

On the way to transformation: Identity transition during a holistic wellness retreat experience

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Dedication

This doctoral thesis is dedicated to:

My grandparents, who encouraged me to study from an early age. I am happy I grew up remembering their advice and completed my PhD journey always thinking about all of you. Every single page of this work is filled with my thoughts and gratitude to you.

My parents – to my father who motivated me to pursue my PhD and who gave me the vision of this challenging yet rewarding path in life; and to my mother whose endless support and love gave me strength in the hardest moments. Thank you for always believing in me and being by my side.

Abstract

The global trend towards healthy lifestyles presents opportunities for the tourism industry. An increasing number of consumers display interest in holistic self-care and engagement in activities that facilitate self-exploration. Wellness tourism offers opportunities for the consumer to explore self while focusing on self-care. Generally, tourism can promote a sense of liminality, while self-exploration may result in new self-discoveries. These components in return might lead to identity transitions. How exactly these identity transitions occur, however, represents a theoretical gap that needs further exploration. To address this gap, it is important to study identity transition through the lens of liminality and determine how liminality and other factors might promote identity transition.

The focus of this study is the wellness retreat. The study utilised qualitative methodology, including interviews and observations, to illuminate the process of identity transition when undertaking a wellness retreat, that is, how the holistic wellness retreat experience illuminates changes in the perception of self and the meaning of wellness for participants. The study answers two research questions: (1) What are participants' (a) meanings of wellness and the holistic wellness retreat experience and (b) perceptions of self, prior to and following attendance at a holistic wellness retreat?; and (2) What forces shape and influence identity transition while at the holistic wellness retreat and how does such change occur?

Findings show a re-construction of self-perception towards self-acceptance and evolvment of the meaning of wellness into an achievable state. Identity transition is facilitated by the liminal place of the holistic wellness retreat and by the self-work during the retreat stay. In order for self-work to occur, people need to have a high level of self-commitment and self-motivation. The self-work and identity transition are driven by motives of self-exploration, learning and participation in different activities as well as by shared experiences and by socialising with like-minded people while at a holistic wellness retreat.

On a holistic wellness retreat, participants gain new knowledge on the self and an opportunity to re-evaluate themselves, learn new skills and tools, become more trusting, and start living 'consciously'. As a result, they gain a sense of vision, clarity, and direction to a new self, wherein identity transition is a starting point and a process of change rather than an end goal.

The contributions of this study are threefold. First, the study extends research on consumer behaviour in tourism by introducing the notion of identity transition to explain how wellness tourists attempt self-roles and reconstruct identity in the liminal place and space of a holistic wellness retreat. Second, the study extends the consumer behaviour and tourism

literature by showing the process of identity transition and presenting new mechanisms of identity transition through identity work and play. While past research states that tourism activities are mainly ‘play’, this thesis argues that holistic wellness retreats are perceived as both play and work. The study illustrates how people transit from identity play to work and elaborates on what makes these two constructs effective in the identity transition experience. The study shows how identity work and play serve as mechanisms of identity transition within the holistic wellness retreat experience. Third, the empirical contribution includes the exploration of tourists’ behaviour in a new market hitherto unexplored in the domain of the tourism marketing literature.

This study addresses the complexity of identity transition at a holistic wellness retreat. In doing so, the findings add to the growing body of knowledge of consumer behaviour in tourism studies through its focus on identity work, liminality, and identity transition, and demonstration of the stages of knowing self and ritual creation. The study proffers methodological, managerial and practical implications.

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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, 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.

The following publication relates to work undertaken for this thesis:

Lyulicheva, M., Sheau-Fen Yap, S. F. & Hyde, K. (2019). *The holistic wellness retreat experience and identity change*. ANZMAC Conference, Wellington, New Zealand, 2-4 December 2019.

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Ethics Approval

Ethics approval from AUT University Ethics Committee (AUTEC) was granted on 8 June 2018, for a period of three years until 8 June 2021. The ethics application number is 18/199, (see Appendix A for Ethics Approval Letter).

Chapter 1

Introduction

What we anticipate in our destinations is not holiness or divine visions, but something even more miraculous – the opportunity to feel different from the way we feel at home. It is as if the act of travelling to a certain place in the world entitles us to feel happier and more alive
(Chaline, 2002, p. 67)

1.1 Introduction

The first chapter acts as an introduction to and summary of this thesis. The chapter opens with a discussion on the background and context of the research. Both the practical and theoretical foundations and the gaps in the current state of knowledge are discussed, followed by a presentation of the research aim of this thesis and research questions. The chapter further elaborates on the design of the study and the valuable contributions this research provides. The chapter then concludes by presenting the structure of the thesis.

Pre-story

When we research something, we cannot ignore our personal interests (Hall, 2004). One of my predominant interests is healthy lifestyle and a holistic approach to health preventative practices with past experience in attending yoga retreats and practicing different techniques for holistic health including meditations, spiritual development, sport activities and healthy diet. One of my other biggest passions in life is to travel and explore the world by engaging in different types of tourism.

Over the years I have questioned myself why I always feel different during and after a trip – every journey I have been on has dramatically changed something deep inside me, making me feel like a completely different person. After a trip, I never go back to my ‘old-self’; instead, I keep exploring and uncovering new layers of being. Interestingly enough, my postgraduate study journey has not been an exception. For this research I wanted to combine these two areas of tourism and healthy lifestyle together. Combining my personal thoughts and reflections together with my interests, I decided to explore the wellness tourism segment due to the healthy aspects of such experiences and the transformational possibilities and opportunities.

Therefore, my research interest is exploring how people change during wellness travel, specifically in a holistic wellness retreat – a facility people travel to in order to experience a

holistic health approach where different wellness related practices are delivered under one roof over a selected period of time.

I am eager to know whether it is the actual act of travelling that changes people or if there is something more specific that triggers these identity transitions and transformations. These thoughts have been on my mind since the beginning of my ‘doctoral study journey’ and so I have spent time exploring this area in more detail.

It is vital to elaborate that in this thesis I did not know for certain whether that transformational experiences would take place and definitely happen for every holistic wellness retreat guest. While I recognise that travel itself can lead to various types of changes in self, however, it should be outlined how a traveller encounters wellness tourism in general and more specifically a holistic wellness retreat. We, therefore, must recognise that:

- (i) One group of travellers consciously seeks change, including changes to the self and, therefore, seek out such experiences, leading to a transformative experience or not
- (ii) Others stumble on wellness tourism out of curiosity, not expecting a transformative experience, but have one
- (iii) Another group similar to the previous one, end up not having a transformative experience at all.

This classification in turn provides a reflection on situating adequately the role of the holistic wellness treat experience as a particular form of wellness tourism that perhaps facilitates this transition. It is imperative to highlight that not everyone expects and gets a transformative experience; in this thesis I focus on those participants that had a transformational journey by looking at identity transitions. In other words, in my reflective account of the research it was the expectation that holistic wellness retreat might be a liminal place where transformation might happen for some tourists. Keeping in mind that not everyone might receive a transformational experience, I focus in this thesis on those participants that had a transformational journey at the holistic wellness retreat.

I invite you to read my thesis and to join me in a journey of new discoveries on how a specific tourism industry segment (holistic wellness retreat) shapes identity transition.

1.2 Background

The positive ‘take-away’ of tourism is that a travel experience often makes people feel different in a positive way from the way they used to perceive themselves prior to the commencement of the journey (Chaline, 2002). Often, these changes are positive and result in people becoming more interested and engaged in various types of tourism. Moreover, it is also interesting to observe how people take their usual perceptions, opinions, and interests in life with them when travelling. Past research has shown that lifestyle has a direct influence on people’s destination and is likely to affect their activity choices and experiences when travelling (Holz-Rau & Scheiner, 2010; Lee et al., 2015), (e.g., members of the Slow Food movement have a higher interest in local culture [Lee et al., 2015]). Nowadays, one of the most popular examples of this integration of people’s lifestyles with travel activities and related behaviour is the focus on a healthy lifestyle.

'A lifestyle can be defined as a more or less integrated set of practices which an individual embraces, not only because such practices fulfil utilitarian needs, but because they give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity' (Giddens, 1991, p. 81). The pursuit of a healthy lifestyle is increasingly popular and has been adopted by many people around the globe. This is evidenced by the growing number of healthy food cafes and gym and fitness centers globally (Fallon, 2004). It is also shown through people’s engagement in a variety of health-related events (e.g., yoga sessions, social activity clubs such as swimming, hiking, and running clubs, etc.). Apart from people’s interest in maintaining their health status, the belief that living a healthy lifestyle is ‘fashionable’ has been further promoted by marketers in health and wellness industries around the world in order to attract more customers to purchase and use their services. Such services include gym memberships, health magazine subscriptions, paid seminars featuring healthy lifestyle coaches and nutritionists, and so on (Howell, 2004). A healthy lifestyle, therefore, can be summarised by a simple definition provided by Bloch (1986): a healthy lifestyle aims at the prevention of health related problems and the maximisation of well-being. Adopting a healthy lifestyle is a growing trend based on people’s values and standards of living and is reflected not only in everyday life, work, and leisure participation, but also in the choice of holidays and tourist activities (Divine & Lepisto, 2005).

Indeed, the trend towards a healthy lifestyle has had a favourable impact on the tourism industry. If, in the recent past, there was a predominant focus on medical tourism with a primary aim to cure an existing illness, due to shifts in consumer behaviour towards a more holistic healthy lifestyle, a change has occurred in the market place whereby preventative health tourism

also known as wellness tourism has begun to gain trust and interest globally (Lehto et al., 2006; Voigt et al., 2011; Wellness Summit, 2013). Wellness tourism has been defined as:

“The sum of all the relationships resulting from a journey by people whose motive, in whole or in part, is to maintain or promote their health and well-being, and who stay at least one night at a facility that is specifically designed to enable and enhance people’s physical, psychological, spiritual and/or social well-being” (Voigt et al., 2011, p. 17).

Further growth of wellness tourism can be seen in the emerging trends within the industry that further support the development of a healthy lifestyle. One of these popular trends includes specially designed places that are called wellness retreats. Wellness retreats are currently one of the most popular places within wellness tourism where people can promote, improve, or maintain their health status. A wellness retreat is a centre or a venue that provides a combination of different activities, practices, and treatments aimed to balance body, mind, and spirit in a calming and supportive context (Kelly, 2012). The growth and development of wellness retreats are dependent on people’s interest in holistic self-care and their engagement in a variety of activities that facilitate self-exploration. Wellness tourism meets their needs because it offers unique opportunities to explore self while focusing on complete self-care at the same time and in the same place (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2006; Richards & King, 2003).

However, the popularity and global growth of wellness tourism and wellness retreats have also resulted in negative outcomes that include confusion and misunderstanding amongst consumers, business operators, and academics concerning what a wellness retreat is and what services it provides. For instance, if a person searches for wellness retreats on the Internet, such as through Google, he or she will find a wide variety of businesses. One group of businesses often label themselves as wellness retreats where there is a provision of only yoga and other yoga related services. Other businesses focus on spa, massage, and beauty treatments and call themselves wellness retreats or wellness holidays. In fact, while both of these examples are correct and they both provide wellness-related services, it appears there is a lack of understanding amongst consumers and operators around the meaning of the concept of a wellness retreat. Consumers and industry practitioners tend to think that wellness retreats are solely yoga venues, or solely spa and massage centres, or spiritual centres, without realising that the aim of a true wellness retreat is to be holistic and provide all of the wellness related services under one roof. Moreover, academics also tend to limit their research on wellness tourists to only one type at a time – the yoga niche or spiritual tourism (e.g., Dilletta et al., 2019; Wray et al.,

2010), which might be contributing to the confusion on the full meaning of the wellness retreat and its practices.

Recognising this confusion, some businesses within the industry have started to name their centres holistic wellness retreats, thus, potentially adding more clarity to the market in terms of their offerings and hopefully the true meaning of a wellness retreat. Despite the confusion, the market for wellness retreats has been accelerating and growing rapidly. A new generation of health-conscious visitors is discovering traditional spa destinations, but also demanding more luxury and add-on experiences (Richards, 2011), which all-inclusive holistic wellness retreats aim to provide. Holistic wellness retreats, therefore, are places that provide all of these services: spa, massage, healing sessions, yoga, meditation, fitness, and other physical activities tailored to each individual (Voigt et al., 2011; Wray et al., 2010). They also include educational seminars, workshops on such topics as self-development or art, massage treatments, guest speakers, and more. They are all delivered ‘under one roof’, and are designed to meet the needs of various groups of people, while also offering accommodation services and long-stay plans (Voigt et al., 2011). Moreover, since the segment is still relatively new on a global scale, to date, there are many people who are unaware of offerings such as holistic wellness retreats that aim to provide all of the wellness services in one specially designed place. The meanings of wellness as understood by the participants of the holistic wellness retreat, therefore, should be explored further, in order to lessen this confusion as well as to promote the importance of these places to consumers on a wider scale.

In order to explore consumer behaviour in the tourism context more comprehensively, a review of the literature showed that historically, tourism in general has often been studied through the theoretical application of the concept of self, more specifically with examples of searching for self through travel experiences (Cohen, 2010; Goeldner & Ritchie, 2006; Neumann, 1992). Another definition of the self-concept theory is an individual’s perception of self based on physical self, products and services consumed, and social interactions (Todd, 2001). In the past, the theory of self-concept has been employed in tourism research with a primary aim of determining how self-image might influence travel intentions (e.g., Curtin, 2010; Hung & Petrick, 2012). The concept of self, however, has been studied in tourism literature beyond self-image and travel intentions; further examples of the past tourism studies on self and travel include papers that are often based on self-congruity as a part of self-concept (e.g., Gazley & Watling, 2015; Sirgy & Su, 2000; Sohn & Juan, 2011, etc.) and self-perception in tourism activities (e.g., Prebensen et al., 2003; Woosnam et al., 2018).

It is important to note that the perception of self, which is part of self-concept, has a direct influence on consumption behaviour, while consumption of different products and services also influences the perception of self in return (i.e., Falasconi et al., 2019; Morgan, 2019; Saenger et al., 2017; Zhang & Haller, 2013). For example, mass media consumption affects the identity of self both negatively and positively amongst those with disabilities: negative media representation of people with disabilities leads to denial of their identity, while positive media representation leads to affirmation of their identity (Zhang & Haller, 2013). While media consumption is proven to have an influence on one's identity, it is further beneficial to study whether and how the perception of self might differ as a result of holistic wellness retreat consumption as an underexplored area. This provides an idea for the research question for this thesis which is on self-perception and its changes during holistic wellness retreat consumption.

Generally, self-concept is a multi-dimensional construct that integrates different components or sub-concepts; for example, self-concept also elaborates on the identity of self (Belk, 1988). Identity has a predominant focus on self where a person perceives self from one's own perspective (Belk, 1988). Past studies have demonstrated the relevance of self in tourism (e.g., Hung & Petrick, 2012; Todd, 2001). Indeed, the concept of identity has a strong relevance to the tourism industry and past research agrees that tourism experiences often affect one's identity (Beerli et al., 2007; Sirgy & Su, 2000). The literature further shows that engagement in self-exploration through tourism may result in new self-exploration, new self-discoveries, and even identity change (Cohen, 2010; Davidson, 2005; Desforges, 2000). Furthermore, past studies have demonstrated that wellness tourism could be a form of transformational journeying that takes people from one state of mind or body to another (Little, 2012; Noy, 2004). Therefore, researchers have argued that travelling also can lead to identity transition (Desforges, 2000; Ryan & Martin, 2001; White & White, 2004). Based on the above review, it is believed that the holistic wellness retreat experience can result in similar self-role and identity transitions insofar as visitors are exposed to different fantasies concerning their self-roles as well as their self-identities. Therefore, the concept of identity is relevant in the holistic wellness retreat context; while wellness tourism may be a form of transformational journeying.

Travel provides an opportunity to acquire experiences that become the basis for discovering or transforming self. Current empirical work and conceptual discussion in the tourism literature have largely focused on tourists' actual and current identities. What merits further attention is the self in-between and the process of identity transition. Of relevance to identity transition is the work of Van Gennep (1960) who described rites of passage consisting of three phases: (1) the pre-liminal rites of separation (detachment from a former social position);

(2) the liminal rites of transition (passing through the threshold between the past and future or possible status); and (3) the post-liminal rites of incorporation (reintegrate into society with a new social status). The second stage in self-transformational experiences – transition - could be linked to the state of liminality, because changes in identity might result in experience of a liminal state. Further work by Turner (1967) identifies the notion of liminality, as an in-between state of mind that is temporary and transitional, that provides a basis for understanding the self-transformation process.

Identity transition often occurs together with liminality because one is never fully fixed or emplaced (Daskalaki et al., 2016). The transitional opportunities for self-change are also observed in tourism research, i.e. how liminal experience through travel can facilitate the search for a revitalized sense of self (White & White, 2004); liminal experiences of backpackers (Bui et al., 2014); the hotel as a liminal place (Pritchard & Morgan, 2006) and the exploration of airports as a liminal space (Huang et al., 2018).

The current research aims to advance our understanding of identity transition experiences as part of the self-transformational journey in a holistic wellness retreat context. It is imperative to note that the occurrence of self-transformation is not certain, but focus on the process of identity transition that may occur during holistic wellness retreat is the centre of attention for this research. The transformative power of tourism often lies in its ability to bring tourists into a liminal state of being that allows them to temporarily escape routines. In this regard, the holistic wellness retreat might promote identity transition.

Conducting a study on the abovementioned research topic is also highly significant because identifying whether and how identity transition occurs during a holistic wellness retreat experience would help the wellness tourism industry to eliminate the confusions around the concept of a wellness retreat. Additionally, carefully studying people's experience within the holistic wellness retreat will highlight the area and contribute new knowledge on the holistic wellness retreat phenomenon. Moreover, other implications would include a new extension of the theoretical base of identity and identity transition concepts. Therefore, this study seeks to provide a fresh perspective on this topic by examining the identity transitional experience of visitors to a holistic wellness retreat and aims to develop an integrated 'industry-academic' discussion on this topic that will provide insights on both theory and practice.

1.3 Statement of the problem

Firstly, despite the relevance of liminality in tourism, the concept has not yet been studied within the wellness tourism sector. In this research, the holistic wellness retreat is viewed as a liminal place that might promote identity transition. It is, therefore, appealing to see whether one's identity might change during the consumption of holistic wellness retreat tourism and how this identity transition may occur.

Secondly, the concept of identity transition is one of the elements of self-transformational theory. Tourism is known to be a transformational process for some travellers (e.g., Coghlan & Weiler, 2018; Dillette et al., 2019; Kirillova et al., 2017; Laing & Frost, 2017; Lou & Xie, 2018; Robledo & Batle, 2017; Sigala, 2020; etc.) To date, the majority of the existing research on transformational tourism has predominantly focused on the following areas: comparison of different wellness tourism groups and the transformational benefits they seek from their wellness tourism experience (Voigt et al., 2011); volunteering and backpacking tourism and how it changes the self through performance identity change and personal narratives (Noy, 2004); how the tourist can change through tourism in Third World countries and how natives' self-change is stronger compared to tourists' (Bruner, 1991); and long-term travelling and changes to one's identity (White & White, 2004). While there is a theoretical discussion on identity and transformational experience in wellness tourism, there is a lack of empirical evidence to date on self-transformational experiences within the holistic wellness retreat tourism segment and more specifically identity transition within the holistic wellness retreat.

