodge everything, from the room to the dining experience to the pre-dinner cocktails to the sitting by the pool to going to an activity, we organise that for you, we give you the service – we facilitate your stay. It's a more hands-on personal kind of experience.*" (Manager R)

Managers promise to deliver whatever the guests ask of them (within reason – nothing illegal). Guests want to be looked after and to have personal attention, and managers felt that this is done by having an attention to detail and good communication. Managers thought that it is important to read their guests and second-guess guests so that they do not have to think and things are done for them before they need to ask – staff and managers should be able to understand their cues, and this is achieved by talking to the guests and finding out about them.

Guests

> "*From making that booking through to leaving – which for us is tomorrow – so far everything has been perfect, seamless, everything has been taken care of for you and all we have had to do is turn up. And that is what you want when you come to a place like this.*" (Guest R)

Guests saw the highly personalised attention that is paid to them in the very personal welcome, being made to feel special and being extremely well looked after by the very attentive staff throughout their stay. Guests saw the attention to detail throughout the lodge in various forms, in the building itself and in the staff. Guests stay at the lodge because they want to, not because they need to.

Physical surroundings – Theme expressed by managers and employees

Managers

> "*It's the – well it's several things, it's the location; generally lodges are normally built in beautiful places, and in amongst nature and the natural wonders of the world, and areas of that sort of stature.*" (Manager R)

Managers felt that the weather can affect the guests' experience as there are a lot of activities that are conducted outside the lodge and these are weather dependent. On the other hand, it can be the weather that they come for. There are many activities (inside and outside of the lodge) for guests to participate in, and guests can choose to do as many or as few of the activities as they like. Managers felt that the guests come for the location, the service and the activities.

Employees

> *"The scenery is amazing, stunning – just look at it – it is a beautiful location.
> We're so close to some of the most beautiful scenery in New Zealand."*
> (Employee U)

Employees felt that the scenery and views that surround the lodge are spectacular and part of the guests' experience, and the area has been made famous by certain films, and guests want to visit the area for this reason. Employees felt that the weather can affect the guests' experience, as there are a lot of activities outside the lodge dependent on weather, but sometimes it is the weather the guests want to experience. Employees are involved in organising all of the activities, inside and outside of the lodge.

Interactive – Theme expressed by everyone

Managers

> *"Don't just give the guests the key – 'here's your room' and 'it's on the third
> floor', etc. Just guide the guests, be interested in them, why are they coming
> here and that sort of thing. Don't be a person 'I get my pay slip and bye' – that's
> not how we work, and that's the interesting thing about the lodge. You have to
> do it with all of you. It's not only me, it's not only Hamish.* If we don't have the
> service staff, if we don't have the gardeners, if we don't have the laundry and if
> we don't have housekeeping, it's not going to happen."* (Manager Q)

> *Pseudonym

Managers felt that there is a great deal of interaction among the guests, themselves, the owners (when they are there) and the staff, and that this creates the experience for the guests. Managers explained that they are executing the owners' vision of the lodge, which is that they are selling an experience and not just a room for the night. The owners are very involved with the guests when they are there, and they expect the same level of hospitality from their staff when they are not there. They felt that if there is no interaction between staff and a guest, then it is very difficult to be creative and create a luxury experience.

Employees

> *"I think it is important to get to know people, staff and guests, making yourself*
> *available – I think making sure that your guests know you are around – and you*
> *also need to know where your guests are so you can look after them."*
> (Employee T)

Employees realised that there has to be a certain amount of interaction between the

guests and themselves in order for the guests to have an experience, but they did feel

that they do this to a lesser degree, as they are there to serve, where managers are seen

as hosts (managers act as host during all mealtimes) and that they are the ones who form

relationships with the guests while they are at the lodge. Employees saw that everyone

is involved in creating a luxury experience for the guest, including the guest themselves.

Guests

> *"I would thoroughly recommend the tour of the house and garden. I thoroughly*
> *enjoyed the tour of the lodge, especially the garden. I enjoy my late afternoon*
> *walks in the loop."* (Guest G)

Guests saw that there was interaction between them and the staff, the managers, the

owners and other guests. Guests noted that the lodge staff are discreet, professional,

knowledgeable and extremely hospitable. Guests realised that their experience at the

lodge needed a certain amount of creativity and other things to be in place so it could

happen.

Experience – Theme expressed by everyone

Managers

> *"I think ... the difference between staying here and staying somewhere else, like*
> *staying in a hotel, is that you only experience the room – here you have the*
> *whole experience."* (Manager R)

The managers saw the lodge as a nice place for a complete experience – the lodge is a

complete package. They saw the guests' experience as starting from the moment they

make their reservation (they are starting to build up a picture of what the stay will be

like), while engaging with the staff that give them the intimate service that is expected (due to paying a high tariff), to when they leave the lodge, and everything in between.

Employees

> "*So an experience here from a guest's perspective – this is a completely different experience from a hotel just because … it's very personal, the amount of time and effort that we put into each person's experience that stay here.*" (Employee, R)

The employees saw the experience as the guest experience and that staying at the lodge is an experience. Employees explained that there is a lot of personal effort that goes into creating the guest experience, and they felt that everything at the lodge is set up for the guest to have a great experience. Employees did note that guests only have their memories of their experience to take away with them.

Guests

> "*You need the staff and the amenities to be perfect or you couldn't have a luxury experience.*" (Guest R)

Guests defined what experience is, and they saw the lodge as an experience and an experience that should not be missed. They felt that the lodge is phenomenal and did everything in its power to make sure that they would be left with memories of an unforgettable experience.

Physical location – Theme expressed by everyone

Managers

> "*Coming to New Zealand they stay in a luxury lodge and they see the best side of New Zealand, where they see the best side of us through us as the staff, or the nature of the country and the food and the region, the wine, and everything – that whole package. So it's really the icing on the cake of the country so to speak – that's it in a nutshell.*" (Manager R)

Managers saw guests coming to their lodge for three reasons: the lodge itself, the location and the country. Guests may decide on New Zealand as the destination and then look for lodges with the infrastructure in place so they will be able to give them an

experience at the locations they want to visit. Guest may decide on the lodge because of its reputation and location.