Specifically, the study will demonstrate in the following paragraphs how the current research adds knowledge beyond the above studies. For instance, Voigt et al. (2011) argue that different types of wellness tourists seek diverse benefits from types of wellness tourism services, i.e., spa, yoga, or spiritual retreats. While there is a clear picture of what attracts those groups of tourists, it would be interesting to see the motivations of holistic wellness retreat visitors and how these motivations might affect or contribute to their identity transition. Further, Voigt et al. (2011) focus on profiling the wellness tourist; however, it is important to note that profiling studies generally provide only descriptive information and further insights into what motivates wellness retreat participation is imperative. To further emphasise, the current study focuses on not just the motivations but also how these motivations facilitate or contribute to the identity transition process.

In his study, Noy (2004) focused on backpacker tourists and the social collective identity changes that occur through social and collective narrative performances and found that changes occur for both narrators and listeners. However, while Noy's study was on collective identity, the

focus of the present study is specifically on individual identity. Moreover, it is important to add to the body of knowledge by determining what might contribute to the identity transition process while at a holistic wellness retreat and how exactly the process of identity transition occurs, as well as what else might trigger identity transition.

Additionally, White and White (2004) found that the process by which an individual re-examines his/her identity after long-term travel is through a recognition that a specific life stage has ended and the individual starts to imagine a range of possible future ways of living. The authors further argue that there are two aspects that provide an opportunity for the re-creation of identity: the long-term travel itself and the experience of tourism as a journey while in a liminal state (White & White, 2004). The authors explicitly studied long-term travelling after the completion of life events. However, what is yet to be investigated is whether identity transition might occur not due to the end of the specific life stage or event, but rather while travelling or as an outcome of the travelling experience. To study whether tourists experience a liminal state as an outcome of the travel experience is also beneficial. This research adds value to the body of knowledge by studying a short-term travel mode, where the holistic wellness retreat stay is a facility where people go to for a week or two in comparison with more long-term travel modes, e.g. study abroad, work exchange, etc.

Taking into account the above discussion, it is important to point out that the current study discusses whether identity transition could be an outcome of the experience of travelling to a holistic wellness retreat. The research further seeks to elaborate on the process of identity transition, how or whether the motivation to attend a holistic wellness retreat affects identity transition and what else might trigger this transition.

1.4 Research aim, questions, and methodological design

To date, the majority of studies on wellness tourism have focused on the motivations of wellness tourists, for instance, the motives for yoga tourism (Lehto et al., 2006), with some researchers also dividing wellness tourists by segments based on the type of retreat they visit (e.g., Voigt et al., 2011). Taking into consideration existing studies and the lack of academic research on the topics discussed in the previous section (1.3), the goal of this doctoral research is to study consumers' self-transition during the holistic wellness retreat experience. That is, in order to eliminate a gap in the existing pool of literature on the topic of self-transformation in the tourism context, identity transition experiences during the holistic wellness retreat will be examined in this doctoral research. The research aims to not only determine how a holistic wellness retreat experience influences identity transition and how, and what effects it brings into an individual's life, but also why the overall experience of the holistic wellness retreat centre can change consumer identity.

In sum, the present study addresses the following research aim and questions. This research aims to examine whether a holistic wellness retreat experience can facilitate an individual's identity transition and how this might occur. More specifically, the research aims *to study identity transition by studying how the holistic wellness retreat experience illuminates changes in perception of self and the meaning of wellness*.

Furthermore, this thesis proposes two research questions that will assist with comprehensively fulfilling the research aim. In response to a lack of research on the complex nature of tourism consumption and identity transition in wellness tourism, this study will explore and address the following research questions:

1. *What are participants' (a) meanings of wellness and the holistic wellness retreat experience and (b) perceptions of self, prior to and following attendance at a holistic wellness retreat?*
2. *What shapes and influences identity transition while at the holistic wellness retreat and how does this occur?*

In order to address the research aim and answer the above research questions, this thesis adopts a qualitative methodological approach. The methodology design involves two sets of individual face-to-face interviews (with eight participants partaking in each interview set) as well as observation in order to gain valuable insights into retreat participants' behaviour in relation to identity transition and related experiences.

Potential outcomes of the study are better knowledge of what shapes identity transition and the specific factors that influence identity transition. The findings also seek to explain how identity transition occurs.

1.5 Rationale and significance of the study

This research explores wellness tourists' behaviour in a new market segment hitherto unexplored in the domain of the tourism marketing literature. This section elaborates on the significance of the current research in terms of both theory and practice. Firstly, significance in terms of theory includes a careful exploration and study of the current gaps discussed in the section on the problem statement. By answering and addressing the issues below in the following chapters, this research contributes to the enhancement of the marketing literature in wellness tourism and consumer behaviour domains.

This study aims to develop an integrated 'industry-academic' discussion on this topic that will provide insights for both theory and practice. Regardless of the rapid growth of the segment within the market, the topic of identity transition during a holistic wellness retreat experience lacks critical investigation to date. Therefore, carefully studying people's transformational experience within the holistic wellness retreat will enhance the body of academic knowledge on transformational and identity re-construction tourism. The focus of the current study is to look deeply into the self-transformational experience an individual can experience during a holistic wellness retreat stay. This will help by not only adding to the academic literature, but also by helping marketers to better understand transformational outcomes such places bring and allowing them to market retreats accordingly, resulting in greater popularity and awareness of these retreats and reducing the current confusion concerning their purpose.

Specifically on the contributions the study will bring, it is vital to firstly state that it is anticipated that this study will add value to the body of knowledge through studying an individual's identity and how individual motives in undertaking a holistic wellness retreat influence identity transition. Despite the nature of the social settings of the holistic wellness retreat environment where there are different people in the same place, each person remains on an individual journey to self-discovery. Thus, the primary focus of this research is to witness individual journeys and internal changes.

Further theoretical contributions include addressing the gap in research on how identity transition is engendered during a holistic wellness retreat experience and what specifically underlies this process. Moreover, conducting a study in the holistic wellness retreat prevents

wellness tourism sliding off to health based notion and missing the potential wellness tourism concept offers.

Next, the current research brings value by studying whether identity transition might occur not due to the conclusion of a specific life stage or event, but rather while travelling or as an outcome of the travelling experience. It is expected that tourists might experience identity changes through the various self-roles discovered during holistic wellness retreat activities. Furthermore, these changes might lead to a person experiencing liminality. Therefore, it will be interesting to see whether tourists experience a liminal state during the travel experience rather than before travelling, and how this affects identity transition. It will also be interesting to see whether the retreat itself acts as a liminal place and space for the guests. Therefore, this work extends prior research on consumer behaviour by introducing the notion of identity transition to explain whether and how holistic wellness tourists attempt different self-roles and reconstruct their identity in a liminal space and place such as a holistic wellness retreat.

The current research provides a valuable contribution to the consumer behaviour literature by expanding the scope of study on liminal places and their effect on the identity transition process. By linking liminality to self-perception, the thesis clarifies the role of the holistic wellness retreat as a mechanism stimulating identity change.

Past studies looked at self after travel is completed; while this research explores self before and during the travel activity. Moreover, past research has focused on self-transformation and identity transition after a tourism experience, that is, once tourists have returned home. Therefore, there is an important need to study identity transition and possible self-transformation during the tourism experience also (Lean, 2009). The current research aims to investigate the process of identity transition during and straight after the completion of a holistic wellness retreat programme.

Furthermore, how exactly the process of identity transition occurs and, more specifically, what triggers this transition are other important contributions to the body of knowledge that are expected to be added. Therefore, the current study will specifically explore the mechanisms behind how the holistic wellness retreat experience influences the process of identity transition. Moreover, Vespestad and Lindberg (2011) suggest that more research is needed on wellness experiences; thus, the current thesis adds value to the empirical context. The current study comprises of a set of qualitative interviews including various projective techniques and participant observational studies response to Medina-Munoz and Medina-Munoz's (2013) call for more exploratory studies on wellness tourism.

The research is not intended to examine the long-term outcomes of transformative experience, but it concerns more with the process of how retreat experiences illuminate the guest's identity transition, together with approaching the notion of identity as a process. This thesis aims to extend knowledge on self-transformation and deepen our understanding of the mechanism behind the identity transition process during the wellness tourism experience. The research's focus on the process of identity transition in short-term settings is yet another contribution, as past research has predominantly focused on long-term transformational tourism.

The study will highlight that holistic wellness retreat can enable guests to undergo identity transition and further demonstrates the process of that identity transition in detail, and show that this is the first step towards self-transformation; by doing so, the study addresses the gap of how identity transition is engendered during the holistic wellness retreat and explores mechanisms that underlie that process.

The researcher applies theory of identity work and play to explain the findings and identity transition process, thus, extending past studies that viewed tourism as play, arguing that there is a co-existence of work and play and their applications to the transformational power of short-term wellness tourism.

Practical and managerial contributions that this study brings include the potential benefits for industry practitioners by helping them better understand their customers and thus build effective communication strategies and differentiate their services accordingly. Communication strategies could be built around the argument that the holistic wellness retreat is a safe place for self-explorations and identity transition. One of the other managerial implications that contribute to practice is that the factors leading to identity transition should be taken into account by retreat owners in order that they can build strategies for consumer engagement and provide greater transformative experiences for guests. By achieving this, customers could then achieve positive self-transformation through these identity transitions that are facilitated by the holistic wellness retreat stay experience. Specific examples of managerial implications include building and implementing various approaches to design programmes that enhance identity transition process in a liminal place such as a holistic wellness retreat; to implement communication strategies with an aim to highlight transformative aspects of holistic wellness retreat and health preventative marketing practices, including implementations of video testimonial from past guests who underwent transformational experiences, and building collaborations with bloggers who act as role models and opinion leaders within the wellness industry with a high level of trust established for current and future customers.

1.6 Organisation and structure of the thesis

This doctoral thesis is organised into the following chapters. Chapter 1 (the current chapter) introduces the research topic including the research problem and its limitations, the research context and its primary aim, research questions, and the contributions and significance of the study. The chapter closes with an outline of the structure of the thesis.

Chapter 2 provides a theoretical perspective and the conceptual foundations from the consumer behaviour, tourism, and marketing literature. The literature review includes discussions on the wellness concept and wellness tourism, motivations for wellness tourism, and the concept of a holistic wellness retreat. The concepts of self and self-identity in a tourism context are then introduced. In addition, findings on self-transformational processes are also examined, followed by a review of the existing literature that has studied identity change and identity transition. The concepts of identity work and play are presented to illustrate the theoretical background and progression of the research. Research on liminality and liminal places vs. spaces and how these affect identity transition is integrated into the discussion.

Chapter 3 describes the research methodology design chosen that best suits this unique and still under-researched area and summarises the collected data and how the data was analysed.

Chapter 4 presents the findings to the research questions and further answers the research aim. A framework that emerged from the findings is illustrated and critically discussed within this chapter.

Chapter 5 presents an overview and discussion of the findings and explores the theoretical implications of identity work and play, liminality and the importance of liminal places and spaces in identity re-construction processes, and the implications of the concept of wellness. Further discussion includes an exploration of other relevant theories that elaborate on the findings further. The chapter provides a list of theoretical and academic contributions and also provides managerial and practical implications that are of value for further industry growth and development. Methodological implications of the study for the field of marketing research are also presented. This final chapter concludes this doctoral thesis by discussing the limitations of the study and presents various recommendations and ideas for future research as well as contributions of the research to the body of knowledge.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

“Wellness vacation is a window of time which takes us away from the routine demands of our daily lives. Our experience of time slows down. We have the space to reflect on our lives and values... Wellness travel creates greater balance and harmony on all levels of our wisdom, mentally, emotionally, physically and spiritually.”
(Aloha Wellness Travel, 2001)

2.1 Introduction and background

This research studies identity transition by exploring how the holistic wellness retreat experience facilitates and illuminates changes in one’s self-identity through the inspection of changes in the perception of self and the meaning of wellness. This research aim resulted in the two following research questions:

1. *What are participants’ (a) meanings of wellness and the holistic wellness retreat experience and (b) perceptions of self, prior to and following attendance at the holistic wellness retreat?*
2. *What shapes and influences identity transition while at the holistic wellness retreat and how does this occur?*

“Tourism and wellness” – people hear these two words in everyday contexts at work, home, on public transport, at social gatherings, and on mass and social media – everywhere. It appears that people’s passion for tourism and wellness has reached its peak in the 21st century. It is now easy to book a holiday online, get on a plane and go to any part of the world – and people can choose to engage in any kind of type of travel. There is currently a growing interest in wellness tourism, the type of tourism that aims to provide an individual with feelings of wellness and holistic balance both mentally and physically (Voigt et al., 2011). Indeed, academic research has started to explore this area too (Voigt et al., 2011; Kelly, 2012; Medina-Munoz & Medina-Munoz, 2013; Kim et al., 2017). However, despite the popularity of wellness tourism, this is still an under-researched area in the literature (Dillette et al., 2019).

The wellness industry is growing rapidly and positively affecting the growth of the wellness tourism sector. However, there are still issues that could negatively affect the future of the industry. For example, there is some degree of confusion between consumers and academics on what a holistic wellness retreat actually is, and this confusion is discussed in detail in this chapter. Moreover, many people are unaware of places such as holistic wellness retreat centres that aim to provide all of the wellness services under one roof.

The theoretical base for this thesis includes the following concepts. Transformational theories started to emerge in the tourism literature in the early 1990s, utilising such concepts as transformation of self and self-transformational tourism (Bruner, 1991). Later, a discussion occurred in the literature on identity, identity change, and the implication of the liminality concept (e.g., Ybema et al., 2011). This chapter, therefore, carefully reviews the past academic literature on identity change within tourism consumption practices, more specifically in the wellness tourism segment. The research questions of this thesis touch on key areas of the literature in the following sections: the wellness concept; wellness tourism development; the concept of self and perception of self; identity concepts and identity search, change, and transition; liminality, which also includes the liminal state of tourists and liminal places.

2.2 Wellness concept

*“Wellness is first and foremost a choice to assume responsibility for the quality of life.
It begins with a conscious decision to shape a healthy lifestyle.”*
(Ardell, 1985)

Historically, the term ‘wellness’ comes from two words: “well-being” and “fitness” (Dunn, 1961). Wellness is a very rich and meaningful concept that was first developed and introduced by American doctor Halbert Dunn in 1959 and is defined as a special state of health involving body, spirit, and mind. Later, wellness was explained as the state of health when the body, mind, and soul are in harmony and balance (Ardell, 1985; Stanciulescu et al., 2015). The Global Spa and Wellness Summit (2013) defined wellness as “a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing” (p. 2). The main purpose of wellness is to maintain health or to improve it but not to treat or cure it as in medical tourism (Wellness Summit, 2013; Wray et al., 2010).

The broad idea of wellness is that “people are holistic beings with physical, mental, spiritual and social dimensions and that personal development is based on a potpourri of balance, interdependence and integration of these dimensions for each individual” (Kimiecik, 2011, p. 774). Wellness is more than just an absence of disease or illness – it is also a presence of purpose in life, joyful relationships, a healthy body, a healthy living environment, and a presence of happiness (Dunn, 1961). Wellness includes physical, mental and spiritual health, self-responsibility, social harmony, environmental sensitivity, intellectual development, emotional well-being, as well as occupational satisfaction (National Wellness Institute, 2007; Smith & Puczko, 2015). Wellness is multi-dimensional and a subjective or perceptual concept (Adams, 2003) that consists of six life tasks: spirituality, self-direction, leisure, work, love, and friendship (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006). The most recent literature shows that wellness as a broad

phenomenon is viewed by academics as a social setting where people have an opportunity to reflect on their personal experiences as well as to strengthen their so-called ‘wellness skills’ that are vital for self-care and life management (Koskinen et al., 2017). Considering all of the abovementioned findings, it is possible to divide the wellness concept into the following elements:

- Spiritual element – meditation, mental walks, healing
- Physical element – fitness, physical activities, beauty treatments, spa, nutrition
- Occupational element – special programmes for the workplace
- Environmental element – nutrition, eating fresh, organic food
- Social/cultural – community/retreat placement
- Emotional element – meditation, breathing techniques, spa, seminars and workshops
- Intellectual element – nutritional education, learning about cultural traditions and healing

(Derived from: Greenberg, 1985; Mueller and Kaufmann, 2001; Verschuren, 2004).

Consumers seek to look and feel better, relieve pain or discomfort, slow aging, manage stress and nutrition, and solve personal problems (Lehto et al., 2006). Many wellness-related programmes offer an assortment of treatments including massage, meditation, acupuncture, aromatherapy, yoga, and so on (Kimiecik, 2011). Moreover, other examples of wellness tourism activities are those that offer a connection with nature, inner and outer beauty therapy, spas, saunas, art, and music (Bushell, 2009).

In summary, based on the above definitions of the concept of wellness derived from the existing literature, wellness can be seen as a rich and meaningful concept that consists of various elements. However, when observing what people refer to when talking about wellness on social media platforms (e.g., Instagram) or travel forums and discussion platforms (e.g., Trip Advisor, YouTube comments on wellness and travel related videos, etc.), it appears that people place diverse meanings on the concept. Therefore, it is imperative to understand the meaning of wellness as defined by consumers – specifically those groups of people that attend wellness related places and consume wellness related services.

2.3 Wellness tourism

Wellness tourism has been defined as:

“The sum of all the relationships resulting from a journey by people whose motive, in whole or in part, is to maintain or promote their health and well-being, and who stay at least one night at a facility that is specifically designed to enable and enhance people’s physical, psychological, spiritual and/or social well-being” (Voigt et al., 2011, p. 17).

This, therefore, means that wellness tourism is the activity or behaviour that people undertake in order to achieve some or all of the elements of wellness. Wellness tourism has remained popular over the years. Previous research shows that there are many health-conscious consumers around the globe who take a proactive role in pursuing their health and thus make informed choices about various products and services within the health and wellness industries (Voigt, 2010). This has led to rapid growth of the wellness industry, which also includes a growing phenomenon of wellness tourism (Smith, 2003).

The concept of healthcare tourism emerged as a focus of academic research in the early 1980s and evolved from medical tourism into healthcare and health tourism (Bennett et al., 2004). In the 1990s, academics started to pay close attention to wellness tourism and, most importantly, to distinguish it from the other health tourism types. Wellness tourism is different from health tourism because it includes a wide spectrum of elements that include self-responsibility, fitness and beauty treatments, healthy diet, relaxation, meditation, and intellectual activity – which together enhance learning, environmental sensitivity, social relations and more (Csirmaz & Peto, 2015). Another important difference between wellness tourism and health tourism is that wellness tourism services are chosen and used by tourists of their own free will (Csirmaz & Peto, 2015).

Wellness tourism is a type of travel that aims to maintain or enhance one’s personal well-being (Parmar, 2016). Wellness tourism incorporates physical, psychological, social, and spiritual experiences, and the main motive for this kind of tourism is to maintain or improve one’s health and overall well-being (Wray et al., 2010). The primary purpose of wellness tourism is wellness (Wellness Summit, 2013). There are a large number of differences proposed by various academics and operators regarding this rich concept (Smith, 2003), but “the common denominator for this concept is a need to reconcile body, mind and spirit, to understand one’s true self and to live life better.” (Smith, 2003, p. 106) It is a state of being well and fit mentally, physically, and emotionally.

Wellness tourism includes trips that aim to harmonise and balance health, and to prevent disease rather than cure it; however, some medical treatments may still be used in wellness tourism in addition to lifestyle-based therapies (Smith & Puczko, 2013). Therefore, wellness tourism incorporates such dimensions as spas healthy cuisine, fitness and other physical activities, learning, adventure, spiritual enlightenment, and personal growth (Smith & Puczko, 2015). All of these activities usually take place in specific purpose-built centres – wellness retreats. These retreats, however, also raise confusion as many people ascribe different meanings to them. According to online conversations observed on social media platforms such as tourism forums, some people refer to spa places when thinking about wellness retreats, while others perceive these places as yoga retreats. Moreover, business practitioners also tend to be confused about the meaning of a wellness retreat and what it promises to deliver to consumers. These confusions are described in greater details in the next subsection of the current chapter.