Employees

> *"I think a lot of it has to do with the location and the scenery. We're so close to some of the most beautiful spots in New Zealand, and it's so easy to get to them from here by helicopter."* (Employee S)

Employees explained that guests prefer the location being in the country as they like to get away from the city or they do not want to stay in a city. Employees felt it is the isolation that draws guests to the lodge or the beauty of the location, or they have heard about the lodge and they want to experience it themselves.

Guests

> *"This place is stunningly beautiful, set in a tranquil environment with an amazing landscape, sweeping lawns that overlook the lake, there are snow-capped mountains beyond, and these surroundings are pretty impressive."* (Guest S)

Guests saw the attraction of New Zealand as a destination, and the location of the lodge can be a deciding factor in terms of why guests stay there (e.g. the scenery and views from the lodge's bedrooms and main areas are magnificent). The lodge's reputation and what it has to offer the guest can also be reasons why guests visit.

Guest sensations – Theme expressed by guests

> *"Excitement – I wanted to come here for a long time, so I am not disappointed. Everything is living up to my expectations so far. I am really enjoying my stay – everything is exceptional."* (Guest S)

Guests experienced anticipation and expectations before and during their stay at the lodge; for example, they did expect a certain amount of comfort or to be made comfortable. They remembered the first impression of the lodge when they first came to it and they experienced 'wow moments' or 'wow factors' during their stay. Guests felt the atmosphere of the lodge and tended to have an emotional response to their stay. Guests saw that their stay involved engagement with each other and with the staff.

Property Four – Hotel A

Luxury hotel – Theme expressed by everyone

Managers

> "*'No' is not part of our guest services vocabulary. It's all about being customer service focused. In addition to that there are other elements that make a luxury hotel complete, but service is very important.*" (Manager I)

Managers described the luxury hotel as being a New Zealand experience that involves the location, the service and the quality of the offerings within the hotel. Managers felt that guests experience a 'wow' factor and develop expectations about the hotel via social media platforms before they come to stay. Managers pride themselves on their customer service, their hospitality and their friendliness when dealing with guests. They felt that they have well-trained staff members that are able to make the guests feel comfortable, and that guests get value for the money that they spend at the hotel. The general managers felt that they have placed a lot of focus on food and beverage, which they felt is something that New Zealand hotels have no concept of at all, and that their food and beverage is at the very high end of the market.

Employees

> "*I think having a lovely room to stay in with a view – just feeling comfortable as soon as they walk in the door – I think that's our job, as a luxury hotel, to make it the best experience they can have.*" (Employee L)

Employees saw the luxury hotel as a place where they treat guests as individuals from the very start of their stay. Employees make sure that they welcome the guests, and felt that the guests should feel comfort or comfortable as soon as they check in. Employees felt that guests should be looked after from the start, and they physically take guests to their rooms and show them everything in their room. Employees saw guests wanting to take their time over everything, relaxing, wanting to be spoilt, and just taking time out from their normal life.

Guests

> *"Getting good service. There will be quality throughout the hotel and generally the accommodation is outstanding – a luxury hotel is a quality product and it should be beyond compare when it comes to service."* (Guest L)

Guests described the luxury hotel as a place in which they feel welcome, from the initial contact through to the end of their stay. Guests saw the luxury hotel as a place for privacy, a place to celebrate a special occasion, somewhere special and at the high end of the market (guests explained that you can see the quality and that there is an extra attention to detail throughout the hotel). Guests felt that there should be friendly and helpful staff that are always hospitable and accommodating, and provide exceptional service. Guests wanted to feel a nice ambience, to have complete relaxation within a very comfortable environment with unpretentious fittings and lovely décor.

What guests want – Theme expressed by managers and employees

Managers

> *"Everyone's got four walls, a shower and a bed: it's actually how you are treated within those four walls that actually makes the difference. I keep saying that I've this amazing team here that are very motivated and naturally very friendly, and that makes a huge difference to the guests."* (Manager H)

Managers felt that what guests want is to be treated well. Managers saw their jobs as involving an attention to detail, and that throughout the guests' stay there are many extra touches that they can do to treat the guests well. By going the extra mile for them, they can make their stay that extra bit special – for example, providing turndown service, putting chocolates and wine in the room for special occasions, greeting the guest by name, and having a concierge available to help organise anything or to give them any information they need. Managers try to read their guests or anticipate what their needs or wants are, in order to enhance their experience, for example, by judging how much money they are willing to pay on a wine tour and tailoring it accordingly.

Employees

> *"It's exactly that – you have everything that you want and everything that you need, if you want it, we'll get it for you. So it's just – you don't have to worry about your holiday, it's all here."* (Employee I)

Employees felt that guests want to be treated as individuals – they do not want to be seen as a number; if they wanted this, they would go to a motel. Guests want to receive special treatment. Employees felt that it is just the small things that make a difference, like a door being opened for them, being greeted by their name or being helped with their luggage without having to ask. Guests want a certain amount of pampering – to be looked after. Employees saw their job involving giving highly personalised attention and having an attention to detail in everything that they do, and that they could not do their job if they did not give attention to detail.

What guests expect – Theme expressed by guests

> *"Somewhere that will cater to my needs and make me comfortable, somewhere I can relax. I understand the phrase 'luxury hotel experience' as an experience that is more memorable than one I would get elsewhere, than say at an ordinary hotel."* (Guest J)

Guests were very clear as to what they expect from a luxury hotel: to feel special, to feel more relaxed because of the luxurious surroundings, and having easy access to what they want or need when they want it. Guests expected to receive personal attention from the staff, to feel pampered and to feel looked after. Guests saw the staff as possessing an attention to detail and a passion for providing the best possible service and assistance.

Interactive – Theme expressed by everyone

Managers

> *"I'm lucky 'cause I'm a people person, I enjoy the interaction. I'm very interested where people have come from and, I guess with all my travel, I've generally got something to discuss with them. I am continually telling the team that the front desk is not a barrier – I want them to come out from behind the front desk, I want them to tell people their stories, tell them where they have come from – you know, interact with them. And I think that the emotional part of*

our job is actually enjoying people enjoy their stories – and being willing to interact with them on same sort of level." (Manager H)

Managers saw being interactive as any form of interaction among guests, staff and themselves. They explained that it is not an individual effort, but that it takes everyone working together to produce the final experience for the guests. Interaction is talking to the guest about themselves, about the manager's own life, to create a connection, meeting and greeting the guests, opening the doors for them, helping them with their luggage and driving them somewhere in the shuttle bus (this is generally the general manager's job). Managers felt that relationships are built up among staff, managers and guests by being engaged in what is going on at the luxury hotel.