Wellness tourism is a set of tourism activities undertaken to achieve a special state of health, which can fulfil all aspects of the domain of wellness (Dunn, 1959). Activities participated in within wellness tourism, include spas, massage, aromatherapy, healing (such as Reiki), astrology, tarot, reflexology, meditation, prayer, painting, writing, dancing, pilgrimage, festivals, counselling, stress management, life strategies (Smith, 2003), healthy eating, yoga, beauty treatments, and physical activities (e.g., Pilates, tai chi, personal training, group fitness classes) (Bushell & Sheldon, 2009). Wellness tourism is the sum of all relationships resulting from the journey of people whose main objective is to preserve or promote health (Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001). Wellness tourism has rapidly become an industry where people travel to obtain all forms of health-related effects (Garcia-Altaes, 2005). Moreover, wellness tourism develops differently by geographical areas and regions: Africa – rituals, massages, and detox; America – welcome packages, massages, and rituals based on global brands; Asia – complex rituals such as wraps, massages, scrubs, facials, personal spa experiences; Australia/New Zealand – mud and bath; Europe – herbal spa treatments, baths, and massages (Smith & Puczko, 2015).

Generally, escalating health costs and growing scepticism towards Western medicine have stimulated people's desire to live healthier lives and, as such, have resulted in a growing interest in more holistic and alternative healing therapies, and wellness tourism is one of them (Sointu, 2006). This growth has resulted in the building of various types of wellness-related retreats and places. Regardless of this enormous growth, the confusion around the wellness retreat is present, as elaborated in the following subsection.

2.3.1 Wellness retreats, confusion, and holistic wellness retreat market development

This section is a discussion on wellness retreats and the different types of wellness retreats the world has at the present time. The biggest issue found through the detailed literature analysis is that there is confusion around the meaning of wellness and wellness retreats. For instance, consumers are found to hold different meanings for wellness retreats, where some perceive these places as massage and spa services, while others think of these places as yoga holiday destinations. While a wellness retreat includes both yoga and spas, it is not limited to only these two constructs, nor does a wellness retreat exclude any of these components. This confusion, therefore, whereby there are people who are not aware of the true spectrum of the services wellness retreats offer, could potentially lead to missed business opportunities and, hence, hinder the industry's further potential success and market development. This issue is discussed thoroughly in this sub-section.

Past literature has made various attempts at defining a wellness centre including (1) a destination resort that offers various programmes intended for physical or spiritual self-development (Stein et al., 1990); (2) an integrated place that offers various services for visitors including food options, for example vegetarian, exercise such as yoga, beauty treatments such as facials, medical/wellness diagnosis and treatment such as acupuncture, and de-stress services such as massage (Becheri, 1989; Goodrich, 1993). Generally, a wellness retreat is a centre or a venue with a pre-prescribed aim of providing a combination of activities, practices, and treatments aimed to balance body, mind, and spirit in a calming and supportive context (Kelly, 2012). Another definition of a wellness retreat is a place where people can stay and engage with a programme of activities that aim to balance body-mind-spirit and increase well-being. It is a place that offers quiet reflection time and rejuvenation, an opportunity to regain good health, and allows time for spiritual renewal or development (Retreats Online, 2007). Retreat tourists or visitors, therefore, are people who stay at least one night (usually longer) at a defined retreat centre for the purpose of body-mind-spirit rejuvenation (Kelly, 2012).

Generally, it is possible to classify retreats in many ways – based on the place, the environment, the activities, the spiritual emphasis, and so on (Kim et al., 2017). The concept of 'retreat' in general means a physical place and an opportunity or moment in time for rest, reflection, and self-development (Kelly & Smith, 2016). A typology of retreats includes spiritual retreats (Buddhist retreats, ashrams); religious retreats (monasteries); yoga retreats (yoga centres); health retreats (nutrition-related places); fitness retreats (boot-camps); mind-based retreats (mindfulness meditation centres, Vipassana meditation centres, etc.); and body-mind-

spirit (holistic wellness retreats) (Kelly & Smith, 2016). Wellness retreats offer yoga, massage, meditation sessions, personal development, counselling, nutrition, healing, outdoor activities, spiritual development, stress relief, leisure activities, and more (Kelly, 2010). Types of wellness-related places and activities include organic and natural food stores and cafes/restaurants; nutrition and weight management; detox retreats; gym and fitness centres; yoga and Pilates classes; meditation sessions; active retreats including hiking and walking; healthy hotels, wellness cruises, health resorts; spas and salons; baths and hot springs; spiritual retreats; massage and body treatments; hair and nail salons; and life coaching. Only a few publications have focused on retreat-based tourism to date (e.g., Kelly & Smith, 2016; Lea, 2008). Previous research has focused on the separate components of wellness such as the spiritual retreat experience (Bone, 2013) and the yoga tourism retreat (Dillette et al., 2019; Lehto et al., 2006); however, empirical attention to the holistic nature of wellness, and holistic wellness retreats (Mintel, 2007) has been limited.

Wellness retreats and confusion over the terms ‘wellness’ and ‘wellness retreat’

Wellness tourism is directly linked with the healthy living trend. It is no longer enough for the consumer to live healthily at home: consumers also want to keep the same healthy lifestyle while travelling and, thus, search for health-related tourism options (Hall, 1992; Turner, 2007). Wellness tourism is a growing international trend among health-conscious people who are motivated to enhance their well-being, educate themselves about wellness, preserve their health, look and feel better, manage stress, establish a nutritional plan, and relax, all of which are provided in all-inclusive wellness retreats. However, at the same time, many people are still confused about the true meaning of wellness retreats, for example, perceiving such retreats as a visit to a spa (Stanciulescu et al., 2015). There are various types of retreat, all of which are often are called wellness retreats, raising more confusion about what a wellness retreat actually is and what a holistic wellness retreat is. It is therefore not surprising that wellness retreats have failed to become a solid part of the healthy living concept in many countries, as there is vast amount of confusion.

Consistency in the academic literature regarding the concept of wellness tourism is also lacking (Voigt et al., 2011). There is a confusion in the academic world with terms such as ‘wellness tourism’, ‘health tourism’, ‘health-care tourism’, ‘holistic tourism’, ‘well-being tourism’, ‘spa tourism’, and so on, that are used interchangeably but often describe different concepts (Voigt et al., 2011). Voigt et al. (2011) also argue that the term ‘wellness tourism’ belongs under the health tourism umbrella. Moreover, academics such as Henderson (2004) and

Voigt (2010) argue that wellness tourism is totally different from health tourism and they should not be linked. Many other academics distinguish different types of tourism within the wellness tourism sectors including outdoor and sport activities tourism (Hall, 1992; Sheldon & Bushell, 2009), yoga tourism (Lehto et al., 2006), and spiritual tourism (Smith & Kelly, 2006). The argument most academics put forward is that all of these activities are part of wellness tourism because they improve individuals' quality of health and overall life. However, these are 'supply-based' definition, while Voigt et al. (2011) argue that a 'demand-based' definition of wellness tourism is needed, that is, the focus should not be on what wellness tourism offers but what it is that people need from wellness tourism. Therefore, Voigt et al. (2011) offer a wellness tourism definition whereby it is "the sum of all the relationships resulting from a journey by people who stay at least one night at a facility that is specifically designed to enable and enhance people's physical, psychological, spiritual and social well-being" (p. 17). These dimensions of well-being are desired by consumers in wellness tourism settings.

Confusion in academic discussion regarding wellness retreats does not stop there. Bhardw and Kumar (2013) state that typical spa treatments (as a part of the broader wellness concept) are aromatherapy, hot springs, hot tub, mud bath, sauna and steam room, body wraps, facials, massage, manicure and pedicure, skin exfoliation, and waxing. These treatments indeed belong to the spa category within the wellness industry; however, the authors additionally state that spa treatments also include nutrition and weight guidance, personal training, yoga, and meditation. However, while these treatments are part of the wellness industry, they are not in the spa treatments category. This type of confusion is very common not only in the academic world but also amongst the current and potential clientele of the wellness industry.

Csirmaz and Peto (2015) undertook an international comparison of differences within the wellness industry amongst different countries and looked at who chose which treatments the most. In Australia, for example, the most popular type of wellness retreat is spa services and outdoor activities, used primarily by domestic tourists and usually lasting for one or two days. In Asia, on the other hand, for example, in Japan or Korea, the most important wellness services include Indonesian body treatments, Thai massage, and the cosmetic industry, while, in North America, day spas play a key role within the industry. Canadians are interested in outdoor and nature activities combined with accommodation providing wellness services, while Europe has many hotels that offer wellness services such as spas and thermal bathing. Wellness tourists in Australia can generally be divided into three major categories: beauty spas, lifestyle resorts, and spiritual retreats (Wray et al., 2010). Moreover, the author's observations illustrate that people in

New Zealand think of nutrition when they talk about wellness, while in Russia, fitness defines wellness.

The term 'retreat centre' also has many different meanings; for example, it may mean a place for quiet reflection or rejuvenation and an opportunity to regain good health, while for someone else, it is a time for spiritual renewal and development (Retreats Online, 2017).

Retreats are often divided into different themes offering diverse services but are still called wellness retreats, thereby adding to the growing confusion within the industry. There are categories that include spiritual retreats, yoga retreats, health retreats, spa retreats, and so on. It is possible to classify retreats in many ways – based on the place, the environment, the activities, the spiritual emphasis, and so on (Kim & Smith, 2017). Retreats Online (2017) for example, classifies retreats by location, by date, and by 'activity' – the latter using categories such as 'personal/creative', 'spiritual', 'outdoor', 'yoga', and so on, perhaps led by market preferences. Specialist retreats offering nutritional advice are very current, as are fitness weight-loss 'camps'.

Interpreting and applying the word 'retreat' in the context of wellness tourism must, therefore, be treated with caution; questioning what it means and how it is used is important (Kim et al., 2017). The benefit of this doctoral research is that it plans to shine some light on the confusion that still remains unnoticed by so many. Wellness retreat tourism is much more profound than just holidaying (Kelly, 2012). As past research has suggested, it may be difficult to study and analyse the connections, patterns, and behaviours involved in wellness retreats; however, it is beneficial to acquire a more solid understanding of these components because this would deepen the understanding of wellness retreat tourism immensely (Kelly, 2012), and, thus, lessen the abovementioned confusion. Moreover, as well as the confusion amongst visitors and other consumer groups of wellness retreats and related services, there is also a lack of regulation, which could result in abuse by rogue traders with financial rather than quality provision motives (Kelly, 2012). This, in turn, could result in lower standards of important services aimed at the well-being of wider audiences – which is another reason why it is important to reduce confusion amongst scholars and tourism businesses.

Holistic Wellness Retreats

Since there is considerable confusion in academic discussion and among people (both operators and consumers) within the industry, interpreting and applying the word ‘retreat’ in the context of wellness tourism must, therefore, be treated with caution; questioning what it means and how it is used is important (Kim & Smith, 2017). The following discusses the concept of the holistic wellness retreat.

Holistic wellness retreat tourism is a newly emerging sector within the tourism industry. The motives and desires for wellness tourism are very varied and the individual is able to choose (type of retreat, programme, destination, etc.). However, a concept within wellness tourism that has not garnered enough attention yet is that of holistic all-inclusive wellness retreats that offer all of the above services under one roof. Voigt et al. (2011) found that beauty spas, lifestyle resorts, and spiritual retreats attract three different groups of people. Based on the fact that there are different groups of tourists and that they require different services based on their diverse needs, this could be a possible explanation for why researchers have studied different types of retreats separately. However, some people are interested in and attracted to all of these elements; thus, they are interested in retreats that include body, mind, and spiritual elements under one roof. A new generation of health-conscious visitors is discovering traditional spa destinations, but is now demanding more luxury and add-on experiences (Richards, 2011), which holistic, all-inclusive wellness retreats provide. Moreover, Lederman (1996) discusses the importance of holistic vacations for wholly integrating body, mind, and spirit.

There has been limited research to date that has explored the phenomenon of the holistic wellness retreat. One study by Kelly and Smith (2016) examined holistic wellness retreats and what motivates people to attend these places and found that people choose such retreats to restore and recharge as well as to re-connect with themselves. This study takes the above finding into consideration but goes beyond the motivations of retreat visitors to find out not only why they attend a holistic wellness retreat but also how it influences their perception of self and meaning of wellness. While past research has suggested that holistic retreat journeying leads to re-connection with authentic self, this study explores how exactly holistic retreat journeying leads to this re-connection with self and whether it involves not only a re-connection but also a change or transition.

Furthermore, past research has looked at the opportunities retreats offer for recuperation and the creation of healthy bodies through yoga practices and nature as a ‘therapeutic landscape’ (Lea, 2008). However, some of the limitations of this past research are its focus on the physical components affecting tourists’ experience, without the inclusion of the holistic approach and an

examination of the mental and spiritual effects of retreats. Moreover, Lea's (2008) study has predominantly been on yoga practices and their effect in wellness retreat settings, which provides a limited picture that does not take into consideration the full spectrum of holistic wellness retreat activities and their impacts on the self.

Generally, holistic all-inclusive wellness retreats are about health maintenance and self-development, where customers are provided with comprehensive service packages including yoga, spas, meditation, nutrition, and educational seminars, as also described by Mueller and Kaufmann (2001). However, as there are many different types of retreats and programmes offered to people within wellness tourism, the research to date has not looked into all-inclusive wellness retreats that build these places with a holistic concept that integrates physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and environmental aspects of wellness under one roof.

Based on the above description of the holistic wellness retreat, the working definition of a holistic wellness retreat in this study is as follows: a holistic wellness retreat is a place that invites its guests to stay for different lengths of time and to take part in various activities and experiences that facilitate enhancement and development of all wellness elements in order to produce a sense of inclusive well-being.

2.4 Motivations for wellness retreat holidays

Motivation theory is a large and well-explored area in tourism settings. However, motivations for wellness tourism have been subsumed under overall motivational theory, thus, this section of the chapter focuses specifically on motivations for wellness holidays. Past research has shown that there are two fundamental dimensions relating to the motivation for leisure derived from tourism: seeking and escaping (Iso-Ahola, 1997). Furthermore, Krippendorff (1987) maintains that people generally travel to get away from the routine of life, while people engage in wellness tourism to improve health. Therefore, the self-development motive in wellness tourism can be defined as the drive to achieve personal growth or the desire to learn about and interact with a host culture and its community (Woodside & Jacobs, 1985). It is very popular for people to engage in wellness tourism activities and retreats for these reasons as well as learning about self (Kim & Smith, 2016). Such tourism experiences can strengthen tourists' confidence and self-esteem and, consequently, enhance self-identity (Ponder & Holladay, 2013; Voigt et al., 2011). Several previous studies have confirmed the importance of 'the self' in the context of wellness tourism (Smith & Kelly, 2006) because retreats offer 'safe' spaces in which to develop and transform the self (Kim & Smith, 2017). Heintzman (2013) suggests that sometimes tourists visit wellness centres to deal with or overcome negative situations or life

events. The growing development of the sector can be also explained by the fact that people want to go inwards for an explanation, resulting in self-awareness (Smith & Kelly, 2006). Wellness tourists want enhancement of self or to find their true selves (Smith & Kelly, 2006).

Existing research has examined the motivations for engaging in various wellness tourism activities. One of the distinct elements of these studies is that the authors have chosen just one or two dimensions within the wellness tourism sector, for example, a yoga retreat (Dillette et al., 2019) or a spiritual retreat (Kim & Smith, 2017). Past research on wellness retreats has focused primarily on individuals' motivation for choosing wellness retreats. Some of the motivations for wellness in general and wellness tourism include physical and mental health (Smith, 2003), escapism (Kim et al., 2017), rest and rejuvenation (Kim et al., 2017; Ryan, 1997), reconciling body, mind, and spirit (Smith, 2003) and an opportunity to reflect on their lives (Heintzman, 2000). In wellness retreat settings, escapism and self-identity (self-searching) have been found to be the most important motivations (Kelly, 2012). Relaxation and self-development are also important (Kim et al., 2017). Below are the most common motivations for wellness tourism as found in the existing literature:

Relaxation, rest and escape

Vejola and Jokinen (1994) suggest that in general, the main motivation for travelling in is to rest. Leisure and rest are one of the common motives for wellness related tourism (Medina-Munoz & Medina-Munoz, 2013). In the context of wellness tourism, escape and relaxation often go together and are particularly important since tourists choose wellness tourism destinations as an ideal outlet to escape from daily stresses (Voigt & Pforr, 2013). Reducing pressure and taking a rest has been identified as one of the primary motivations for first-time visitors to a wellness tourism destination (Lim et al., 2016). Mak et al. (2009) and Chen et al. (2008) also maintain that relaxation and escape are two of the most important motivating factors for tourists travelling to wellness tourism destinations. The most common motivations for yoga tourism as a part of wellness tourism have been found to be (1) renewal and (2) relaxation (Lehto et al., 2006). Lea (2008) suggests that there is a long history of removing oneself from everyday life in order to rest and recuperate. Sometimes, people choose wellness tourism to escape from their daily lives (Mak et al., 2009). Some motives for visiting spas are escape, indulgence, self-improvement, friendship, relaxation, and relief (International Spa Association, 2004; Mak et al., 2009). Travel in general is often perceived as a means of escaping from one's self and reality or sometimes finding it (Kelly & Smith, 2016). Escapism and self-searching also appear to be present among visitors of holistic wellness retreats (Kelly, 2012). Dimitrovski and Todorovic (2015) identify

relaxation and escape as motivations for beauty and spa tourism, while Gill et al. (2019) state that wellness retreats with a strong emphasis on spiritual components are perceived as restorative destinations.

Self-reflection

Past research has suggested that different types of wellness tourism prove that tourists seek self-reflection during their holiday. For instance, it has been found that self-reflection is expected and often happens during wellness retreats stays (Kelly & Smith, 2016). Moreover, people want to participate in various meditation events and/or spiritual retreats because they promote deeper self-reflection (Kim et al., 2017). On the other hand, wellness places that focus predominantly and exclusively on spa related services are also popular among tourists because they tend to use a spa destination for soothing purposes, including restoring (recharging) (Kamata & Misui, 2015), while relaxation in turn can offer an opportunity to find time for further self-reflection.

One of the most common definitions of self-reflection in the academic literature is it is a temporary phenomenological experience in which self becomes an object to oneself (Gillespie, 2007). The vital distinguishing factor of self-reflection from general reflectional behaviour is that during self-reflection, a person reflects on their internal world (Gillespie, 2007). Past research further links self-reflection to transformative practices. For example, it has been suggested in the literature that the act of reflecting on one's actions, self, or life in general carries the potential to transform one's life – for instance, by becoming a better person, including learning to control anger, being a better parent or a friend, and so on (Beckett & Nayak, 2008). Finally, when linking the concept of self-reflection to the topic of consumer behaviour in tourism settings, it should be outlined that tourism consumption provides people with a new form of freedom whereby they can express their individuality and identity as a result of self-reflection during travelling (Beckett & Nayak, 2008).

The application of self-reflection to wellness tourism is important because various activities at wellness retreats are designed to lead to deeper mental self-reflection, where people have an opportunity to switch off from the outside world and learn more about self and their lives through reflective practices, such as journaling, writing reflective notes on books and seminars, doing meditative practices, and so on.

Transformation and self-development

Self-development has been found to be another motivational factor within wellness tourism settings (Damijanin, 2019; Velayuthan et al., 2019). The motivation for self-development is linked with the motivation for various transformations. For example, Smith (2013) outlines the transformative power of wellness tourism in its ability to transform physical, emotional, spiritual, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions. Transformative experience can be facilitated via co-creative processes including the design of programmes and activities, as well as service delivery (Fu et al., 2015).

Transformation as an inner journey (Kim & Smith, 2017) is a motivation discussed by a number of academics in wellness tourism. Reisinger (2013; 2015) argues that any tourism offers transformational experience by changing assumptions, expectations, opinions, and even self-perception. Moreover, Smith (2013) agrees that wellness tourism is a powerful tool for those looking for self-transformation. Unlike other forms of tourism, wellness retreats provoke visitors to reflect upon themselves before, during, and after the retreat holiday in order to conceptualise who they are, where they are in their lives, and where they would like to be (Kelly, 2012). During a wellness holiday, people also tend to ask various questions about themselves that do not usually arise in other tourism contexts (Voigt et al., 2011). This argument is further linked to both self-reflection and reflections on life that people go through while on a wellness vacation.

The idea of researching and examining self-transformative experiences in tourism is meaningful due to the fact that transformation in tourism is multidimensional, whereby some consumers may seek physical transformation while others might seek discovering a more creative side of the self or being connected with the cultural environment (Kottler, 1997; Ross, 2010). Moreover, past research has shown that different services in tourism settings act as a catalyst for self-transformations and changes (Boswijk et al., 2012; Fu et al., 2015). Transformation of self during wellness tourism is a central theme connecting all of the motivations and expectations the customers have during a retreat (Voigt, 2010). Wellness tourists look for a holistic self-transformation when at the retreat, which includes psychological, spiritual (internal), and physical (external) changes (Voigt et al., 2011). Generally, taking all the above into consideration, wellness tourism can be seen as a transformational journey that takes customers from one state of mind and/or body to another, and people are usually happier in a new state (Little, 2012; Noy, 2004).

To conclude, people might experience only a limited amount of enjoyment from travelling due to the fact that some people cannot easily escape themselves and their persistent worries even during holidays and travel (De Botton, 2002). However, participating in a holistic

wellness retreat may be one of the ways in which people can confront their thoughts and worries and learn how to deal with these issues in their everyday life. Transformation, relaxation, and recharging are the most common themes found by academics in previous studies that have examined different types of wellness services: spa, yoga retreat, and so on. As these themes are very common, the current study looks beyond these motivational factors into the self and deeper into self-transformational aspects.

2.4.1 Past research on transformational tourism

This subsection discusses past research on transformational tourism. Past studies have provided worthy insights on other attributes of the wellness related travelling, such as trends and challenges in the wellness industry (McNeil & Ragins, 2005), consumer perceptions for visiting a spa (Bhardw & Kumar, 2013; Tabacchi, 2010), motivations of wellness travellers (Chen et al., 2008), emotions towards the hotel and resort spa experience (Lo et al., 2015), segmentation of wellness tourists in the spa industry (Dimitrovski & Todorovic, 2015; Kucukusta & Guillet, 2016), market analysis of wellness tourism overall (Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001), and so on. However, to date, there has been limited research on the transformational outcomes of wellness tourism. In fact, to date, the existing studies on transformational tourism in general (including various types of travel) are very limited.

Tourism is known to be a transformational process for some travellers. Past research has examined various types of tourism and their transformational outcomes. These include studies on the transformation of communities, that is, how tourists can change through tourism to Third World countries and how locals at these touristic destinations might experience self-change due to tourist volumes (Bruner, 1991). Studies have also looked at how pilgrim tourism contributes to the sustained transformation of an individual as well as community wellbeing (Devereux & Carnegie, 2006), and how wine tourism can transform and enhance the well-being of communities and tourists through the socio-cultural elements of 'winescapes' and wine culture (Sigala, 2020). Further, studies have examined individual transformations as a result of travelling activities, including volunteering and backpacking tourism and how travel changes one's self through performance identity change and personal narratives (Noy, 2004) and how long-term travel in particular changes one's identity (White & White, 2004). Moreover, researchers have studied specific travel programmes and how they change tourists, for example, the transformation and empowerment of Nepal women travelling for work programmes in Australia (Hillman & Radel, 2017). More recently, researchers have also begun to study how various home-sharing experiences while travelling contribute to transformation, for example, the

transformative power of Couchsurfing experiences for travellers (Decrop et al., 2018). Secondly, wellness tourism and its transformational potential should also be outlined. For instance, past research has compared different wellness tourism groups and the transformational benefits they seek from wellness tourism (Voigt et al., 2011) and concluded that various eudaimonic tourism activities create more long-term transformational benefits for such tourists (Smith & Diekmann, 2017).

Based on the review of past studies, there is clearly a need for further studies on the transformational effects of wellness tourism (i.e., Smith & Diekmann, 2017; Voigt et al. 2011, etc.). Moreover, there are short-term versus long-term effects of transformations from wellness tourism, where hedonic activities provide short-lived transformations and eudaimonic experiences provide not only temporary increased wellbeing during the holiday, but also valuable take-home effects that enhance transformations (i.e., Smith & Diekmann, 2017). It will be interesting to see how the transition occurs during retreat programmes and what triggers them.

Due to a limited amount of research on the transformational outcomes of wellness tourism, there are gaps in the knowledge. Too much focus has been placed on consumer motivation theory when there is a need to look more deeply into consumer behaviour beyond this focus. For instance, past research has examined consumers' needs and motivations for various wellness-related offerings (Chen et al., 2008; Kamata, 2010; Kelly, 2012; Kim et al., 2010), while such areas as consumers' self-transformational experiences while at the holistic wellness retreat have not been studied.

Regardless of individual motives for wellness holidays, Smith and Kelly's (2006) study of holistic tourism in general and showed that holistic tourists crave enhancement of self or to find their true self. In fact, a focus on self is the predominant motive for wellness tourism (Dallen & Conover, 2006; Smith, 2003; Smith & Kelly, 2006). Therefore, it can be predicted that the market for holistic wellness retreats will expand further through the provision of alternative and holistic therapies, activities, and treatments, which encourage self-awareness, healing, and self-development.

2.5 Concepts of self and self-identity

“Human beings as self-contained unitary individuals who carry their uniqueness deep inside themselves, like pearls hidden in their shells, waiting to be found” (Burkitt, 1991, p. 1.)

Based on the fact that past academic literature has discovered various motivations for wellness holidays that allow consumers to significantly focus on self, the concepts of self and self-identity should be included in the literature review of this doctoral thesis. This subsection discusses the concept of self, identity, and related concepts.

Self-concept includes “cognitive and affective understanding of who and what we are” (Schouten, 1991, p. 413). Self-concept is defined as one’s perception of self which is based on one’s physical self, products and services consumed, and social connections and other people (Todd, 2001). Furthermore, the perception of self also consists of mental self, that is, the thoughts and emotions one has about self (Malhotra, 1988). Self-concept further includes attitudes, perceptions, and feelings about one’s character and behaviour in terms of what is appropriate behaviour in a certain situation (Schenk & Holman, 1980). Moreover, another definition of self-concept theory is an individual’s perception of self, based on physical self, products and services consumed, and social interactions (Todd, 2001). There are various dimensions of self, including actual self (how people actually perceive themselves); ideal self (how people would like to be perceived); and expected self (an image of self somewhere in-between actual and ideal self) (Sirgy, 1982).

Generally, self-concept includes various concepts, for instance, the identity of self (Belk, 1988). Past research has examined self-identity and the social and aspirational aspects of one’s self-description (Cohen et al., 2014). Moreover, self-concept theory also focuses on identities with personal attributes, symbols used for self-creation and understanding, fantasies, and relationships with others (Belk, 1988). Applying these constructs to the current research, it is expected that people at a holistic wellness retreat will be exposed to fantasies on self-identity based on the retreat activities. Moreover, they will also be interacting with other guests and building relationships with them, while self-creation and understanding will be supported by participating at the holistic wellness retreat. Based on the literature review, the concept of identity has a strong link with the current doctoral thesis. Moreover, self-identity has a predominant focus on self where a person perceives self from his/her own perspective (Belk, 1988). This finding supports the relevance of the identity concept in the current research due based on the research question on self-perception and how it changes during the holistic wellness retreat experience.

Identity can be either individual or social (Erikson, 1959; Walseth, 2006). To distinguish the difference between the two aspects of identity, it is important to note that individual identities are those that people refer to and attribute to themselves, while social identities are those that people attribute to others (Collinson & Hockey, 2007). Moreover, social identities also include social roles (McCall, 1987; Turner, 1987). Social roles are the roles that people ‘play’ in social settings and these roles are defined as symbols of identity with which people gain self-understanding (Hewitt, 1976). Applying this to the current research, the social identity construct is not strongly relevant due to the research aim and research questions that are based more around individual identities.

When applying the above concepts to relevant disciplines, such as consumer behaviour in marketing and tourism as examples, it was found that past academic literature has tended to focus on the concept of self and other relevant constructs such as self-identity, self-perception, etc. In the marketing context, for instance, the use and application of one’s perception of self or self-concept has long been supported by researchers (Sirgy, 1982) to better understand consumers’ reasons for buying products or engaging in various services (Todd, 2001). Generally, the concept of self is strongly linked with consumer behaviour. For instance, past research has illustrated the relationship between self-image and product-image congruity, where positive self-perception is linked to positive product attributes or high luxury product attributes are linked to the image of self being of a higher status, for example, luxury car consumption (Sirgy, 1982). Moreover, the study of self-concept in marketing and consumer behaviour further reveals that while consuming services, people might willingly dissociate themselves from their real selves; in festival consumption settings it was found that festival goers actively disassociate themselves from the ‘tourist’ tag in reaction to the belief that it involves less authentic participation and has a negative impact on social self-image (Gration et al., 2011). Another recent example is a study on how identity affects subscription choices, where it was found that people with a lower self-concept clarity were more likely to keep unused subscriptions and less likely to subscribe to a new service compared to those consumers with higher self-concepts (Savary & Dhar, 2020). Generally, research on self-concept in the marketing literature has concluded that the concept of self influences consumption behaviour in a number of different ways (Gneezy et al., 2012), including pre-purchase behaviour (i.e., attitudes, preferences, willingness to buy, and choice) and also post-purchase behaviour (i.e., level of satisfaction, trust, and referral) (Sirgy, 2018). Finally, self-concept and perception of self are strongly interlinked in the consumer behaviour literature where perception of self has a direct influence on consumption practices and consumption behaviour influences the perception of self in return (i.e., Falasconi et al., 2019; Morgan, 2019;

Saenger et al., 2017; Zhang & Haller, 2013). The contributions from these studies foreshadowed the present inquiry on self-perception changes during holistic wellness retreat consumption.

There is also strong and applicable relevance of the self and identity concept to tourism as shown by past research. For instance, the application of self-concept in relation to tourism destination marketing has been explored in detail (i.e., Beerli et al., 2007; Sirgy & Su, 2000). The next sub-section discusses the concept of self in the tourism context as well as the past literature on this construct in tourism settings in greater detail.

2.5.1 Concept of self within the tourism context

Consumer identity is often goal-driven (Schau & Gilly, 2003). Within the marketing literature, it has been found that while consuming products and services, people form and transform or generally work with their sense of self (Belk, 1988; McCracken, 1986). In the tourism marketing literature specifically, self-concept theory is often used to analyse how self-image influences travel intentions (Hung & Petrick, 2012). Moreover, self-concept provides insights into how people perceive themselves in their tourist role and their consequent behaviour (Todd, 2001). In general, self-concept theory has received lower than needed attention in terms of tourism and related content (Gazley and Watling, 2015; Laing and Frost, 2017; Todd, 2001). Overall, the use of self-concept theory is beneficial, as past research has shown (Todd, 2001) because it helps to understand what tourists do while on various types of holidays.

Academic research has aimed to clarify how travellers incorporate their travel experiences into their conception of self (Davidson, 2005). Searching for self through travel has been widely discussed in popular and academic tourism literature (Cohen, 2010; Goeldner & Ritchie, 2006). Travel provides an opportunity to acquire experiences that become the basis for discovering or even transforming the self (Neumann, 1992). Backpacking has also been researched in this regard, with researchers concluding that backpackers often travel to find themselves (Richards & King, 2003).

Previous papers have shown that a focus on the self is a very important factor for wellness tourists during engagement in wellness-related retreats (Dallen & Conover, 2006; Smith, 2003; Smith & Kelly, 2006; Voigt, 2010). Wellness retreat visitors prefer to focus on self: even if some visitors perceive this time as selfish and egoistic, it is still all about them (Voigt, 2010). In some other types of tourism, the attention is linked outwards, that is, it is away from self towards others, for instance in the case of volunteer tourism where tourists travel to places to serve or work for the benefit of other people or places. In contrast, the primary focus of wellness tourism is inwards where self is the centre of concentration for a traveller. Relevance of self in

wellness tourism and wellness retreats is also proved by the nature of the activities that wellness retreats provide, which are all based on the focus on self (e.g., yoga, workshops, etc.), while only occasionally are these activities based on switching focus onto others (e.g., sharing circles and talking events).

Identity change and self-transformation might be the results and outcomes of the changes in perception of self during or after travel-related activities (Voigt et al., 2011). Modern holiday programmes, for instance, focus on encouraging tourists to engage with self and to attempt reconciliation of personal dissonances in the perception of self (Smith, 2003). The use of the concepts of self in the tourism literature suggests that it specifically helps to understand not only what people do while on holidays, but also how they feel, what they want from their experience and self (Todd, 2001). In other words, participation in tourism experiences can affect one's self-concept and self-perception. Therefore, it is important to include this concept in this doctoral thesis due to the fact that perception of self tends to shift or change during tourism consumption practices.

In the process of consuming products and services that lead people to higher wellness, consumers also produce specific self-identities (Annavarapu, 2016). People who go to wellness retreats are often seeking not only hedonic but also eudaimonic well-being (Voigt et al., 2010) by learning about themselves and engaging in identity building. The growth of the holistic tourism sector illustrates that there is a growing desire to focus on the self rather than others (Wang, 1999). Therefore, switching the inner focus towards self while also learning about self and engaging in identity building may contribute to identity changes to occur.

2.5.2 The Johari Window Model and its relevance to self-perception

The Johari Window Model was developed and introduced by Joe Luft and Harry Ingham (1961). The model illustrates four stages of knowledge and the interaction between what is known and unknown to oneself and to others: the open/free area (known to self and known to others); blind area (not known to self and known to others); hidden area (known to self and not known to others); and unknown area (not known to self and not known to others) (Luft & Ingham, 1961).

This is an information processing tool that has since been widely used in management and organisational studies (Beach, 1982), education and learning process development (Khatoon, 2018; Sutherland, 1995), self-awareness (Jack & Miller, 2008), as well as in studies of interpersonal relationships and communicating with each other (Beverly, 1976; Saxena, 2015; Verklan, 2007). The Johari Window Model has served a useful role by focusing attention on the

need to be more aware of ourselves and the degree to which others know us (Newstrom & Rubenfeld, 1983).

While Johari Window theory deals with self-awareness and relations with others, another model which is the ‘four stages of competence’ model covers the learning process of acquiring a skill. The ‘four stages of competence’ model was further developed by Noel Burch in 1970 based on the Johari Window model. The original model (Figure 1) has the following stages:

1. Unconscious Incompetence – a person does not know and most importantly does not recognise that he or she does not know how to do something.
2. Conscious Incompetence – a person realises that he or she cannot do something and addresses the value of a particular skill that should be learned; therefore, he or she gathers information about the skill and starts to learn the new skill at this stage.
3. Conscious Competence – a person knows how to do something, however, doing a specific skill requires time and concentration, and the possibility of making a mistake is still present.
4. Unconscious Competence – a person has practised the skill for a period of time and enacting the skill has become unconscious, which means that he or she is performing the skill without conscious effort.

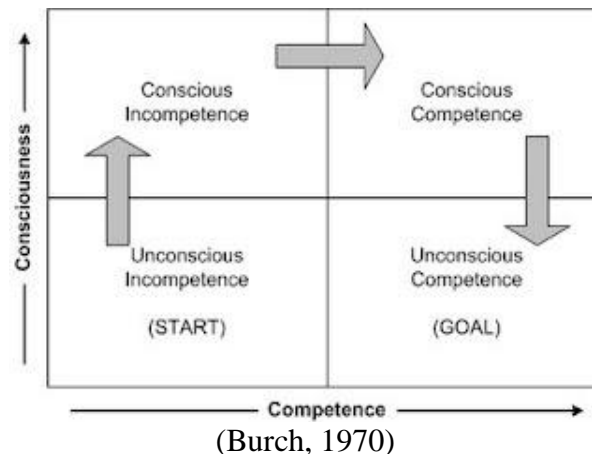


Figure 1: Stages of competence model

The above concepts can be linked to self-perception in the current study. In any interpretive research one can use existing theory to study a phenomenon in greater detail or borrow existing theory to interpret research findings, as illustrated in Chapter 5 of the thesis where the researcher elaborates how the above stages could be used to explain self-perception changes and identity transition process.

2.6 Transformation is the outcome of the transition

Transformation is an inner journey but also a part of a process of social change (Kelly & Smith, 2016). Transformation includes changing the way people live and behave as well as their responses to things (Smith, 2013). Self changes include internal (i.e., self-esteem) and external (i.e., physical) transformations (Kelly & Smith, 2016; Noy, 2004; Schouten, 1991; Smith & Kelly, 2006; Todd, 2001; Voigt et al., 2011) and generally self-transformations can be physical, mental, spiritual, social, cultural, environmental, or existential (Smith, 2013). Moreover, “selves are not fixed givens, but are always in process and performed” (Burkitt, 1991, p. 121). Since it has been found that people tend to focus on self-learning and engage in identity building during wellness tourism consumption, the above statement highlights the importance of further investigating self-concept within the wellness retreat context. Tourism-related experiences can affect one’s self; however, while this argument does not necessarily mean the occurrence of change or transformation of self is certain, past research has pointed out that wellness retreats could be an ideal platform for this self-transformation (Annavarapu, 2016). In this research, the focus is not on studying self-transformations per se, but rather on one element of these self-transformations, more specifically, identity transition. A detailed discussion and justification for including identity transition are presented in the following section.

Earlier definitions of transformation include the following meanings: transformation is a change of character (Williams, 1991) and it means forming over or restructuring the character (Wade, 1998). Personal transformation, therefore, is defined as a dynamic individualised process of expanding consciousness, where a person becomes aware of the old self and new self, and chooses to integrate this awareness into a new self (Wade, 1998). This applies to the wellness retreat setting in that retreat guests go through the individual process of expanding their knowledge of their old and new self.

A more recent definition of transformation is provided by Ross (2010, p. 54), who defines personal transformation as

“a dynamic socio-cultural and uniquely individual process that (a) begins with a disorienting dilemma and involves choice, healing, and experience(s) of expanding consciousness towards the divine; (b) initiates a permanent change in identity structures through cognitive, psychological, physiological, affective, or spiritual experiences; and (c) renders a sustained shift in the form of one’s thinking, doing, believing, or sensing due to the novelty of the intersection between the experience and the experience’s location in time”.

When applying this definition to wellness tourism and wellness retreats specifically, it is important to note that not only is transformation a result of expanding knowledge of self, but it could also be due to the social influence of other retreat guests. Moreover, wellness retreat places provide services that aim to enhance different elements of wellness, thus involving choice and physical, psychological, mental, and spiritual experiences. Therefore, it is necessary to study whether and how these and other components might influence changes in people's behaviour.