Employees

"*It's the whole staff. I mean you can't really be having luxury if three out of the 10 people who are involved in it are not interested – then that is only 70% who are. So everyone has to be interested in the guests.*" (Employee K)

Employees saw interaction taking place between guests, managers, suppliers and other employees. One employee explained that they had visited one of their wine suppliers' vineyards and had been shown all around – so when they went back to work they were really able to talk about the wine to the guests. Employees explained that relationships are built up among staff, managers and guests, especially if they are staying for an extended period, or they are returning guests. Employees felt that there has to be a certain amount of creativity to produce an experience for guests.

Guests

"*All staff is involved, front and back of house staff – they are able to create the experience, but I think they have some kind of guidelines from the owners or the company as to how the experience should be for the guests here.*" (Guest K)

Guests felt that there must be some kind of guidelines from the owners or the company of the luxury hotel as to how the experience should be for the guests while they are staying there. Guests felt that all of the staff were involved in creating the experience –

both front and back of house staff, and that they were all very approachable and easy to communicate with.

Physical surrounding and country – Theme expressed by everyone

Managers

> "*Well, New Zealand – that's got to be the point of difference. I mean just look around you, isn't it amazing? And I hope the difference here is the staff – as I have said, I have this amazing team.*" (Manager H)

Managers felt that the marketing of the hotel and reviews on TripAdvisor influence guests to come and stay at the hotel. The photos of the hotel and its surrounding areas make the hotel look fantastic. Managers felt that the guests come for the scenery and views that can be seen from the bedrooms, because they are just stunning. Managers also felt that guests come to New Zealand as it is a destination for them, and the location that the hotel is in is usually on a guest's itinerary.

Employees

> "*You have definitely the view here, you have a great restaurant and an award-winning chef, the rooms are amazing, it is really spacious, and it's close to town but not in town.*" (Employee K)

Employees saw the stunning scenery and views influencing the guests' decision to stay at the hotel, especially as all of the bedrooms have an unobstructed view of the amazing scenery. Employees felt that the hotel is in a great location, and is a 'gateway' to many other places in the South Island. Employees felt that the location is a 'must see' on a tourist's itinerary.

Guests

> "*Lots of things attracted me to this hotel: the location and convenience of the location to the other activities I want to do while I am here; I wanted a nice hotel to stay in during my time here; I wanted somewhere comfortable, clean and safe as I am travelling by myself.*" (Guest I)

Guests had various reasons why they chose to stay in this hotel. Generally, guests had conducted some form of research to choose the hotel and had looked at websites to aid

their choice. Location and beautiful scenery did factor into their decision, and they felt

that the location was important as this location is a springboard to other places to visit,

but there are also many activities to do at the location.

Luxury – Theme expressed by everyone

Managers

> "*Luxury – you can 'luxuriate' the different aspects of the hotel room – a beautiful bed, beautiful linen, beautiful products in the bathroom. People – you have got to have friendly staff that will go above and beyond the call of duty for the guest, they want to do everything for the guest. That is luxury – that is a luxury experience. Guests have to trust the product, that the experience will be outstanding, and that they are served with eagerness and willingness.*" (Manager H)

Managers described luxury for the guests as comprising many tangible and intangible

aspects. Managers felt that they bend over backwards for all of their guests and that it is

'all about them' and making sure that they are satisfied. They felt that the luxury

element is giving them excellent quality and excellent service, and that the luxury

experience at the hotel often consists of the small things, for example, a welcome note

personally signed by the general manager, small fruit bowls, turndown service – little

things to make the guests feel at home.

Employees

> "*Luxury – you serve the guest by serving not what the guest expected – it's more than they are expecting. Luxury is this view – just look at it.*" (Employee I)

Employees described luxury in relation to what the guest expects: a luxury experience.

Employees saw guests wanting to experience New Zealand in a luxurious way and that

one way that the hotel does this is by giving the guest a luxury meal experience using all

local produce. Employees saw the guest experience also involving the accommodation,

so they make sure it truly is a luxury accommodation experience by having checks in

place throughout that will ensure that everything related to the accommodation will live

up to the guests' expectations.

Guests

> "*A luxury hotel provides that attention to detail, excellent customer service and a friendly 'can do' attitude of the staff, and in a luxurious environment.*" (Guest J)

Guests described luxury in regard to the hotel: a luxury hotel was seen as being above the normal standard hotel in every way, and it is about receiving pampering in many formats. They saw luxury as involving everyone who provides service and structure to the luxury hotel, and they saw a luxury hotel experience as a team effort.

Experience – Theme expressed by everyone

Managers

> "*The main thing is when the guest leaves that they feel that they've had an experience here – that the experience started from the moment they walked in the door and that we do our best to make their experience based on all of their requests.*" (Manager K)

Managers saw experience as something that is a combination of how the hotel is built, and who the team are who can influence the experience for the guests. Managers explained that it is the staff who make the experience worthwhile because if they welcome the guest to the hotel and are focused on guest service, then the rest of their stay will be pleasant and enjoyable.

Employees

> "*I think that guests here have a good experience and have a good time, they just enjoy themselves – it's all about being in the moment – guests have a great time and I know I have been part of that experience.*" (Employee J)

Employees described experience as something that starts for the guests before they come to the hotel: they contact the guests two weeks before they arrive and ask them if there is anything they need or want before they come. While the guests are staying at the hotel, staff do everything they can to make sure the guests have a good experience, and when they leave they send them their feedback email.

Guests

> *"The whole experience of being here is very memorable and it would be hard to say which part has contributed to my experience. But if I was pushed to make a choice I would say last night's dinner – it was divine, the food was amazing – it was an experience."* (Guest K)

Guests described experience as the whole time they are staying in the hotel, starting with them logging on to find a place to stay. Their experience includes having the hotel's facilities and amenities on hand for them, concierge service, having friendly staff and being indulged while at the hotel. Guests felt that a luxury hotel experience is an experience that is going to be more memorable than staying at an ordinary hotel.