Transformational theory has been widely discussed in nursing and health sciences, education, and behaviour research (Wade, 1998). In the behavioural sciences, transformation has been viewed as an evolutionary process within the consciousness where a person sees the world in a new way (Ferguson, 1980). Generally, when transformation happens, an individual adopts a new behaviour including a new self-definition, passion for life, and a sense of freedom (Wildermersch & Leirman, 1988). In the educational literature, it is stated that transformation occurs through transformative learning (Boyd & Meyers, 1988) that enables people to make self-discoveries. For instance, this is clearly illustrated in Carpenter's work (1994) on patterns associated with the rehabilitation process of clients following spinal cord injury. Transformation as a process of psychic and spiritual healing is also present in health science (Jennings, 1993) when an individual becomes aware of the fact that old ways of thinking or living no longer work, and this internal awareness results in inner growth and self-changes (Wade, 1998).

People have a tendency to examine, create, and re-create themselves or make themselves better (Schouten, 1991). The sense of incompleteness drives people to 'self-creation', while consuming products and services in the process (Schouten, 1991). Furthermore, people consume products and services as a form of self-expression and self-transformation (Belk, 1988; Elliot, 2016) and symbolic or experiential consumption behaviour is important for a successful self-transition (Schouten, 1991). Schouten's belief (1991) that people tend to create and self-create due to a sense of incompleteness is aligned with this research topic. Wellness retreat centers offer various activities and environment that facilitate self-creation. Self-creation might contribute to identity transition. Some of the most common examples of identity transitions involve life's stages or situations and transiting from one role to another, including getting married, divorced, giving birth, losing a loved one, changing jobs and careers, immigrating to a culturally different country, transiting from school to university, and so on. These role transitions lead to changes in consumption behaviour (Andreasen, 1984). In the current research, however, it will be interesting to investigate whether a transition occurs not for abovementioned reasons, but rather as an outcome of self-creation.

Generally, a consumer's transformation revolves around meaning and he/she is not satisfied with merely a staged experience; rather, he/she also requires the experience to be authentic by conforming to self-image (Gilmore & Pine, 2009). Self-transformation can occur through spiritual or inner experiences due to the consumption of a product or service (e.g., craft) and as an outcome of building connection with the inner self (Elliot, 2016). In summary, as stated by Wade (1998), personal transformation is generally a dynamic, uniquely individualised process of expanding consciousness whereby individuals become critically aware of old and new self-views and choose to integrate these views into a new self-definition.

Furthermore, self-transformation is a complex concept that includes various components or stages. Van Gennep (1960) discussed three stages of self-transformational theory or rites of passage that are (1) separation, in which the person disengages from their role or status, (2) transition, in which the person adapts to changes and to a new role, and (3) incorporation, in which the person integrates the self with the new role or status. This is linked to the current study in that a participant at a holistic wellness retreat separates from his or her regular routine and then transits to the new roles and activities explored. The participant then incorporates recently acquired behaviour and new habits into their life while at the holistic wellness retreat.

Past studies on these stages of self-transformational theory are broad. For instance, a study by Barrios et al. (2012) on the separation stage in the transformational process focused on specific events that lead people into a state of homelessness and their transformational process. In their study, the authors focused on the forced changes in the people's lives and the forced separation from their usual life 'settings'. Applying this to the present study, it is suggested that visitors at a holistic wellness retreat are not forced, but rather willingly jump into new ways of being while holidaying. An example of research on the incorporation stage is that of Elliot (2016), who focused on the rational and spiritual dimensions of craft consumption that lead to consumer transformation, whereby craft consumption involves reflexivity and new insights. Elliot's (2016) is the example of the third stage of the self-transformational process, where people incorporate new behaviour into their lives, thus, transforming aspects of self. Applying this finding to the current research, it is valuable to note that in the holistic wellness retreat setting, people may experience the incorporation stage to some extent as they incorporate new practices relevant to well-being into their lives. With the above examples of the stages of transformation, it can be assumed that in order for transformation to occur, one should go through all of the three stages, where the end result of self-transformation is an outcome of the transition.

2.6.1 Identity transformation and transition within the tourism context

Historically, tourism experience has been associated with change and transformation. Travel is a paradigmatic ‘experience’, and it is the model of a direct and genuine experience, which transforms the person having it (Leed, 1991). The nature of these transformations is in the roots of Indo-European languages, where travel and experience are closely wedded terms (Leed, 1991). Past research has found that an individual uses a tourism experience to increase inner awareness, and foster change and spiritual growth (Reisinger, 2013). Therefore, transitional opportunities for self can arise as a result of almost any kind of tourism. While any form of mainstream tourism has an important component of escapism, wellness tourism is very much related not only to escaping but also to seeking self and self-transformation (e.g., Voigt et al., 2011).

Furthermore, travel is often viewed as a process of transformation that changes people’s usual patterns of daily life (White and White, 2004); thus, tourism offers people an opportunity to escape from their daily lives and also to reflect on their lives. For many people, tourism is an inward journey of self-discovery or transformation (Goodnow & Ruddell, 2009; Thursby, 2005). Travelling offers people the luxury of removing their old identity and, while the new identity has not yet been formed, they can assume a new or anonymous ‘non-identity’ (White & White, 2004). People in transition seek physical and psychological distance from the familiar and routines (White & White, 2004). These could be other reasons why people choose holistic wellness retreat centres.

In order to achieve self-changes, people very often choose to travel. For example, some tourists intentionally engage in travelling in order to undertake a “personal hero’s journey”, which is the metaphor of archetypical journey of transformation that includes three stages: departure, initiation, and return (Wilson et al., 2013). Kottler argues that travel often takes people to unfamiliar situations and places, resulting in the opportunity to experience new ways of thinking, living, and behaving (Kottler, 1997, 2002, 2003). Many similar arguments have been made. When people travel, they find themselves or their true selves (Bell, 2002). However, Gazley and Watling (2015) argue that the ‘self’ is not something one finds, but is something one can create with the use of symbolic products and experiences when travelling. Once the identity transition has started or, has in fact occurred, a person will never go back to the old perspective (Ferguson, 1980; Laing & Frost, 2017; Wade, 1998). Selves are not fixed and are always in the process of reformation (Cohen, 2010). Travel is a very powerful vehicle for people’s transformation in thinking and behaviour, both during the travel and after they come back home

(Lean, 2009). Therefore, after a holistic wellness retreat, people could experience an identity transition that will change their perception of self.

Past literature has shown that during transitions or situations that present challenges to self-perception, people can express new identities through self-narrative revisions by drawing from a repertoire of possibilities (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). Applying this to the research context, tourism and travel also offer unique opportunities to search and find self (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2006; Richards & King, 2003). Tourism also provides an opportunity to get involved in experiences that promote discovery and self-transformation (Neuman, 1992) as well as forming or re-forming one's self-identity (Davidson, 2005). Identity transition, as a part of self-transformational theory, however, remains under-researched within the wellness tourism area.

The transformation, transition, and identity change concepts have been discussed in the tourism literature since the 1990s. Table 1 presents a summary of the literature on self-transformational tourism including identity transition and self-changes in tourism practices (from 1991 to 2020 inclusively):

Table 1: Summary of the Literature on Self-Transformation, Identity Transition and Identity Change in Tourism

Author(s)	Positioning/key words	Research questions and aims	Key findings
Bruner, 1991	Tourism and self, anthropology of experience, performance, Third World countries	The focus is on transformations in the self; author claims that contrary to the assertion of the discourse, the native self may gain more, in the sense of expanding more and changing more, than the tourist self.	Tourist discourse promises the tourist a total transformation of self, but the native is described as untouched. The opposite occurs in experience – the tourist self is changed little by the tour, while the consequences of tourism for the native self are profound. Third World cultural displays are a mirror for Western fantasies, reflecting back in performance what tourists' desire.
Desforges, 2000	Identity, self and long-term travelling	What are the processes through which tourism consumption is mobilised for self-identity?	Long-term travelling is chosen by tourists because it closely links people to questions they are asking about their self-identity and lifestyle at various moments in life. This type of travel further accumulates experiences that re-narrate or represent self-identity.
Noy, 2004	Backpacking, performance identity change, personal narrative, self-change	How is identity constituted through narrative performance during travel?	The tourist identity is constituted through narrative performance. During the interpersonal context of narration, an experience of self-change is achieved inter-subjectively, between narrators and audiences. Performers conversationally position their audiences in a role that implies the audience is undergoing self-change too while listening to narratives. Performances are social events, the personal sense of self-change materialises in the social realm. Moreover, participation assists in construction of collective identity.
White & White, 2004	Transition, long-term travel, identity, Australia	How do long-term travellers describe their motivations for and experiences of journeys? What are their accounts to discern whether these can be illuminated by the notion of "transition"? Whether their stories provide evidence that long-term travel provides a transitional zone between endings and new beginnings.	Journeys serve as a rite of passage between "old" and the possibilities of "new" ways of living. Long-term travel offers separation from all familiar distractions, a space in which the process of disintegration and reintegration of personal identity can occur. The experience of tourism as a journey though the liminal is common to the long-termers, irrespective of their reasons for embarking on their journeys.
Breathnach, 2006	Self-concept, heritage tourism, authenticity, heritage attractions	The aim was to develop a theoretical framework to understand heritage attraction visits by referring to a discussion on touristic experiences, identity, and modernity within the past literature.	Authenticity in the context of heritage tourist attractions is not one dimensional but rather multidimensional, which results in the need to look at the subjective authenticity of self and also authenticity that is judged according to objective realities.
Lean, 2009	Self-transformation and sustainable types of tourism	How can the tourism experience be used to achieve the long-term transformation of people's behaviour needed to realise sustainable development outcomes?	The concept should take a broader focus than just the destination (sustainable tourism). This means that in order for this transformational tourism to occur, the industry need to work towards inspiring enduring changes of behaviour that ensure health and wellness of people.
Frost, 2010	Film-induced tourism, life changing tourism, Australia	How do films project the image and attributes of a touristic destination?	The majority of the films showed that the main character did change during the travel or by their visit. Accordingly, through the film there is a key promise that outback tourists will have life-changing experience
Cohen, 2010	Lifestyle travel, concept of self, social construction, India and Thailand destinations	The paper discusses the concept of searching for self through extended leisure travelling for lifestyle travelers.	Selves are not innate or fixed, but rather in flux as they are socially driven and are an ongoing process of becoming. Learning about self, getting to know self, finding self are the common words used by travelers in

			interviews. Long-term travellers are different from holiday makers as the second group wants to play and progress, while lifestyle travellers are in a quest for meaning through their travels.
Cohen, 2010	Identity confusion, leisure lifestyle travel	Is the subjective finding of one-self problematic?	The majority of the respondents were left with more questions than answers about personal identity as the result of their travelling resulting in them being lost in their long-term journeys.
Voigt et al., 2011	Consumer behaviour, health, comparison of wellness tourism groups based on benefits sought	Who are these tourists? What are they are looking for and what is it worth to them? What are the benefits sought by three types of wellness tourists: beauty spa, lifestyle resort, and spiritual retreat visitors?	Six benefit factors emerged that include: transcendence; physical health as well as physical appearance; escape and relaxation; important others and novelty; re-establish self-esteem; and indulgence. While all participants sought transformation of the self, each group placed a different emphasis on physical, psychological, or spiritual types of transformations.
Little, 2012	Transformational tourism, wellbeing, fitness	What helps to achieve transformation in fitness tourism?	The paper attributed a central role to nature in the discussion of the practices of exercise and nutrition designed to achieve transformational fitness and well-being. Nature is not only present, it argues, in the spaces and practices of fitness tourism but in the bodies it produces.
Gazley & Watling, 2015	Overseas experience (OE), self-concept, self-congruity, motivation, and symbolic consumption behaviour in tourism	What benefits is the tourist seeking to obtain through the symbolic consumption of tourist products?	A survey incorporated scales including change-seeking, social comparison; self-expression; identification with tourist role; expressiveness of product and experience. When buying a product, or consuming an experience abroad, the tourist looks beyond functional utility to social meaning. When making consumption decisions, a tourist forms perceptions based on the likelihood that the product or experience will be congruent with their self.
Everett & Parakoottathil, 2016	Identity transformation, meaning making, folklore tourism, festival, change	How do folklore events appropriate contemporary and social interpretations of stories to entertain whilst also outlining how legendary historical personalities can play a role in generating tourism?	Three themes emerged which are a sense of freedom and escape, camaraderie and interpersonal social authenticity and the transformation of self and creation of alternative (additional) social identities.
Kirillova et al., 2017	Transformative tourism experience	The study explored triggers of transformative tourism experiences and their circumstances.	Triggering episodes of the transformative experiences are co-created by tourists and are found to occur at the end of the travel.
Laing & Frost, 2017	Narratives of transformation, Italy, identity	To examine the Italian self-transformative journey as a travel trope in women narratives in non-fiction books.	Transformative experience is associated with new identity. Transformation is physical or ingrained habits, self-acceptance or self-discovery. The transformational process will continue after they return home.
Robledo & Batle, 2017	Transformational tourism, hero's journey	What are the conditions of the touristic experiences that foster transformation?	Three stages of the hero's journey are departure, initiation, and return. A hero's journey normally follows a model consisting of a departure from the known world, initiation to some source of power, and a return to live life more meaningfully. The factors that foster transformation are personal situation, being away doing unfamiliar activities, interaction with people, live the moment, difficulty, setting, reflection and integration. The authors were able to classify the different themes obtained in the research into three master themes that correspond to the hero's journey stages of departure,

			initiation, and return. Those stages constitute the structure of the transformational tourist process.
Lou & Xie, 2018	Identity, place attachment, public participation, Macau	To examine the potential role of Chinese outbound tourism as a catalyst of change for Macanese identity.	The social media space is built to voice concerns of language, place attachment, and induced public participation.
Decrop et al., 2018	Couchsurfing, transformation, collaborative tourism experience	To understand couchsurfers' motivations and shared values.	The authors focus on the transformative power of the couchsurfing experiences and underlying processes, which are socialisation, acculturation, and trust, and behavioural consequences.
Coghlan & Weiler, 2018	Transformation, change, volunteer tourism, reflect	To study the process of transformational change in volunteer tourism through a multidisciplinary perspective.	Transformational change occurs through tourism, but that this is an individualised process with distinct steps, of which a change in behaviour is just one element.
Pope, 2018	Transformational tourism, tourism provider	How management of specific touristic experiences may instigate the notion of transformation.	This study provides a review of the literature as it relates to the relationship between well-being, sustainable tourism, and transformational experiences, developing a conceptual framework to form the basis for further research on the intersection between transformative experiences, well-being, and sustainable tourism.
Parsons et al., 2019	Tour guides, self-development, change, spiritual tourism	How do spiritual tour guides manage and organise spiritual tourists' experiences?	Spiritual tourism guides broker the experiences of tourists through provision of physical access to sites, facilitating encounters within and beyond the travel group, and through facilitating understanding, empathy, and self-development.
Dillette et al., 2019	Yoga tourism, self-change	Explores yoga tourism through a priori dimensions of positive psychological well-being.	Yoga tourism provides the environment to experience positive psychological well-being during the trip and post-trip. Yoga tourism has the ability to transform lives on varying levels.
Mei Pung et al., 2020	Tourist transformation, conceptual model	Through a multi-disciplinary approach, this paper reviewed the contexts where transformative tourism research has emerged and the main theories employed.	Liminality, cultural shock and challenges faced at the destination initiate transformation by provoking peak episodes, dilemmas and new performances. Contextual stimuli can lead tourists to reflectively interpret the experience and acquire skills, values and knowledge, with consequences on attitude, habits, and behaviour. A tourist transformation model was created, which provides a conceptual foundation for future research, and is relevant for designing and marketing transformative tourism experiences.
Sterchele, 2020	Tourism experience, transformation, memory, interaction ritual	What are the consequences of the memories of the tourism experiences?	Interaction ritual theory was applied to the study and the answers indicate that emotional experiences and patterns of collective action are reproduced by the returning tourists in their home communities through the trans-local appropriation of the event's format.
Sigala, 2020	Wine consumption, transformation, well-being	To study transformation of individual and community well-being through wine consumption.	Wine tourism can transform and enhance the wellbeing of communities and tourists through the socio-cultural elements of 'winescapes' and wine culture.

Previous studies have focused on different types of tourism and tourists, looking at self-transformational theories from different angles. However, the review of the existing literature on transformational tourism shows that the amount of research is still limited as authors have tended to focus on only one demographic or cultural category of the respondents, or on general tourism (usually a long-term type of tourism). Other types of travelling such as short-term tourism or wellness tourism still remain under-researched. In particular, there has been no research on self-transformational experiences such as identity transitions during holistic wellness tourism.

Past research indicates that selves are not fixed and are in an ongoing process of becoming (Cohen, 2010). The overview of the past literature proves that tourism influences various changes in self. Table 1 illustrates that past studies have tended to focus on how different forms of tourism change the self. The most common approach to studying self-changes, while in tourism settings, has been by focusing on a particular segment and/or type of tourism. For instance, a transition to another life stage is a common finding in the academic literature on backpacking tourism (i.e., Maoz, 2007; Noy, 2004; Sorensen, 2003), while there have been further articles written on lifestyle travel and more specifically about the individuals who choose travelling as a way of life or as a lifestyle choice (Cohen, 2010; Noy & Cohen, 2005; Welk, 2004; Westerhausen, 2002). Furthermore, there have been research papers on the specific tourist segments including those who study abroad and how the experience of overseas study changes self (Kauffmann, 1983; Milstein, 2005). Generally, what is in common among these studies is that the traveller often perceives a travel experience as a resource for self-realisation or for a unified sense of self (Cohen, 2010; Rojek, 1993) and for many lifestyle travellers it is a developmental project (Cohen, 2010).

In order to compare and contrast past studies and their findings, the following examples should be highlighted. For instance, Voigt et al. (2011) studied the benefits of three different categories wellness tourists seek for their transformational experience. The authors conducted a total of 27 semi-structured interviews with clients from Australian wellness tourism organisations and found six main benefits sought by these groups of tourists: transcendence, physical health and appearance, escape and relaxation, novelty, re-establishing self-esteem, and indulgence (Voigt et al., 2011). While there is a clear picture of what attracts these groups of tourists, it will be interesting to see the motivations of holistic wellness retreat visitors and how these motivations might affect their identity transition. The motives behind holistic wellness retreat experience remain to be explored; however, the focus within this research is on both mental (i.e., stress management, learn to meditate, improve self-esteem, etc.) and physical

attributes (i.e. weight management, gain physical strength or flexibility, etc.) at the same time since the visitors of this type of retreat choose the holistic approach to wellness.

Noy's research (2004) was undertaken through semi-structured interviews but with only one demographic category – young Israeli backpackers, which is a demographical limitation of the study. Moreover, the author focused on only one aspect of self-change, which is through a narrative performance. The findings of the study were that trip participation assisted in the construction of collective identity where the narrators experienced self changes during the narration and the audience also underwent self-changes while listening to narratives. Applying these findings to the context of the current study on identity transition while at the holistic wellness retreat, it is argued that the guests go through collective identity changes while at the retreat programme as they would be engaged in the same activities and shared talks about these activities and how they relate to their lives. However, there is a need for further study on the experience of individual identity transition also. Moreover, it is imperative to add to the body of knowledge an understanding of how exactly the process of identity transition occurs and what else might trigger identity transition while at a holistic wellness retreat.

Bruner (1991), on the other hand, provided an opinion-based study combined with an extensive literature review. The author, while studying transformational experience of self in tourism, focused more on natives than tourists, arguing that the native people who live in a touristic destination change more than the tourist (Bruner, 1991). The focus of the present study, however, is only on tourists and it adopts qualitative interviews and further uses observational data in order to triangulate the findings from the interviews.