Outside – Theme expressed by everyone

Managers

> *"My knowledge of the region – I've lived here for six years now and I understand the region very well, I know what activities are on offer in the region. So that's the value I can add to my guests' experience – I will be able to give them an answer straight away and say this is what they would like to do, or no this isn't something you would like to do."* (Manager I)

Managers thought that what happens outside the hotel will affect the guests' experience; for example, the weather will greatly affect what activities the guest can participate in outside of the hotel. There are many activities that the guests can try in and around the luxury hotel, and the managers and concierge are very active in recommending and organising these activities for guests.

Employees

> *"I try to give a lot of information about the town, where to go. We try to give them tips about here and there, and just try to make recommendations, just finding out what people want to do."* (Employee J)

Employees saw the weather as something that affects the guests, as there is a lot to do outside of the hotel that is weather dependent, and employees are very involved in organising activities for guests to do in and around the luxury hotel.

Guests

> "*The hotel – having lots of space and facilities in the room – having the apartment for us is important as we are doing a lot of activities*" (Guest, L)

Guests came to the hotel's location because of the activities that they could partake in at the location. There are many activities that guests can do in and around the luxury hotel.

Property Five – Hotel B

Luxury Hotel – Theme expressed by everyone

Managers

> "*You are going to deliver their expectations, and I think it's quite exciting, because it's good to have a good team, a good hotel with good standards that gives you the confidence that when people do come, that they are going to experience something that is quite nice, and the chances are that you are going to exceed their expectations.*" (Manager L)

Managers described a luxury hotel as having two elements: the level of service that they give the guests and the opulent surroundings of the hotel. Managers saw service as going that extra mile for the guest, adding those little touches that make them feel special, being discreet, making them feel comfortable and treating them well from the very first welcome to the very last goodbye. Managers felt as if they are welcoming guests to a home, and they want their guests to feel at home while they are staying at their luxury hotel.

Managers explained that the hotel is beautiful, with beautiful rooms and quality throughout. They felt the brand itself is a big drawcard and is definitely perceived as an 'ultimate luxury hotel'. Managers noted that guests return because of the combination of the service and the hotel itself – getting this right provides the guest with a luxury experience.

Employees

> "*I think if you just look in terms of where we are right now, you just look at everything and it is plush in terms of the furnishings, fantastic view, fantastic rooms and not only that, the guest experience, of having people looking after*

your every need and not wanting for anything – that is a luxury hotel."
(Employee O)

Employees described the luxury hotel as somewhere that has the 'wow' factor, from the initial welcome until the final farewell – guests should arrive and be blown away by everything that is on offer to them. Employees saw service as being a point of difference for luxury hotel guests who want five-star services; for them, this means not only getting whatever the guests want or need, but going the extra mile for them. Employees know what is expected of them, which is going a little step further, going above and beyond for the guest, maintaining exceptional standards, keeping up to the brand's expectations, and knowing that all of this helps them to make the luxury hotel experience. Employees explained that they want their guests to be comfortable, worry free and pampered, and that they want to accommodate the guests by giving them excellent service and making sure that the facilities are ready for them to use.

Guests

"*Expensive, having the best of everything, the best linen, décor, food, service – certainly that staff are well trained, the premises are beautifully maintained, and that if I have a problem it will be addressed and fixed.*" (Guest N)

Guests described the luxury hotel as glamorous, set within an amazing location or surroundings, with an outdoor feel, and with great five-star facilities: a heated indoor pool, a spa with a treatment room, amazing dining options, restaurants with different cuisines, impeccably maintained spacious rooms with quality throughout, comfortable big beds with fine linen, with spa baths in the bathrooms and with breathtaking views. Guests wanted to feel special, to be looked after and to receive excellent service.

Guests stayed at the luxury hotel because its brand has a great reputation, and guests expected the luxury hotel to have high standards, and for them to be upheld. Guests also saw the luxury hotel as a place to spend time with family.

Interactive – Theme expressed by everyone

Managers

> "*Gosh, there are so many people involved in so many levels and it starts when they contact the reservations team, from the guy who opens the car door, from the girl who ticks them in, the housekeeper who does the room, the waiter who serves the breakfast in the morning. Collectively, we expect everybody to interact with the guest – it's our culture here.*" (Manager M)

Managers felt that they should be able to anticipate the guests' needs and have everything ready for them. They take opportunities, such as escorting them to their rooms or during breakfast, as a time to engage with them, to ask about them (as everyone likes to talk about themselves and why they are at the hotel), and to see if they are having a good time and if there is anything else they can do it make it better. They felt being interactive involves the whole team and it only takes one interaction that is not fantastic to undermine the whole experience. Managers also felt that there is a connection with the community and their surroundings.

Employees

> "*I think everyone really that the guest comes across. It's, you know, starts from when they check in, to when their room gets serviced, even when they are calling us downstairs to make their bookings. I think everyone makes an impression. If one person is rude, it can kind of ruin the guests' whole experience.*" (Employee M)

Employees saw interaction between themselves and the guests as very important, and if they are having a good experience it will reflect on the other guests, but if they are having a bad experience it is going to reflect on everyone, including the staff. That is why employees feel they have to work as a team because they know that they are the ones who can make or break the guests' enjoyment of their visit. Employees felt that by working as a team they can go above and beyond to meet the needs of the guests (the sum is greater than the parts), and they all do two or three 'journey ambassador' shifts a month, when they wander around approaching guests and asking them how their stay is going and if there is anything they can do to exceed their expectations.

Guest

> *"Well, I think there is a lot of involvement by many people and many things. The staff would largely be involved in the experience as they are the ones that have the most involvement with you. And there would be many things involved, like the hotel itself and what it looks like inside and outside. And all of this would have been decided by the hotel company or the owners as to how they want the experience to be created."* (Guest O)

Guests saw a combination of many things and people being involved in creating their luxury hotel experience. Guests noted that staff were very involved with them and were the ones who greeted them or stopped to chat to them, asking them about themselves or how their stay was going. They felt that it is very important to have dedicated, well-trained staff that go out of their way to communicate with them. Guests also saw the importance of 'things' in creating their luxury hotel experience, for example, having luxury extras in their rooms that were not expected (fruit, bottle water, personal greeting card). If the hotel got this combination right, guests indicated that they would want to come back or tell their family and friends about their experience.

Physical surroundings and country – Theme expressed by everyone

Managers

> *"It's in a beautiful location. I think if you are looking at Quietown* as a destination, it's a beautiful place and there is a huge attraction to that, whether it is skiing, adventure activities, wine, or just to see the landscape."* (Manager N)

> *Pseudonym

Managers saw the hotel's beautiful location and the surrounding areas as influencing guests to stay at the hotel. They felt that there is no other property in the area that has this beautiful village location, and from all of the rooms guests can admire the stunning scenery. The brand has only recently built in the area, so the managers felt that having a well-known brand at the location attracts international guests as they know their reputation, but when they get here they are blown away by the beauty of the country and surrounding areas.

Employees

> "*It's a great location – that always helps. I think they come here because it is a thoroughly reputable brand internationally, so for a lot of international guests they see us and they know it's familiar, so they come here.*" (Employee N)

Employees felt that the hotel is in a beautiful location and that guests pay a lot of money for the completely unobstructed stunning views from their rooms. Employees saw guests being completely 'wowed' by the views as they do not know what to expect until they come in the door. Employees felt that the hotel offers something different from other properties in the area: a more relaxed atmosphere away from the town (that can be very crowded and has a 'younger' vibe). Employees saw the location being a much nicer family environment, but still being close enough to the town. Employees saw guests coming to the location as part of their itinerary when they come to New Zealand.

Guests

> "*I chose this hotel as it offered all the features and services I was looking for in a five-star resort – and I am so impressed. It is so close to the airport and the local shops and only 15 minutes into town.*" (Guest Q)

Guests stayed at the hotel for many reasons. The location was one of the most popular reasons, as there is a multitude of activities available at the location. Guests saw the hotel as somewhere where they could get some peace and relaxation, because it is situated in beautiful, clean and peaceful surroundings. Guests were impressed by the amazing views that they had from their bedrooms and from the public areas in the hotel.

What guests want – Theme expressed by managers and employees

Managers

> "*You should expect that you don't need to wait for anything, and you should expect it to be here, and if you need something it can be delivered.*" (Manager L)

Managers saw guests wanting a hassle-free stay and to get great quick service, wanting the personal touch, and to be treated like individuals. Managers felt that they should get to know the guests so that they feel they are being valued. Managers felt that guests

want someone to assist them and help them in ways without having to ask for it.

Managers noted that guests come for an experience, to be treated well, and to do

something special and out of the ordinary, and if something does goes wrong that it is

changed immediately.

Employees

> *"Like the spa, the swimming pool, the sauna, all those different facilities, having a couple of dining options on site. But not only that, I think it all comes down to staff, so when you call up and say I need help with this, they go over and are on to that, making sure you've got everything that you need so you are not having to worry about anything. So they really are there to take care of you."*
> (Employee N)

Employees felt that what the guests want is something out of the ordinary, and that the

hotel is going to go out of its way to make sure that they meet the guests' needs and

surpass their expectations. Employees felt that guests want those little extras (fruit

bowls and bottled water), those little touches (turndown service), the quality that is just

that little bit more (furnishings of the rooms and the public areas), and to receive highly

personalised service (employees want to anticipate when guests need help with

something before they have to ask for it). Employees saw that their job involves an

attention to detail, and that they could not do their job properly if they did not have this

attention to detail, or if there were not high standards that they had to maintain.

What guests expect – Theme expressed by guests

> *"People have busy lives – so I think that people like to get away and relax as they don't get time to do it with having busy lives – so by going to a luxury hotel they feel as if they can have the time to relax and do it in luxurious surroundings and be able to relax and take time out. So I think that is the attraction."* (Guest, P)

Guests were clear as to what they expected from the luxury hotel, but it varied from

guest to guest. Being pampered was one of the most popular expectations from guests as

this is associated with what luxury is. Guests wanted to be treated exceptionally well, to

have all their needs met, to have some peace and relaxation, to rejuvenate, to have no

stress and to experience different things. Within the hotel, guests wanted spacious rooms with lovely beds and fantastic views and they wanted outstanding food, exceptional wine and to receive great service from all of the staff.

Indulgence – Theme expressed by managers and employees

Managers

> "*I like to think we offer a level of service a little bit above everyone else, you know, so the Delta* experience is a little bit unique and there has been a lot of effort put in and money being spent on it to maintain the reputation.*" (Manager P)

> *Pseudonym

Managers saw guests wanting to indulge themselves when they come to the hotel. Managers saw the hotel having that 'wow' factor for guests when they first arrive and that they are there to be pampered, using the facilities and amenities available in the hotel. Managers saw guests treating the hotel like a private resort, because its concept is quite unique (the hotel is set in a village-like environment) and it is only for those guests who can afford it. But guests get what they pay for – exclusivity.

Employees

> "*It's like a treat, it's somewhere guests can totally relax and be pampered, be looked after and waited on. So staff are there without actually being seen – anticipating that they are going to ask for stuff and being ready.*" (Employee O)

Employees saw guests treating the hotel more like a resort, because there are so many restaurants, bars, shops and beauty treatment places available that guests do not need to leave the hotel. Employees saw the hotel as being rather secluded, because it is on the quiet side of the lake, giving the hotel a feeling of exclusivity. Employees felt that guests spend time at the hotel because they make the hotel feel homely, and they make sure they exceed guests' expectations. Employees make sure they look after their guests very well.

Luxury – Theme expressed by everyone

Managers

> "*Right, the first thing is, honestly, being greeted professionally and discreetly – I see that as luxury. I see somebody who is seen but not heard. Somebody who you know is looking after you, and really, I know we talk about anticipating your needs, but you know we look at you as an individual.*" (Manager L)

Managers saw luxury as going above and beyond a standard hotel. They saw it as being individualistic, and acknowledging and taking the time to know the guest, and they saw a luxury hotel as a place where all kinds of services would be available to the guest, and where they could indulge in every possible luxury. Managers saw guests walking into a room and seeing a bed that they just want to sink into or just wanting to sit down and enjoy the room and not wanting to leave as it just looks so lush.