Finally, White and White (2004) also utilised an Australian setting to conduct qualitative interviews and argued that only long-term travelling can lead to the extensive self-transformation of the tourist because usually people choose long-term travel when they go through liminal stages in their lives. Another study that supports long-term travelling and transformation suggests that the occurrence of transformations is due to long-term travellers being on a quest for meaning through their travels (Cohen, 2010). Moreover, long-term travelling is perceived as a more serious type of travel that facilitates various self changes as it assists people to find answers they seek about their self-identity and lifestyle at different moments in life (Desforges, 2000). Past research has found that during short-term travelling, on the other hand, tourists tend to play while on their vacations (Chone, 2010). However, a contrasting argument in the past literature is that it is not only long-term travel that is transformational, since transformation can take place in a shorter period of time or on a shorter journey too (Kottler, 1997). One of the implications of past research for the proposed study, therefore, is that while past literature (White & White,

2004) has discussed self-transformational experiences while backpacking and long-term travelling, the holistic wellness retreat, on the other hand, even though it is more luxurious and short term, can still be a transformational experience for the consumers. The reason for this argument is that the nature of the holistic wellness retreat experience itself might be relevant to the self-transformational outcomes because it involves guests participating in various activities that they might not have experienced prior to coming to the retreat. This, in turn, would result in new self-role trials which contribute to internal changes in self-perception or self-image. Further, it would be interesting to investigate whether holistic wellness retreat guests experience any desire for more than just 'play' during a short travel period, that is, that they may desire serious self-work to contribute to their identity transition. Moreover, in order to further contrast these previous observations, the current research will include a short-term travel setting and determine whether it promotes identity transitional processes and experiences.

What is also yet to be investigated is whether identity transition occurs not due to an end of a specific life stage or event, but rather while travelling. To study whether tourists experience a liminal state as an outcome of the travel experience would also be beneficial. The liminality concept has been applied to the theory of self-transformation in past research, specifically in the case of the self-transformational process in consumers with a sensory disability. It has been found that people experience liminality in transition from the first to the second stage of the process (from a forced withdrawal from their consumption activities), and the self-transformation is achieved by developing new meaning in their consumption behaviour (Beudaert et al., 2016). It is argued that liminality might occur during the holistic wellness retreat experience (where people have withdrawn from their usual daily rituals and ways of being and are exposed to a new environment) and predominantly in the second stage of the transformational process. It is important to note that the second stage, that is, the transition stage in self-transformational experiences, could be strongly linked to the state of liminality, because transition could lead to changes in identity (i.e., Bailey, 1999; Kroger, 2003). Various changes in the identity of holistic wellness retreat participants, in return, might lead to the experience of a liminal state. Therefore, it is important to add to the theory by exploring the transitional stage of the self-transformational theory in greater detail, specifically how and in what way these transitions occur. Thus, how and whether liminality promotes identity transition is an issue that requires exploration through the lens of liminality and liminal experiences, thus, providing new theoretical contributions to the current body of knowledge. The concept of liminality and its applications to the current study are discussed in greater detail in the next section of this chapter.

Despite the popularity of research on transformational experiences within tourism, the concept of self-transformation remains complex and includes various components. Moreover, it usually requires a comprehensive and longitudinal study with more time available to conduct a series of post-stay interviews (i.e., one month, three months, and six months) in order to study the extent of self-transformation in greater detail and to compare whether self-transformation declines, remains, or whether further changes occur. This research, therefore, focuses on the concept of self and more specifically the identity transition experience as a part of the self-transformational journey. A full self-transformation would be hard to study as a part of this thesis due to the short-term settings. Moreover, a comprehensive self-transformational examination would involve a longitudinal study that consists of a careful evaluation of the participants in different stages pre and post-retreat programme participation. For these reasons, applying Van Gennep's theory of three stages of transformation which include separation, transition and incorporation elements, it is imperative to note that the focus of this research is on one element of the transformational experience – identity transition.

2.7 Identity transition and liminality

*"A sense of identity is never gained nor maintained once and for all.
Like a good conscience, it is constantly lost and regained."
(Erikson, 1956, p. 74)*

Identity transition is often studied through the lens of the liminality concept in marketing and consumer behaviour domains of research. The term is derived from the Latin word "limen" which means threshold (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016); which alternatively can be explained as a state of "in-between". Firstly, the concept of liminality was introduced in 1908 by French anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep in his social science work *Les Rites de Passage* (Van Gennep, 1908). In his research, he argued that all cultures have rituals marking transitions from one social status to another (e.g., "boy" to "man") that follow a universal sequence of three phases: separation (detachment from former position in the social structure), transition (an actual passing through the threshold between the past and future social positions), and reincorporation (a person's entrance into a new position in society) (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016).

Later, based on Van Gennep's work, Turner further elaborated on the concept. Turner described the concept of liminality as both betwixt and between well-defined positions in the social structure, as well as an identity limbo, in which people are suspended in social space. Thus, liminality was defined as a state of being "neither one thing nor another; or maybe both; or neither here nor there; or maybe nowhere... 'betwixt and between' recognized fixed points in the space-time of structural classification" (Turner, 1967, p. 96).

Some of the most recent explanations of the concept of liminality elaborate that it is a state of being “betwixt and between social roles and/or identities” (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016, p. 47); it is also often described “a state of being neither here nor there – neither completely inside nor outside a given situation, structure or mindset” (Madison 2005, p. 158).

Past research has significantly focused on liminality during a career change (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016), cultural settings (Howard-Grenville et al., 2010), breastfeeding and new mother roles (Mahon-Daly & Andrews, 2002), pregnancy as transition (Tonner, 2016), professional and mother roles (Ladge et al., 2012), ethnicity and education (Bosetti et al., 2008; Winn, 2010), life with a threatening disease and other illnesses (Bruce et al., 2014; Lindvist et al., 2006; Thompson, 2007), migration and mobile lifestyle (Easthope, 2009), natural disaster (Little et al., 1998), plastic surgery (Schouten, 1991), transition to teenage-hood (Cody & Lawlor, 2011), wellness at work (Hillier et al., 2005), psychology (Frie, 2011), marketing (Cody, 2012), and tourism (Desforges, 2000; Ryan & Martin, 2001). Since the appearance of liminality in the academic literature, the concept has developed further beyond its original formulation and definition, with Ibarra & Obodaru (2016) arguing that liminal experiences indeed occur in various settings and scenarios throughout one’s life.

Moreover, the liminal stage and identity change is another popular focus for consumer research (Tonner, 2016). Therefore, within these lines, past literature has argued that liminality provides insights on consumption meanings (Tonner, 2016). Past research has also maintained that liminality as a focus for describing identity change can be summarised into two different contexts: scenarios where people go through a self-transformational change from one identity to another, which is a ‘transitional betweenness’; and scenarios where people’s sense of being is in-between two or more identities for a prolonged period of time, which is a ‘perpetual betweenness’ (Ybema et al., 2011). Therefore, the liminality concept provides a strong understanding of identity transition processes and practices in various contexts.

Specifically, the concept of liminality has been widely applied to different scenarios and life situations within the consumer research body of knowledge. For instance, life transitions are often used in studying liminal theory and are referred to as liminal life stages, that is, the liminal stage of life transitions is where there is a “break in the rhythm of the course of life” (Sevin & Ladwein, 2007, p. 5). Therefore, in consumer research and other social sciences, the construct of liminality or a state of in-between has been discussed widely with a strong focus on the fact that various life events promote liminality or go hand in hand together.

Furthermore, researchers have proposed the idea that liminality occurs not only as a result of life stage progressions from one role to another or during adjustment and adaptations to

life situations, but in fact, different liminal spaces, places, locations, and experiences can also act as a facilitators and reasons for one to find oneself in a space of in-betweenness and identity reconstruction (i.e., Beech, 2011; Schouten, 1991).

The terms ‘liminal space’ and ‘liminal place’ should be distinguished. The term ‘liminal space’ emerged from the concept of liminality and means a time or space in-between states (Turner, 1974; Van Gennep, 1960). More recent papers that have studied liminal spaces include various disciplines and scenarios (e.g., consulting as a liminal space [Czarniawska & Mazza, 2003]; streets as liminal spaces for children [Matthews, 2003]; the beach as a liminal space [Preston-Whyte, 2004]; and blogs as liminal space Wood, 2012], etc.). The concept of ‘liminal place’, on the other hand, was introduced by Casey (1993), where he argued that liminal place and its experiences are bound with people’s ability to dwell within them. Liminal places are noted to be widely used in tourism and related studies (e.g., hotel locations as liminal place [Pritchard & Morgan, 2006]; different touristic places, for instance Transylvania as a liminal place [Light, 2009]; tourism landscapes [Andrews & Roberts, 2012], the airport as a liminal place [Huang et al., 2018], etc.). This research, therefore, adds new contributions to the stream of these studies by exploring how the holistic wellness retreat might act as a liminal place or a liminal space for the participants and their identity transition.

Moreover, linking liminality theory to the research aim further, it is important to note that past research has shown strong links between liminality and identity construction practices. For instance, Noble and Walker (1997) maintain that liminality “significantly disrupts one’s internal sense of self” (p.31), while Beech (2011) applied liminality to the identity reconstruction of people in organisational settings. To further highlight the importance of considering liminality in the present study, it is important to note that the concept of liminality also contributes to tourism studies since liminality can be applied to away-from-home experiences (Bui et al., 2014). For instance, recently, researchers have focused on the factors that drive liminal experiences in Chinese tourism settings which are physical and social (i.e., Zhang & Xu, 2019). In either case and despite the past research, there is a need for further theorisation of how identity transition occurs in tourism contexts.

Furthermore, regardless of the popularity of liminality theory in different disciplines and despite the past research on liminality in tourism (i.e., tourism development practices [Brooker & Joppe, 2014] the liminal experiences of backpackers [Bui et al., 2014], liminality in adventure tourism [Goodnow & Bordoloi, 2017], etc.), holistic wellness retreats might provide a unique platform for all inclusive experiences that facilitate and promote the beginning of self-

transformation, where retreat guests can find themselves in the state of ‘in-between’, recognising they are no longer their old selves without having fully created their new selves.

2.8 Summary

This chapter provided a review of the past academic literature on wellness and the wellness tourism segment including the development of the new phenomenon of the holistic wellness retreat. It further discussed the concepts of self, perception of self, and self-transformation during tourism consumption and then focused specifically on identity transition as well as liminality theory.

In conclusion, despite the rapid growth of wellness tourism worldwide, research in this area remains limited. Aside from some studies that have explored the socio-demographic and motivational characteristics of various types of wellness tourists (e.g., Lehto et al., 2006), the holistic wellness retreat sector within wellness tourism still remains an under-researched phenomenon. The current research provides very little understanding of the retreat guests’ experience, especially in relation to transformative experiences and positive self-perception shift. Therefore, this study seeks to extend the literature on wellness tourism by exploring these gaps in the research. Based on the literature review, I believe that the holistic wellness retreat may be a place that delivers not only different services and programmes that shift an individual to a ‘trial’ state where he/she can experience a new well, balanced, healthy, and happy self, but also promises and delivers a safe place and environment for the retreat guests to unfold those dimensions that show a future greater possible self. This is further supported by the argument that the unknown or ‘the not yet conscious’ designates a capacity and desire for future self (Bloch, 1986). Moreover, past research has focused on self-transformation and identity transition after a tourism experience once the tourists have returned home; however, research on identity transition during the tourism experience also needs to be undertaken in order to see the transitional experience (Lean, 2009). Therefore, the current research aims to investigate identity transition by studying how the perception of self and individual meaning of wellness shift prior, during, and straight after the retreat programme, and what shapes and influences identity transition during the holistic wellness retreat experience.

Chapter 3

Methodology and Research Design

3.1 Introduction

This research aims to address the following objective: to study identity transition by exploring how the holistic wellness retreat experience illuminates changes in perception of the self and the meaning of wellness. The study seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) What are participants' (a) meanings of wellness and the holistic wellness retreat experience and (b) perceptions of self, prior to and following attendance at the holistic wellness retreat? and (2) What shapes and influences identity transition while at the holistic wellness retreat stay and how does this occur?. The study uses a qualitative approach to uncover meanings and experiences linked to identity transition while in a liminal place. Qualitative methods allow exploration of a phenomenon and discovery of unexpected findings or contextual depths (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Chapter 3 describes in detail the methodological process chosen that best suits for studying the phenomenology of what people experience and how they experience it (Moustakas, 1994), specifically of what people experience and how they proceed through the identity transition process while at the holistic wellness retreat.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology adopted in the current research. The chapter begins with a discussion on the research philosophy including the choice of research paradigm. Next, a discussion on the choice and justification of my positioning as an involved participant in the research is considered. Further, the chapter provides a discussion on the rationale for the chosen methodology and research process undertaken and a brief overview of the research context. This is followed by an outline of the research design including details of the data collection and sample plan. The chapter further discusses the trustworthiness of the data and data analysis process. The chapter closes with discussions on methodological limitations and research ethics.

3.1.1 Philosophical paradigm

A research paradigm consists of key philosophical assumptions: ontology, epistemology and methodology. Ontology asks the question of the nature of reality, acknowledging the worldviews of a researcher that impact their research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln et al., 2011). Epistemology is the determination of what counts as knowledge, the process of thinking and how the nature of reality should be researched; the relationship between that which is being researched and the researcher themselves (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln et al., 2011). Finally, methodology refers to the overall process of the research (Lincoln et al., 2011). The choice of research paradigm (ontology and epistemology) influences the choice of research methodology (Myers, 2009). Therefore, ontology and epistemology are discussed first before moving to the elaboration of the chosen methodology for the research.

There are four main research paradigms: positivism, postpositivism, interpretivism and critical theory (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln et al., 2011; Myers, 2009). An interpretivist approach was chosen for this research. In their research, interpretivists seek an understanding of the world through exploring the subjective meanings of experiences (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln et al., 2011). Thus, the current research is based on interpretation and is guided by the researcher's own beliefs (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The researcher attempts to capture her interpreted reality within the phenomenon, while also studying the phenomenon and the participants within it. We concur that tourism research experience should be acknowledged as being integral to the interpretive process (Wearing & Wearing, 2006).

An ontology of relativism is used in this study where the researcher's perspective is one of several realities and not just a single objective reality. Because reality is socially constructed in the way people perceive social situations, this research seeks to achieve its objectives by examining consumers' thoughts, feelings, and behaviours while at the holistic wellness retreat. In addition, in light of the interpretivist approach, the researcher used participative inquiry, thus, was able to reflect upon her views of the research using the perspective of research reflexivity to clarify the researcher/researched relationship in the study (Wallendorf & Brucks, 1993). With the epistemological assumption, conducting a qualitative study means that researchers try to get as close as possible to the participants. In other words, the researcher included her voice as a participant in the study along with the voices of the other eight participants to enhance the credibility of the method for the qualitative study. She included subjective introspection and self-observations where the researcher treated herself as a participant. Moreover, observational

notes and memoing notes on what the researcher learned from the data (from both interviews and observations) were included.

In terms of researcher positioning, this research stems from the researcher's personal experiences and interests as elaborated upon in the pre-story of the thesis. The researcher's positionality was made explicit and allowed a critically reflective stance. The researcher recognised that observation of behaviour may be skewed by her personal characteristics such as her ideology, opinions and previous wellness related experiences. Thus, reflection before, during and after the research process was fundamental for objective research to take place. Moreover, an overt approach with the use of participant observations, going through the experience herself as a part of the interpretivist approach, was also adopted.

Finally, adopting an inductive approach to research, the following steps were applied in the study:

1. Observing from a personal perspective, personal reflections and past literature all of which assists research question development (Chapter 1).
2. Gaining evidence in the past literature and exploring areas that could help study the phenomenon (Chapter 2) and further contextualise of the study.
3. Data collection and findings (Chapters 3 and 4).
4. Borrowing theory that to explain the findings and elaborate upon them (Chapter 5).

3.2 Rationale for chosen methodology and research process

This research attempts to understand and explain a life experience or phenomenon. More specifically, the goal is to study the phenomenon of how a holistic wellness retreat facilitates identity transition. Medina-Munoz and Medina-Munoz (2013) argue that there is a need to carry out more exploratory studies on wellness tourism and related research domains. Moreover, studying social, behavioural, and environmental phenomena in a natural setting is more important than studying them in a controlled setting (i.e., in a lab experiment) because in a natural setting participants are offered more realistic exposure in the actual environment. Therefore, this research adopts a qualitative approach where interviews were designed and a naturalistic inquiry approach was also used to observe people interacting, communicating, and behaving during the holistic wellness retreat stay. This approach was considered the most suitable to address the research aim because it allowed an immersion in the daily experiences of the guests during their retreat vacation.

Table 2 depicts a chronological breakdown of the research process that had four major steps. The first step was careful personal exploration of the holistic wellness retreat context by

the researcher. This allowed learning about the context, drawing on the researcher's personal ideas and experiences (Hammond, 2018; Swedberg, 2016). As such, the methodological design for this doctoral research began with the careful examination of holistic wellness retreats around the world through their online presence (i.e., websites, social media, blogs) and the engagement consumers show towards these places (i.e., TripAdvisor reviews, forums, and social media). This secondary research analysis showed that consumers often believe these retreats changed them and their lives. Next, a list of relevant holistic wellness retreats was created in order to contact and invite them to collaborate. A copy of the invitation letter that was sent out to different holistic wellness retreats seeking their collaboration is available in Appendix K.

Next, three phases adapted from Wolcott's (2008) research process were added to the process: experiencing, inquiring, and examining, as illustrated in Table 2 below. The experiencing phase was drawn from the researcher's personal exploration of the retreat. This experiencing of the phenomena further allowed the researcher to learn about the phenomenon and what this holistic wellness retreat offered in its services. Furthermore, this experience later helped the researcher to understand the things people shared about their experiences and identity transition. The next phase of inquiry allowed the researcher to identify the practices and concepts relevant to the context and consumer behaviour within the holistic wellness retreat context. This was accomplished through the data collection in forms of interviews and observations that are discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. Lastly, the examination phase involved examining the research completed by others (Wolcott, 2008) through a relevant literature review and comparison with the data analysis outcomes.

Table 2: Research Process (adapted from Wolcott [2008]).

Time period	Steps	Methods and details
Dec 2017 – May 2018	Exploration – familiarisation with the context	Exploration of holistic wellness retreats and their major practices via studying their online presence (i.e., checking their websites, focusing specifically on the pages of services they offer; examining their TripAdvisor profiles to study past guests' comments on the services and their experiences; and looking through the retreat's social media pages, e.g., Instagram). This strategy allowed the researcher to select and shortlist the holistic wellness retreats to contact and ask to collaborate in the research. Development of the interview guide and observational protocol. Search for the retreat centre in which to conduct the research and to collaborate with.
June 2018	Experience – experience of the research context	The researcher took an overt approach and went through the booking process to stay at the chosen retreat and signed up for the full retreat programme in order to gain first-hand information and go through the customer experience at the holistic wellness retreat herself, thus, including self in the study. The researcher also did this to familiarise herself with the environment of the retreat prior to the next step, and to discuss the process with the managers including signing documents, i.e., consent form and agreement not to share vulnerable information, i.e., brand, staff names, etc.
June 2018	Inquiry – observing the practices and concepts relevant to the context and consumer behaviour within the context, conducting interviews and observations with the participants	Data collection included sets of face-to-face interviews with the participants and observational study on-site at the retreat.
Sep 2018 – May 2019	Examination – data analysis	Data analysis - Thematic analysis with descriptive coding and themes generation. Framework created. Further literature review on the context and what had been researched by others on the concepts applicable and relevant to the findings.

3.2.1 Location and sample of the study

The retreat place

Chapter 2 discussed the wellness tourism industry and the wellness retreat segment in greater detail. Based on the findings from past literature and industry reports, it was chosen to conduct the research at a holistic wellness retreat. It was essential to include holistic wellness retreat visitors in the research context in order to answer the research aim and questions. Moreover, there is considerable confusion in academic discussion and among people (both operators and consumers) within the industry, interpreting and applying the word ‘retreat’ in the context of wellness tourism therefore needed to be treated with caution – questioning what it means and how it is used (Kelly & Smith, 2016). Therefore the data collection took place in the holistic wellness retreat – a place that aims to offer all wellness related services under one roof.

As discovered during the *Exploration phase*, countries with the most recognised wellness retreats are located in the Mediterranean parts of Europe, North America, and Southeast Asia (Csirmaz and Peto, 2015). Therefore, a holistic wellness retreat in one of these regions was sought in order to gain access to their premises for the data collection. The primary distinction of a typical holistic wellness retreat from any other retreats is that a holistic wellness retreat does not limit its offerings to just one primary expertise as in the case of yoga retreats, meditation retreats, spiritual retreats, or rehabilitation centres, and so on. A holistic wellness retreat is in fact a place that offers all of the above services under one roof, and further services are also often provided. For example, currently there is a huge focus on nutrition and detox, fitness and body weight management, psychological and emotional health, dealing with minor mental disorders, and so on. All of these should be provided for within the retreat in order for it to be named holistic. Currently, many holistic wellness retreats position themselves as wellness retreats without a solid distinction from typical old-style wellness retreats where the focus is on spa and beauty elements. This could be due to the current confusion between the terms and their differences among various parties within the industry and amongst consumers. Keeping the above knowledge in mind, a selective choice for the appropriate holistic wellness retreats was obtained through a careful analysis of tourists’ reviews (on TripAdvisor) to see whether the places they travelled to are considered holistic to meet the criteria for the study (Step One – exploration & familiarization). In the end, a total of 20 holistic wellness retreats were contacted and invited to be considered for this doctoral study. Five retreat centres replied to the invitation with three of them declining the offer, while the other two were interested in taking part in the research. One of the centres was in Thailand; however, after long negotiations, it was evident that the business was not able to accommodate the researcher and assist with the data collection

at the chosen time of year; instead, they were willing to grant access to the retreat in late 2019. Because this would cause unnecessary delay in data collection, the second retreat centre that agreed to participate was approached. It was agreed that the final findings report would be submitted to the retreat centre in return.

Data collection occurred throughout June 2018. The study was conducted in a European holistic wellness retreat located in a small Spanish village. The exact location and name of the centre are purposely not mentioned as per the company's request in order to protect their privacy and competitive advantage. A copy of the confidentiality agreement between the researcher and the retreat is attached in Appendix L.

The retreat centre is located near mountain tracks and the village center is easily accessible by foot; there is also a developed public transport system with daily buses with routes to a nearby city and local beaches. The premises of the retreat include one outdoor pool, common areas with a library, kitchen, dining area, TV room, yoga studio, meditation corner, fitness room, areas for individual time, a spa and massage area and a roof top terrace for meditation and other activities as per the programme schedule. The facility offers 15 rooms that can accommodate one, two or three people per room as required. The venue serves only vegan and plant-based dishes buffet style that change daily. They also offer daily freshly squeezed juices that guests can choose instead of solid meals as a part of the juice detox programme, or they can take the juices to complement their plant-based dishes. The venue offers total freedom in terms of the activities offered or how guests choose to spend their time at the retreat but there is a policy of strictly no smoking and no alcohol.

Due to the nature of the ethics implications and the goal to protect the brand name and the retreat guests' privacy, the researcher was not permitted to take photos where the faces of the retreat guests are visible. Therefore, only photos of the retreat location, facilities, and workshop settings were taken as well as some photos where the faces of the guests are not recognisable.



Figure 2: Dining table set for lunch

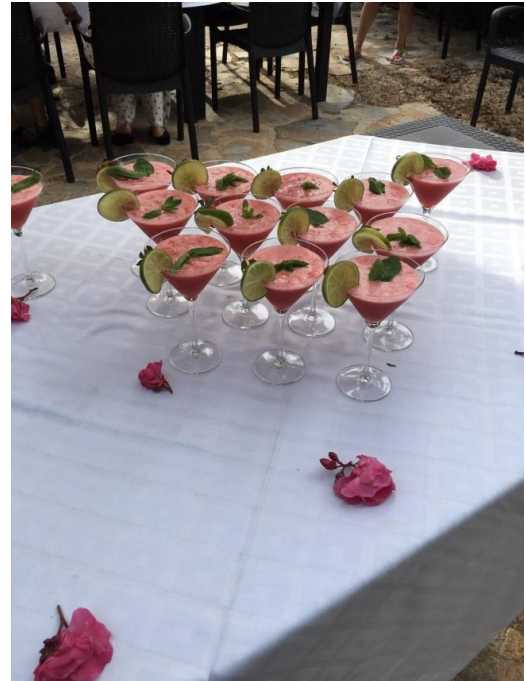


Figure 3: Non-alcoholic cocktails



Figure 4: Non-alcoholic cocktails



Figure 5: Dining table set for dinner

The food at the retreat is strictly plant-based and all meals are served buffet style. Twice per week non-alcoholic cocktails are offered. Dinners are always served outside (weather dependent) as a compulsory social gathering at the end of the day. Breakfast and lunch are served indoors and the guests choose whether they want to eat indoors or outside, alone or with company.



Figure 6: Main pool area



Figure 7: Environment and the location of the retreat

Figures 6 and 7 depict the main pool area where aqua-aerobics take place. The area is also widely used by the guests during siesta and their free time.



Figure 8: Studio room set for yoga class



Figure 9: Studio room set for workshop

Figures 8 and 9 illustrate the activity room where various workshops take place, for example, meditation techniques and creating a visual board workshop.

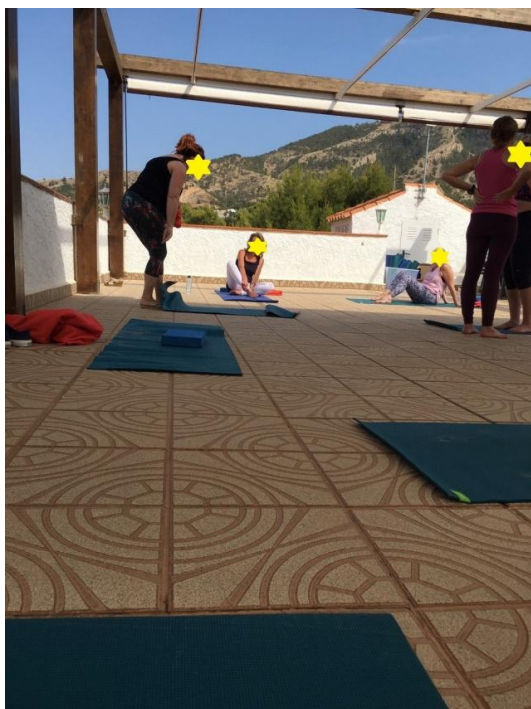


Figure 10: Yoga class on the roof terrace



Figure 11: Studio room set for meditation

Figures 10 and 11 depict the yoga areas which include both an outdoor roof terrace and an indoor shala, also known as a special room or area for practising yoga and meditation.



Figure 12: The second swimming pool (1)

Figure 13: The second swimming pool (2)

Lastly, Figures 12 and 13 show the second swimming pool that is used less often and usually only when many people are occupying the main pool area. There is a seating area around the pool where the retreat guests often have breakfast when sitting outside.

Study sample

The sampling approach used for this research was purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling chooses research participants according to preselected criteria relevant to the research question and research context (Mack et al., 2005). The sample size is a function of available resources, time constraints, and the objectives of the researcher's study (Oppong, 2013). Therefore, sample size may or may not be fixed prior to data collection. In this case, the purpose of sampling was to interview and observe only those participants who stayed at a holistic wellness retreat, more specifically, those who arrived one day before the commencement of the data collection in order that the researcher could obtain all the relevant information from them during the first set of interviews. The researcher did not know the number of people arriving on the day; therefore, the target sample size was not fixed prior to data collection due to the limited amount of time allowed to stay at the retreat as a researcher.

In qualitative studies, however, a small sample size has its significant value. A small number of cases (less than 15) facilitates a researcher's close association with study participants, thus, enabling to establish rapport with the participants and enhancing the validity of in-depth inquiry in naturalistic settings (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). Furthermore, qualitative samples are designed to make analytical rather than statistical generalizations (Curtis et al., 2000). To further support the qualitative study and smaller sample size, it should be noted that qualitative studies may benefit from sampling strategies by shifting attention from numerical input of participants to the contribution of new knowledge from the analysis; thus, a so-called 'information power' indicates that the more information the sample holds, relevant for the actual study, the lower the number of participants needed (Malterud et al., 2015). In the present study, depth of data was obtained and repeating patterns were present within the data set.

The retreat welcomes a limited amount of people at one time, aiming to make the retreat secluded, personal, and private. Due to the small size of the retreat, the total number of guests that arrived on the day of the commencement of the data collection was limited to 13 people. Eight of them agreed to participate in the research, including in both verbal interviews and observations, while four people agreed to participate only in observations. One person declined the offer to be part of the research completely.

The retreat targets mostly women; however, the TripAdvisor reviews and social media photographs suggest that male guests also take part in the retreat occasionally. Only two males agreed to participate in the study, while the remaining were females. The age of the participants varied from 20 to 60 years old. People from all over the world visit this retreat centre, which created a multi-cultural sample for this study.

While it was not the researcher's intention to recruit only female participants, scholars (e.g., Kelly & Smith, 2016), as well as TripAdvisor reviews and social media contents, suggest that women are the prime target for retreat tourism. Hence, it was appropriate to have more female participants than male.

It should be noted that gender and age perhaps could affect identity transition process; however, there was no intention to study and compare the participants on gender or age criteria because this would not reflect the research aim nor an interpretivist approach to research. The focus was to rather study those for whom the identity transition process occurred during the holistic wellness retreat, looking at the subjective experiences of the travellers. There was no intention to include as many participants as possible but rather seek depth from the data. For the present research a small sample was enough in terms of depth of the obtained data, where there were clear repeating patterns among the participants. Furthermore, the researcher also used her own voice as a participant of the study. She used an overt approach to participation in the retreat, adopting use of participant observation, thus, experiencing the 'experience' herself.

Native language of the participants was not used during the interviews and all the data collection process was in the English language. In order to eliminate the language barrier and other relevant limitations, a written and printed questionnaire was shown to the participants during the interviews in case anything was not clear to them. The participants were given time to think and translate words if this was required. The researcher invited clarifications during the interviews and asked follow-up questions to motivate the participants to elaborate upon their answers in more detail. Moreover, rewording and rephrasing of questions was used if participants struggled to understand the meaning of any question.

The participants' actual names have been replaced with pseudonyms chosen by themselves in order to protect their privacy and identities. Notes were carefully written in order not to reveal any identity of the participants at any point during the study. A participation consent form was signed by each participant prior to the beginning of the data collection. Additionally, small boxes of chocolates were given to the study participants after the completion of the data collection as a token of gratitude for their participation in the research. Table 3 shows the general demographic profile of the interviewees.

Table 3: Demographic Profile of the Interviewees

Name/pseudonym	Gender	Approximate age	Nationality	Occupation
Julie	Female	20-25	Poland	Yoga instructor
Andrew	Male	55-60	Ukraine	General director
Irena	Female	50-55	Ukraine	Interior designer
Mary	Female	25-30	Latvia	Lawyer
Lisa	Female	35-40	Ireland	Psychologist/coach
Alex	Male	35-40	UK	Entrepreneur
Rachel	Female	30-35	Canada	Marketing manager
Jessica	Female	30-35	Ireland	Accountant

3.3 Design and data collection

The rationale for the design choice was based on careful evaluation of the approaches conducted in past research within the wellness tourism literature domain and the extent of their relevance to answering the research questions of this doctoral research. For instance, most past research has used a quantitative approach in the form of online or direct surveys (e.g., Thal & Hudson, 2019) or through netnography and analysis of online guests' reviews (e.g., Dillette et al., 2016; Fu et al., 2015). A number of observational studies have also been conducted with a quantitative analysis of data (e.g., Cohen et al., 2017).

In order to address the research questions fully, data collection began with the first interview prior to the retreat and then a naturalistic participant observation was conducted during the retreat programme which promised to provide rich and meaningful descriptions of interactions and behaviours (Ahn & Nelson, 2015; Reeves et al., 2008, in order to study guests' behaviour on aspects that they might not otherwise share during an interview. A second follow-up interview was carried out after the completion of the retreat programme. As a result, interviews provided access to participants' thoughts and meanings prior to and after the retreat, while data from observations provided insights into participants' spontaneous actions, as well as their social and consumption behaviour during the retreat programme. In addition, photographs were taken when appropriate during the fieldwork.

In the following section, the processes of the interviews and observations are discussed.

Interviews

The study included a set of interviews to uncover participants' pre- and post-retreat states of mind by analysing their perceived meanings of wellness and self, how or whether these changed during the retreat programme, and whether the guests experienced identity transition and other self-transformative experiences. Qualitative face-to-face individual interviews were conducted in the English language and a total of 74 pages of interview data were obtained.

The designed interviews took place within the premises of the holistic wellness retreat and were conducted with guests on a one-on-one basis, digitally recorded with the permission of the participants, and then later transcribed in full for careful analysis and examination. The semi-structured interview was chosen because it allows a flexible flowing conversation between interviewer and participant (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Patton, 2002). Because the study is exploratory, the interviews were conducted in a non-directive and unstructured fashion (Calder, 1977). The interview guide with pre-designed open-ended questions was developed and employed for both the first and second interviews. The interview guide was firstly tested on peers and colleagues for their feedback before being used in the field. A copy of the questions asked is provided in Appendix B (interview guide).

The first interview was held on the first day of the participants' arrival at the retreat location shortly before the commencement of the retreat programme. The process took 15-25 minutes per participant. The interviewees were asked various pre-designed questions in order to obtain their thoughts and opinions on wellness, the retreat, the self, the social environment of the retreat, the scheduled programme, and expectations from the retreat and self. The second follow-up interview took place on the final day of the retreat programme and lasted around 20 minutes per guest. During that time, the study participants were asked to tell a story about their experience at the holistic wellness retreat and what happened at the retreat or what happened to them during the retreat vacation. The study participants were further asked to elaborate on whether and how their opinions and thoughts had changed since the first interview. The latter was done by utilising various techniques as described below.

Projective techniques

In consumer research, qualitative data collection methods that include group discussions or individual interviews often incorporate various projective techniques (Webb, 1992). Projective techniques involve the use of ambiguous, unstructured stimulus objects or situations into which the participants "project" their personality, attitudes, opinions on various topics, and self-concept (Donoghue, 2000; Webb, 1992). Therefore, the field interviews for this research included extensive use of projective techniques developed specifically for this study.

While direct and face-to-face questions during interviews elicit responses that might be simple to verbalise, people do not always fully say what they want to say, mean, or think; thus, projective techniques assist with revealing subjective and subconscious thoughts and emotions individuals might hold within their minds (Donoghue, 2000). Methods of projective techniques firstly were designed and came from the field of clinical psychology and later were adapted to be used in the social sciences, including marketing and consumer research, to reveal greater insights into consumers' psychology (Berkman & Gilson, 1986; Loudon & Della Bitta, 1993). Projective techniques may be classified as a structured-indirect way of investigating the 'whys' of situations (Webb, 1992). These techniques do not measure in the same way as surveys in quantitative studies do for example, but rather help to uncover feelings, beliefs, attitudes, and even motivations which many people find complicated to articulate directly (Webb, 1992; Donoghue, 2000). Therefore, when the participants were asked about wellness and related questions, the following projective techniques were employed:

- The first projective technique used was the *word association technique* in order to study whether the definition and meaning of wellness shifted during the retreat stay. This technique was derived from the associative technique – a technique where interviewees are asked to respond to a stimulus with the first thing that comes to their mind (Linzey, 1959). Therefore, the word association technique encouraged participants to think about wellness and the meaning of this concept in greater detail. The interviewees were asked to think about what came to their mind when they thought of wellness. This technique helped the participants to summarise their image and perception of the term wellness.
- Another association technique that was utilised was *personification*. Participants were asked to imagine the term wellness as a person and then describe who they imagined and why. This tactic also incorporated a construction technique which required participants to construct a picture of a story (Linzey, 1959). Therefore, the

participants were asked to describe a person they imagined when they thought of wellness.

When the participants were asked about the perception of self and related questions, the following projective technique was employed:

- The *personification technique* was applied not only in wellness related questions but also in the section that aimed to study self-perception. This technique included the task of picture selection where the participants were given a list of pictures that illustrated different psychological and emotional states. This allowed the gathering of more emotional and meaningful responses from the study participants. Using this personification technique, the interviewees were asked to choose one picture that closely represented their current well-being and perception of self before and after the retreat and then asked to elaborate on their choice in order to gather more information on their reasoning. This type of semi-ambiguous stimuli with little structure presented a range of alternative choices and, thus, the participants could choose their own meanings and interpretations (Doherty & Nelson, 2010). A copy of the pictures shown to the participants during the interviews are presented in Appendix C.

Moreover, with this aim in mind, another *personification technique* was also applied in order to gather more findings not only on self-perception but also to uncover the identity transition process in more details:

- The purpose of projective techniques is to understand and uncover unspoken thoughts and feelings. In order to effectively use these techniques for the topic of identity transition (which is below the level of consciousness), the interviewees were asked to describe their role models during the first interviews. Then, during the follow up interviews interviewees were asked to elaborate on whether they achieved or got closer to their role models in order to unravel identity change. This also provided more information on their desired selves they wanted to become or roles they wanted to achieve and whether they were achieved during the holistic wellness retreat stay.

Observations

Past research has argued that how people behave is often different from what they say in interviews (Ahn & Nelson, 2015; Rust, 1993). Studies that incorporate interview-only designs are limited due to being restricted to sampling participants' verbalisations only; therefore, it is unlikely these studies can provide an accurate and complete picture of consumer behaviour issues (Rust, 1993). Additionally, in natural observational settings, people are more responsive to social and environmental stimuli than they are consciously aware of (Rust, 1993). Therefore, in order to get a better understanding of transitional experiences at the holistic wellness retreat and fully answer the research questions, this study included not only verbal interviews but also observational methods. The value of the observational approach is not only in answering the research objective but also in discovering what people do, not only what they say they do, which in turn potentially unveils further meaningful insights.

Observations allow studying and witnessing the true behaviour of people in natural settings (Ahn & Nelson, 2015; Banister & Booth, 2005; Reeves et al., 2008). Observational study can be accomplished via observations solely or by combining observation and participation in the studied environment (Mack, 2005). This research included the second approach. Participant observation historically emerged from anthropology and sociology and later was spread to further fields of human and related studies (Jorgensen, 1989). This approach, therefore, makes experiential reflexivity an essential aspect of the analysis (Tonner, 2016), potentially adding further value to the research design. Participant observation highlights the importance of reflecting on a researcher's own understanding of the study (Hall, 2004). Participant observation includes the researcher interacting with participants on a daily basis while collecting information, and carefully investigating their experiences and activities (Jorgensen, 1989). Therefore, this participant observation assisted in learning further about the experiences of interviewees.