Employees

> "*Luxury means it's sort of above the ordinary, like it exceeds expectations. It's to a certain standard, it's not your everyday standard – it's above. People like to pay extra for that.*" (Employee M)

Employees described luxury as being expensive, and as such, it attracts a really high-end client base. Employees saw luxury as going that little step further – that you cannot just do the basics; you are going to have to go above and beyond for the guests. Employees felt that luxury is looking after the guests, caring for and valuing them, making them feel relaxed and happy, and providing them with a sense of enjoyment and pleasure.

Guests

> "*Having the best of everything there at your fingertips, not needing to ask for anything – everything should have been thought of. Luxury is that little bit better than ordinary, it's what you pay for, that added extra – to have things just so.*" (Guest O)

Guests believed that a luxury hotel should have a great location with amazing views, great facilities and luxury services, as they are paying for something a bit more – a highly personalised service. Guests felt that if they purchase a luxury hotel experience,

then they expect to get what they pay for: to be pampered, to feel comfortable, relaxed and de-stressed, and to be looked after.

Experience – Theme expressed by everyone

Managers

> *"It's interesting that you are focusing on experience because that is what it's all about. I mean you could actually be in a building that is not as grand as this, and have fantastic service that creates great guest experiences for people and still get the same feedback from those guests. You know it's not all about the building that contributes. But creating that experience is really important and you know that what it comes down to is if there is a problem, that you address the problem as it is happening so that you can improve the experience while they are here and not wait for the feedback on TripAdvisor."* (Manager N)

Managers saw experience as being about the vision of the company and its delivery – they are committed to giving the guest the best possible experience every time, and managers saw every single team member's interaction involved in the guest experience. Because it is an international brand, managers saw that local staff, local furnishings and local produce help to create the whole experience for the guests (for this property, they saw it as a New Zealand experience).

Employees

> *"How they have enjoyed their stay, what they take out of being somewhere, how the staff treated you, it's just the whole package: from when they walk through the doors and when they leave again, and everything that has happened to them in the middle – that's the experience."* (Employee N)

Employees saw themselves as being involved in the guest experience: for example, they saw themselves helping guests to organise trips outside the hotel and then hearing about what an amazing experience it was for the guest when they come back to the hotel. Employees know that if they reflect a positive attitude or nature that this really gives the guests a good experience and a good impression of the staff.

Guests

> *"Who or what – gosh that would be a long list. Well, as I said earlier, it is an excellent experience staying here. But if I looked at the 'who', it would have to*

be the staff. They are really friendly and helpful; nothing seems to be too much of a problem. The 'what' would be the impeccable rooms and facilities and the hotel itself. So a short answer would be everyone and everything that you come into contact with makes the experience." (Guest Q)

Guests felt that there are many things that are involved in an experience and more than they would ever know about or ever see. Guests saw the experience encompassing the hotel itself, and the staff. Guests did note that if something was missing from the combination of things that make up the experience, it would make it an unpleasant experience – so it is about getting the right balance in order to produce a pleasant experience.

Outside – Theme expressed by everyone

Managers

"*It's a resort for all seasons, and this particular property caters to the winter and summer market, and it's got a little bit of something for everybody, no matter whether they are independent traveller or whether they are a group, or whether it's a mum and dad, or whether a high-end luxury traveller – this property offers a little bit of something for everyone.*" (Manager L)

Managers felt that one problem with the property is that there are many activities that are weather dependent, and this can be very frustrating for guests, whether it is having good weather for a wedding or for sightseeing. Managers organise distractions for their guests, especially if it rains or snows non-stop for several days (the hotel has its own cinema, and they have special lunches and dinners).

Employees

"*Sometimes it can be quite exciting when they're all excited about their holiday and they're telling you all about their plans. You get involved in their trip and you are helping them decide what activities they want to do, that is quite cool.*" (Employee M)

Employees saw the weather as being a drawcard for guests to come to the hotel, as they felt that the guests want to experience the weather. Employees see guests undertaking many activities outside of the hotel, but they return to the hotel to relax after they have

finished these activities, and partake in further activities at the hotel in at the health or leisure centre and spa.

Guests

> *"Well for us, we were staying for a 10-day holiday and we have a young family. So for us, we wanted to stay somewhere to get out of the hustle and bustle of Quitetown* itself, but still be near places to do things. But there is a lot to do here with a young family – it's a great location and you can easily get to other places from here, but be far enough away from the busyness of Quitetown."** (Guest O)

> *Pseudonym

Guests came to the region to experience the weather and take part in the activities that the region could offer them. Guests also enjoyed the activities that the hotel could offer them.

Property Six – Hotel C

Luxury Hotel – Themes expressed by everyone

Managers

> *"Luxury hotel is all about a style of service, that going above and beyond for the guests, providing both facilities and service on a luxury scale. I believe that you should have the highest quality of everything so that you can treat them as the guests would be special, making them feel like they mean something."* (Manager V)

Managers felt that a luxury hotel experience is everyone's responsibility, and that it starts from the first person that opens the door, right through to last goodbye: everything should just flow and feel very nice. Managers described the luxury hotel as providing the facilities and management providing the atmosphere and the experience. They said that they expect the guests to see and feel everything when they are staying in the luxury hotel. The managers explained that they have a dedicated welcomer to the hotel, and their job is to 'create moments' for the guests so they feel the hotel is a 'home away from home'. Managers saw guests wanting to have 'wow' moments and to feel pampered, and it is their responsibility to ensure that the outstanding quality and

attention to detail is upheld throughout the hotel. Managers saw the rooms as being an important part of the guests' stay and there are various touchpoints that can determine how the experience is going for the guests. The managers explained that the first touchpoint has to be spot on, and the last few touchpoints need to be spot on as well in order to make sure that the guests will share and speak about their experience to other people.

Employees

> "*A luxury hotel is where you have a special feeling when you come in – where you are the centre of attention, where pretty much everything gets done for you.*" (Employee Z)

Employees described the luxury hotel as a place guests should feel like VIPs from the first welcome, and that everything should be perfect, and nothing should be out of place. Employees felt that guests should feel relaxed within the hotel as it is spacious throughout, nothing is clunky or cramped, and it has a very nice flow through it (the hotel has a feng shui element to it). Employees felt that the most important part of a luxury hotel experience is the quality standard of the service, followed by the facilities. Employees saw themselves representing the brand, and that it is important to maintain the expected high standards, as guests associated the brand with a luxury.

Guests

> "*Luxury hotel or five star means you are probably a bit more exclusive, a bit more personalised service, where you have an expectation of a higher level of quality in the food and everything – bedding, and that everything is provided.*" (Guest Z)

Guests saw a luxury hotel as a hotel that does not just offer the basics, but can accommodate unusual requests from the guests, for example, ordering something that is not on the menu late at night. Guests preferred to stay in a luxury hotel because they like to have space in their room (not just a bed and bathroom), and appreciate the amount and quality of amenities and facilities available to them. Guests felt that they

got special attention from amazing staff that took care of them and could not do enough for them.

Interactive – Theme expressed by everyone

Managers

> *"It's called peopleology, it's about the people, it's about the human connection. So I think they are ahead of everyone else, and I would love to be a part of that. So experiences are just going to get better."* (Manager Y)

Managers felt they have a basic philosophy: get close to the guest, be more interactive, talk to them more, get to understand what they want rather than make assumptions about what they need, and therefore provide what they need or what they want. Managers want their team to be able to talk to anyone about anything as there are a lot of people who travel alone, so by being able to talk to the staff they do not feel lonely or out of place.

Employees

> *"People, people, that's it exactly. People are creating experiences for the guests – people always come to the front desk and we are there to serve them, show them things, help them with things, tell them things. We are going to take care of our guests – so people, it's people who create the luxury experiences for the guests."* (Employee X)

Employees felt that they make the guests feel special, that they look after them by talking to them and listening to what they are saying, because the guests want staff to be more involved in their lives. Employees felt that regular guests bond with staff members and that they play a vital role in the guests' experience. Employees saw the brand allowing them the freedom to be open with guests, and this helps them to be more creative in the guests' experience.

Guests

> *"I think that it is nice to be welcomed to a hotel by your name. So for me it's about the personal touch, being remembered – that is always nice."* (Guest Y)

Guests felt that staff members went out of their way to help them – that they gave them excellent speedy service. Guests could see that in the hotel there is high-quality contact with the staff, and that frontline staff remember guests' names, making them feel valued and having a connection with the hotel and creating a memorable experience.

Physical surroundings and country – Theme expressed by everyone

Managers

> "*Our location. You're in the heart of the city but you haven't got police cars screaming past your door and things like that. So you've got, it's sort of, I suppose, an urban oasis would be the term that we don't use a lot but we probably should. It's a lovely location up here, and it's hidden in corner not a lot of people – they drive past it but they might not know how lovely it is here.*" (Manager V)

Managers saw their corporate guests being very much location bound, and where they are located suits a lot of their corporate clients. Managers felt that they may not have the greatest views but their facilities make up for that. Managers saw guests coming to New Zealand for the first time, and they felt that not only are they giving them an experience of a luxury hotel but they are also giving them an experience of the entire country.

Employees

> "*I think the first thing is the location, it's one of the main cities and most international flights come in, second is the facilities, and third is this really beautiful country.*" (Employee, Y)

Employees felt that the location of the hotel is very important to the guests, especially the business travellers, because they are able to leave the hotel and get straight onto a major highway and they do not have to go through the city and wait in traffic. Employees felt that the hotel being situated in a central city location also appeals to leisure guests.

Guests

> "*For me the importance is that the hotel always has to be five star, and in the five-star market the location of the hotel is also important – it has to be near a city or located within a resort.*" (Guest X)

Guests felt that the location of the hotel was one of the deciding factors in their choosing that particular hotel, and that the surrounding area and the environment that the hotel is located in were also deciding factors.

What guests want – Theme expressed by managers and employees

Managers

> "*I think they like being looked after, I think they like being important, so to speak, but in a nice way, I think they think that staying in a luxury hotel is going to make them, you know, they are going to be looked after, they are going to have all their needs met, their wants met as well, and they are going to enjoy it and go away and want to do it again until they do it more regularly.*" (Manager V)

Managers felt that their philosophy is to get closer to the guests, to understand what they want and then deliver that to the guests in a way that is not treating them all the same. Managers felt that they and all of their staff attempt to attend to the guests' every whim. Managers saw guests coming to the hotel and wanting someone else to do everything for them rather than doing it themselves and they felt that guests should not have to ask for things – things should happen effortlessly. Managers felt that guests want to be looked after to feel special, and to receive personalised service.

Employees

> "*Sometimes you try to be like a psychologist – you try to analyse the guest – you need to read that guest, so you need to just ask questions. You try to involve emotion so you create a more personal relation, not only as staff and guest – you create like not friends but a confidant, a connection.*" (Employee W)

Employees felt that guests want friendly and nice staff that do as much for them as possible, to take the burdens off them so that they can just enjoy themselves. Employees felt that guests want to be taken care of from the moment that they walk in the door, and that they want to feel special throughout their stay. Employees preferred to use the guests' names to give them a sense of connection and to give them more personal attention. Employees saw guests wanting them to have an attention to detail, that the

service is tailored to their needs and that it is at an outstanding level. Employees felt that

guests want the room to be at least at a five-star luxury standard.

What the guest expects – Theme expressed by guests

> *"Having no excuses and that there is always a way to make it work, having*
> *prompt and discreet service, that it is well organised, that the staff are friendly*
> *and sincere – being able to relax and being looked after."* (Guest A1)

Guests were very clear as to what they expect from a luxury hotel. They felt that they

should not have to ask for anything, they should receive prompt service and staff should

go that extra mile for them. Staff should be able to give highly personalised service and

special attention if it is required. Staff should have an interest in them and make sure

that everything is to their satisfaction. Guests expected to feel welcome from the first

greeting, to have a comfortable place to stay, to have enough space to relax in and to

have somewhere that is a home away from home.

Indulgence – Theme expressed by managers and employees

Managers

> *"Understanding what those people need, make them feel special. What is their*
> *little favourite things, like, for example, we know that Tracy likes red wine, and*
> *we have a red wine for her ready in her room when she arrives – wow, you go to*
> *your room, wow, you are amazed. It's those little personalised touches, that we*
> *are delivering experiences, not just luxury experiences but memories that will*
> *stay with them forever."* (Manager Y)

Managers saw luxury hotels as being pitched as unobtainable brands such as Chanel or

Louis Vuitton – you are pitching a dream that your guests want to be in. Managers saw

guests wanting to be looked after, to feel important, to have all their needs and wants

met, to be treated specially, to be pampered and to be indulged in a luxurious

environment. Managers noted that when guests come to the hotel, they want everything

laid out in front of them, they do not want to do anything for themselves, they just let

someone else take care of all their problems, and in fact, they expect nothing to be a

problem. Managers saw guests wanting the finer things in life and the highest quality in everything.

Employees

> "*The first thing for a luxury hotel is that the staff actually make you feel special – so you feel like a king – everybody is here to look after you.*" (Employee Y)

Employees saw guests wanting to indulge themselves or to be indulged when they come to stay at the hotel. Employees wanted guests to depart feeling 'oh wow' or 'this is unbelievable' or to dream about the hotel because they have been so well looked after during their stay. Employees felt that guests should have less to do, and the less they have to do the better, as they will have more time to relax. Employees felt they should make a connection with every individual who comes to stay at the hotel and give them a sense of safety, privacy, quality and amazing service, as this makes them feel that someone cares about them.

Luxury – Theme expressed by everyone

Managers

> "*There is a very nice saying in Germany, 'Auf eine Torte die Krönung ist wie die extra Meile', it's like on a tart the cherry is on the top, it's like the extra mile – the sparkle, I would say, everything is shiny, everything is glamour and sparkling, like going the extra mile, everything has to be perfect to be luxury.*" (Manager W)

Managers described luxury as having everything that you want when you want it, having very luxurious products in the rooms, the hotel providing excellent facilities for the guests, and that the whole feel of the place represents luxury. Managers saw their concept of luxury as being quite modern – contemporary or quite classic: they felt that their hotel is aiming for today's luxury traveller and not the ones that want the top hat and tails. Managers felt that for luxury to exist the service needs to be efficient, friendly and fantastic, and they saw luxury as finite, and that it requires absolute attention to

detail in every aspect, and that everything has to be extremely detailed to make sure it is perfect.

Employees

> "*Luxury hotel is – five-star service that a hotel gives to their guests in the terms of quality, service (of course) and the brand needs to be – everything needs to be pretty much perfect – being very luxurious.*" (Employee V)

Employees saw the hotel as luxury and that serving the guests, and taking care of them is creating a luxury experience for them. Employees believed that there is a price element associated with luxury, and that the prices are always going to be high, but that guests will be willing to pay good money for luxury. Employees felt that even though hotels can have gold cutlery and plates, the service itself has to be five star to be luxury because service makes a five-star luxury hotel what it is.

Guests

> "*A luxury hotel pulls out all of the stops – goes above and beyond in service, and offers fantastic products and facilities.*" (Guest Y)

Guests described luxury as being looked after, about being pampered and spoilt. Guests saw luxury accommodation as having high-quality service, a relaxed environment, a VIP experience, and that it is just that little bit different from normal accommodation.

Experience – Theme expressed by everyone

Managers

> "*I think to be honest we sometimes lose sight of this as hoteliers. The single most important thing is people come to a hotel to sleep – they don't come for any other reason but to sleep. Because, if they didn't need sleep, they'd stay home, or whatever. They wouldn't bother coming to a hotel. And we have to make sure that that sleep is good, and you can have all the best service, you can have all the best hotel in the world, but if someone has a bad night's sleep it's not a luxury experience.*" (Manager Y)

Managers described experience as a luxury experience, and the luxury experience happens when the guests interact with the staff or use the facilities in the hotel, and managers saw guests wanting to experience new things (e.g. a chocolate massage at the

hotel's spa). Managers felt that they have a good team that offers very personalised service to the guests, and they felt that everyone supports one another and that they all have the same goal, which is to give the guests the best experience while they are in the hotel. Managers saw that the experience is a flow of many different things and touchpoints, things that are memorable, and these happen throughout the stay, and this will help guests to decide whether to come back or not. Managers felt that guests return to the hotel because of the experience they have had at the hotel.

Employees

> *"The guest experience is according to the quality of the service, the quality of the hotel – I mean everything in the hotel, like the food, the swimming pool, spa, even a simple greeting – that's all the guest experience."* (Employee X)

Employees saw experience as being the guests' experience. Employees saw guests wanting to experience something different and that is why they stay in a luxury hotel, as it is a chance for guests to feel valued and to feel special. Employees saw the experience starting when the guests walk in the door and continuing until they leave, and that it involves many people and parts. Employees saw the big parts of the experience as being the facilities and a helpful team, but noted that it is also little things that matter too, such as helping with bags. When guests leave the hotel, employees want to feel that they have made a difference, and believe that guests can leave a hotel and think 'that's normal', but for a memorable experience employees need to go above and beyond to deliver the unexpected, and that is the luxury experience.

Guests

> *"For a luxury hotel experience – I don't think it differs from any hotel experience; it's just the level it would come out at. So in terms of a hotel experience, the guest visiting the hotel, the staff at the hotel they interact with, the staff they don't interact with – so you don't interact with the cleaning staff but if the place is nice and clean it will give you a good experience, but if the place is a pigsty your experience will be very negative."* (Guest Y)

Guests described experience in relation to the luxury hotel. Guests saw the luxury hotel as an experience, and felt that their experience starts before they arrive at the hotel in the form of what they are expecting from their stay. Guests saw the service, the facilities and the food as being part of the experience. Guests felt that nothing should be a problem and that all of their requests should be easily and quickly dealt with, and that staff should give first-class quality service, all the time.

Outside – Theme expressed by managers and employees

Managers

> *"When you have leisure guests coming in you can spend a little time with them explaining the city, where they want to go, 'you want to go to this place, and this restaurant, and here, here and here', so you can actually make a nice itinerary for them and help them out."* (Manager Z)

Managers felt that guests just want to get to their room quickly so they can get ready for whatever they are there to do, as there are many activities that the guests can participate in in the city. Managers felt that the concierge team has to have up-to-date information for the guests on what activities they can do when they get to the city, as this is part of their overall experience.

Employees

> *"People want to know about the city, about what there is to do there, and we are here to promote New Zealand tourism and we want to give them a good experience."* (Employee W)

Employees felt that what guests do outside of the hotel will affect their experience, and they felt that it is the responsibility of the concierge team to be able to recommend activities that the guests can participate in when they are staying at the hotel.