Observational study design and procedure

Participant observations always take place in community settings or other locations that have relevance to research questions (Mack, 2005). Therefore, observations in this research were designed to include the researcher's participation in the holistic wellness retreat with others in informal settings in order to capture rich descriptions about words and behaviours of participants and gain an understanding of the context (Ahn & Nelson, 2015; Elliott & Jankel-Elliott, 2003). The current study included observational data collected at the holistic wellness retreat in Spain. In order to establish trust with the participants, the observer incorporated informal retreat style

clothing, a slow and relaxed talking pattern, as well as an open and honest description of who the researcher was and why she was doing this research (Hill & Stamey, 1990).

An observation protocol (attached in Appendix E) was created prior to the commencement of the study and used as a guide during the observational data collection process. The observational techniques used were based on frameworks from Spradley (1980) and Robson (2002). The following facets were observed: activities and programmes guests participated in, guests' verbal and non-verbal behaviour, and social interactions. Past research indicates that social interactions influence self-transformational experiences during travel (Lean, 2009; Pearce, 1982); therefore, the protocol included retreat guests' interaction with each other and with managers and service providers. Moreover, the retreat guests' experiences (social, physical, and psychological) and service problems were also considered during the observational research (Zeithaml et al., 1993). Situational factors such as weather conditions were also taken into consideration. In detail, observations also included physical behaviour and gestures (what people did while at the wellness retreat, who interacted with whom, how they behaved while receiving their treatments) as well as verbal behaviour and interactions (not only interactions with other guests and staff but also how long the conversations lasted; who initiated these interactions, tone of voice, etc.). While observing physical behaviour, further notes on non-verbal behaviour were also taken, including how people used their bodies and voices to communicate their emotions and expectations and what behaviours indicated about people's feelings towards other guests and staff.

With an observational study, such issues as reactivity or social desirability may be present, leading to a change in behaviour of the participants as a result of the observation (Harris & Lahey, 1982), or due to the presence of the researcher or other participants (Kazdin, 1982). In order to address and minimise this potential issue, the observations were started on the same day that the first interviews took place (one day before the commencement of the programme), in order to make sure that the participants adapted to being observed (Kazdin, 1982). Moreover, the researcher made sure to behave as a guest of the retreat, participating in activities when and where it was allowed, thus, predominantly reducing the subjective distance between researcher and participant.

Observations were conducted over the length of the retreat programme, which lasted for one week. Observations were timed to include participants' behaviour during various retreat activities, meal gatherings, and free time. Observations of conversations were stopped as soon as a non-participant joined the conversations. Observations of participants during their free time were completed at a respectful distance and were only conducted during the time that a

participant was in the shared retreat areas such as the library, swimming pool, terraces, and so on. No observations were made when a participant said they needed to be completely alone or in their rooms. Observations of the participants during various retreat activities were conducted only with the permission of the activity facilitator, and provided these observations did not involve contact with non-participants.

During the allocated time, the researcher took extensive notes on participants' behaviour throughout various retreat activities and time slots. As soon as an activity finished, the observer finished up the notes and waited until the next participant could be observed or the next activity took place. A focused narrative observational system was employed that included writing a detailed description of the participants' behaviour (Harrist & Pettit, 2000). The observational notes were typed into a laptop computer in real time during the observation. Later, the data was further elaborated on in the form of an extensive table. A copy of the observational study guide is available for review in Appendix D. The Observations Protocol is attached in Appendix E. A sample of observational field notes is provided in Appendix J.

3.4 Data analysis

An example of a transcribed interview with a participant is available for review in Appendix I of this thesis. All of the interview transcripts were analysed using the thematic analysis technique. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, studying, analysing, and reporting themes that answer research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Elliot, 2016). Thematic analysis is a method which is not limited to reflecting reality, but is also utilised to unravel the surface of reality (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was applied to classify and interpret the collected data, to identify relationships across the data set, and to group the data under the main emerging themes in order to achieve the research aim and answer the research questions. Themes represent important patterned responses or meanings within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Coding is a process of interpreting the collected data. The main aim of any qualitative research is to attach meaningful attributes or codes to data that allows researchers to engage in an analytical process of pattern detection or theory building or categorisation (Wicks, 2017). In this research, the coding was done manually instead of electronically because this method necessitates that the researcher provides an analytical reflection (Wicks, 2017). Therefore, data analysis was based on an interpretative approach that proceeded through repeated readings of the narratives, drawing comparisons and contrasts across the narratives and creating codes from the analysed data (Mick et al., 2012). The principles of descriptive coding were also followed

(Saldana, 2009). Descriptive coding is the use of codes that are identifications of the researched topic (Tesch, 1990). Applying this technique, the codes were allocated within the interview transcripts and then extracted from the transcripts and reassembled together in a separate file for an organised and categorised ‘portrait’ of the researched topic for further analysis (Saldana, 2009). This type of qualitative data analysis allows the use of the entire dataset to identify the underlying themes (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). The codes in the study arose inductively, which means the codes emerged from the collected data. Extensive field notes from the observations together with the transcripts of the interviews with the holistic wellness retreat guests were coded with an integration of the 6Ws approach that focuses on who, what, whom, when, where, and why (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

3.4.1 Development of the coding system

Examples of the codes are illustrated in Table 4 below and a detailed outline of the coding system is further discussed.

Table 4: Examples of Codes

Code name	Code description	Quote
Social aspect	Socialising influenced identity work positively. People pushed/ motivated to reflect on self and work on self in order to become better. This also included inspiration from others and shared experiences.	<p>“The people that were in my age group, I felt they were good examples of how to be healthier. When you’re around people that seem healthy and they can do all the activities and they just seem they’re healthy in everyday life, it makes you wanna be more like that. I think that was another thing that I got out of it... being around healthy people, who are mostly quite healthy, it made me realise that I do have work to do. Just to give you an example, one of the hikes, I thought it was actually hard and no one else seemed to think it was that hard, so that made me think I need to improve my physical fitness. I always knew I needed to improve it but that was just like I really do need to get better” (Rachel).</p> <p>“Actually, all of my worries were for no reason. I shouldn’t worry about other people because it is even great that there are other people because there is even more work on yourself. We all live in society and we can’t just close our apartment, just stay there and meditate and be happy with ourselves. We need to still go into society and learn how to meet there. Actually, with all the people, at the end, we felt like we were some kind of family. There were all these people coming and going but still, we felt some kind of connection that we are all here for a reason. They all were so supportive, they supported each other and also shared their experiences” (Julie).</p>
Re-evaluation of self/life; learned new about self/life	The retreat promoted gaining a new perception of self and life, including looking at things from different, earlier unknown perspectives. The retreat became a first step to work on self and improve life.	<p>“Well, I’d say it (wellness retreat) helped me to put things into perspective. It helped me to see that it’s not as hard to live well, to be well, to think well” (Alex).</p> <p>From observations: he is generally a closed person, not very talkative. But he started to make jokes with others during the retreat, smiling, became friendly as he noted once during dinner, etc. He tried new activities that became a part of his life</p>

Interviews

The face-to-face interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed in full. The transcripts were carefully checked against the original audio recordings for accuracy (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The verbal audio files were listened to while reading the transcripts in order to further search for hidden clues, laughter, emotions, pauses in speech, intonations, and so on.

Data analysis of the interviews also included the intra-text cycle process, that is, reading the entire set of transcripts in order to gain a sense of the whole (Giorgi, 1989). The interview transcripts were analysed using an open coding technique, coding any phrase relevant to the research questions and research aim. Using this approach, open codes were then thematically grouped around the closely connected ideas of liminality, identity transition, and consumption experiences; this in turn provided an explanation and understanding of the data meanings. The second stage of the interview data analysis involved inter-textual reading, searching for commonalities and differences, if any, across the interview sets, and then capturing these in themes and sub-themes (Giorgi, 1989). Next, the application and re-introduction of the existing theory took place in order to explain the primary data.

Observations

An audio recorder was not used during the observations in order not to influence the naturalistic settings or potentially make others feel uncomfortable. The extensive notes were typed into a digital format during the time of observations, or if the situation did not allow for the notes to be typed on the spot (i.e., dinner gatherings), the researcher made notes of everything that was observed and typed the information with greater detail. The observational notes were collected during the retreat programme and then examined and interpreted by conducting a detailed line-by-line analysis (Orrel-Valente et al., 2007). The coding system for analysing observational notes involved using codes or categories (Chorney et al., 2015). These codes were grouped together into the following categories: who – holistic wellness retreat guests; where – at the retreat and during the scheduled activities outside of the retreat premises, as well as free time while at the retreat; what – doing or not doing something (i.e., participating in an activity or skipping the allocated time for a free vs. social time; positive or negative conversations; complaining or being happy about something at the retreat or about something that was relevant to the retreat experience, etc.). Additionally, situational and environmental factors surrounding the observed place were also taken into consideration, such as weather, equipment, location, and so on (Mick, 2012). After the data collection was completed, as a type of a triangulation method, a thematic analysis from the interviews was combined with an analysis of the observations in

order to discover the meanings and thoughts shared by the study participants more comprehensively as well as to increase the trustworthiness of the obtained answers from the interviewees. Once the data from interviews had been analysed and coded, it was then compared with the data obtained from the observations in order to find matching answers and meanings.

3.5 Trustworthiness of the data

Lincoln and Guba (1985) maintain that trustworthy data should meet the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In this research credibility was achieved through triangulation and member checks. Transferability was obtained through the generalisation of the study findings, thus, other researchers are able to apply them to other situations and contexts. Dependability was achieved and the study could be repeated by other researchers and the findings would be consistent where other researchers are able to replicate the findings which are not of conscious or unconscious bias. Confirmability was obtained through the participants' evaluation of the findings in interview transcripts. The trustworthiness of this research was assessed by applying interpretive criteria, keeping in mind the possibility of participants' misrepresentations, and focusing on the credibility and transferability of the study so that findings were acceptable representations and could be applied to other contexts for further studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In order to establish the trustworthiness of the obtained information from the interviewees, firstly, a type of environmental triangulation was applied. This type of triangulation includes the use of different locations, settings, or other key factors that are related to a specific study and its environment that may potentially influence the received information (Fusch et al., 2018). This was accomplished by holding the individual interviews with the retreat participants at different times of days (breakfast, afternoon juice break, after dinner free time), at different locations of the retreat (indoors or outside), and on sunny or windy days. The same person was asked to be interviewed in diverse environmental settings during the first and second interview; that is, during the first interview, an individual was interviewed indoors during their free time before the yoga class started, while the second interview took place outside on the terrace during lunch break. Varied environmental situations were used to see if the answers and the openness of the interviewees remained unchanged.

Secondly, member checks were also conducted in order to further establish the credibility and trustworthiness of the collected data. Member checking is a respondent validation technique that facilitates exploring the credibility of the findings (Birt et al., 2016). In order to make sure that the findings were accurate, the researcher shared an audio file of the interviews with each

respective research participant after the interview recording was complete. The interviewees checked their answers for accuracy and resonance with their experiences (Birt et al., 2016). Moreover, the study participants had a chance to add more information if they wished or to edit what they had said while reviewing the files. During the second follow-up interview, retreat guests were also asked if they wished to add anything to their first interview that took place prior to the beginning of the retreat programme. The outcomes of this type of credibility check of the data illustrate that the interviewees had positive feedback on their given answers and no conflicts occurred. Thus, credibility and confirmability were obtained.

Moreover, triangulation techniques such as cross-checking against what the participants said, their experiences during the holistic wellness retreat experience, and observing them were also employed. Triangulation across methods was reached where different kinds of data were compared to assess whether conclusions were corroborated. This was accomplished using multiple forms of collection that included field notes, photography and audio taping of the interviews. The researcher shared with participants the observational field notes and interview recordings to validate whether the interpretations were true to their experiences.

Furthermore, the combination of the observational study with qualitative interviews provides a valuable methodological contribution to the wellness tourism marketing research domain. This methodological framework was built with the aim of becoming transferable so that other scholars and researchers can answer related questions. Therefore, the methodology meets other important criteria such as transferability because the findings can be transferred to other contexts. It should be highlighted, however, that the generalisation of any qualitative studies provokes various debates in the research world. There are different arguments with regards to the generalisation in interpretivist studies (Williams, 2000). However, statistical generalisations are not part of the agenda of interpretivism. Following interpretivist philosophy, generalisation cannot be the same as in positivist research but it is possible, with triangulation checks and methodological pluralism, to achieve 'moderatum' generalisation in qualitative research (Williams, 2000).

Moreover, observational notes of other participants were completed objectively, stating the facts of the observed environment and behaviours without including any judgements, preferences, or personal beliefs in the observational outcomes. Observer expectations as a form of potential analysis bias were also excluded. Thus, the dependability of the data is sound in that another researcher could come to similar findings due to the nature of how the data was obtained.

3.6 Research Ethics

It is important that a discussion around the ethics of this research is conducted. Data collection focused on retreat guests at the holistic wellness retreat was approved by Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC). A copy of the Ethics approval is provided in Appendix A. Moreover, prior to the data collection procedure, the research design was discussed with the researcher's supervisors and further examined and approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee.

Prior to data collection at the retreat, the researcher's identity and role as a doctoral student from Auckland University of Technology in New Zealand was fully disclosed by verbal announcement to all the potential participants before the commencement of the retreat programme. The researcher also shared information about the study and its objectives and what would be required during the data collection. This disclaimer provided a general idea around the purpose of the research and the researcher's role in it, inviting anyone to participate without any coercion or being too obtrusive. People were given an option to respond to the verbal invitation during that time or to take an hour to evaluate their option and come back to the researcher with their response either face to face or via the email address provided.

Further, before the data collection, verbal agreements and written signed consent forms (a copy can be found in Appendix F) were obtained from the study participants. Therefore, both written and verbal consent was provided. Only those who gave the authorisation and signed the form were included in this study. For privacy purposes, in order to protect identities, all participants' names were changed to pseudonyms that the interviewees had a chance to choose themselves if they wished. A copy of the Confidentiality Agreement is shown in Appendix H of this thesis.

3.7 Summary

This chapter has discussed the research design and methods undertake for this research to fully answer the research objective and questions. The chapter began with an overview of the research context studied and the rationale for the chosen methodology. The chapter also explained the research process and design of the study, followed by an explanation of the data collection and data analysis process.

Chapter 4

Findings

4.1 Introduction

This research sought to examine whether a holistic wellness retreat experience could facilitate a person's self-transformation and how this might occur. More specifically, the research aim was *to study identity transition by studying how the holistic wellness retreat experience illuminates changes in perception of self and the meaning of wellness*.

In Chapter 2, an extensive literature review was presented on wellness tourism, liminality, and the differentiation of liminality space and place, as well as the definition of identity and identity transition. The concept of self and the concept of wellness were also discussed.

Next, Chapter 3 presented the methodological design employed to address the research questions. The most efficient approach to answer the research questions was to design an interview guide and conduct individual face-to-face interviews prior to and after participants' experience of the holistic wellness retreat programme. Additionally, in order to study not only what people say they do, but also to study what they actually do, field observations were also employed during the holistic wellness retreat programme to determine the behaviour of the participants during their stay.

With a careful examination of the interviews and field observational data, the following research questions are answered in this chapter:

1. *What are participants' (a) meanings of wellness and a holistic wellness retreat experience and (b) perceptions of self, prior to and following attendance at the holistic wellness retreat?*
2. *What shapes and influences the identity transition while at the holistic wellness retreat, and how does this occur?*

The data was transcribed and coded into the identified emerging themes that are discussed in this chapter. These themes were then linked to and compared with the findings from the observational notes in order to support or enhance the findings. The current chapter opens with a section that answers the first research question and provides an in-depth explanation of how meanings of wellness and perceptions of self were revealed and transformed during the holistic wellness retreat stay experience. It also discusses the finding that the holistic wellness retreat acted as a safe liminal place that facilitated and provided an environment for self-

exploration and identity transition. These findings, therefore, address the second research question. A framework (illustrated in Figure 14, page 126) was developed in order to explain the above processes meaningfully and in greater detail, as well as to show the outcomes that were found as an outcome of identity transition while at the holistic wellness retreat. This framework, therefore, addresses what shaped and influenced identity transition while at the holistic wellness retreat and how this occurred.

The sections of this chapter follow the sequence presented as follows. Firstly, general information is outlined that includes participants' reasons for a holistic wellness retreat experience, criteria for choosing the retreat, and their motivations for this type of holiday. The above findings expand the story and act as an introduction to the discussion of findings that relate to the main research questions that emerged from the data. Thereafter, the chapter progresses into a detailed overview of the meanings of wellness and the holistic wellness retreat experience and how these evolved as a person progressed through the retreat programme stay. Shifts and changes in perception of self prior to and during attendance at the retreat are then examined. Next, the chapter discusses the second research question related to identity transition while at the holistic wellness retreat. This incorporates details on how self-work emerged and what influenced work and identity transition. The outcomes of the self-work and of the whole experience are then provided. The chapter closes with an illustration of the findings in the form of a figure and a short summary that provides an overview of the main points of the findings. Examples of interview transcripts can be found in Appendix I of the thesis. An example of observational notes is presented in Appendix J.

4.2 General information and participants' reasons for attending the retreat

Prior to discussing the findings, it is important to remember that it was decided to omit the name of the holistic wellness retreat in this thesis and the names of the participants were also changed. The participants had an opportunity to choose their own pseudonyms if they wished.

To begin, it is beneficial to open the discussion with general information on who the interviewees were and how they found out about the retreat – whether they were first-time or returning guests, whether they were familiar with the idea of a holistic wellness retreat, and what were their personal reasons for choosing the retreat at this time. It was found that the interviewees looked for a retreat online using Google search and forums. Moreover, other people motivated them to try the retreat, including friend referrals and social media communities that presented photos of happy people or positive written stories and reviews:

I found out about it from a friend. She went there a few years ago and she talked very highly about it and she enjoyed it. She highly recommended that I should go and it came up a few times over the past few years and then based on her recommendation, that's how I decided to go there. (Rachel)

This place was also recommended by wellness communities and social networks. That's why I'm here today. (Mary)

The people in the pictures, who were taking part in this retreat, looked really happy. The final thing, on the same day or that day after that, my friend just out of nowhere also mentioned this retreat. She had been here a year ago and she really liked it. It was a life changing experience and she changed in so many ways. I thought that that it was a sign for the universe in one day, twice mentioning this retreat. (Julie)

The data also revealed that the interviewees were first-time guests of this particular holistic wellness retreat. Only one woman was a returning guest and she had attended this retreat four times in the past. However, the participants had experienced a retreat experience and they all said that their past wellness retreat experiences were different from this holistic wellness retreat:

It was a yoga retreat. I have never done a holistic retreat before.... Detox health retreat that I did was really tough for the first few days but then once you adjusted, it is really good. (Alex)

Many years ago, I was some retreat but health retreats, which offer some medical procedures but it's absolutely different. (Irena)

Moreover, while in the recent past, the majority of retreat centres had a different service emphasis and focus (i.e., a yoga or religious retreat), many of the retreats nowadays tend to offer a holistic and all-inclusive approach to wellness (Kelly, 2010; Smith, 2003). This observation provided auxiliary support during my analysis. As further examples illustrate, the participants were aware of what differentiates a holistic wellness retreat from other retreat places prior to the beginning of the programme:

I have done a yoga-type retreat before but it was organised through relations, so it wasn't an organised place like here. It was in Greece but it was the type of place that just did the yoga and accommodation. It was more of a family run type. (Jessica)

I did retreats in Ireland where I'm from and this was my first retreat outside of Ireland. I had done three retreats in Ireland first and then this.... I went for the retreat experience but I found the religion too much. (Lisa)

A desire to follow a healthy lifestyle trend was another reason for the retreat experience. Some of the retreat visitors wanted to try a holistic wellness retreat because it was an unknown experience for them and the only thing they knew about it was that it is currently a popular trend around the globe:

First of all, it's just nowadays quite modern and I just would like to try" (Andrew); "Nowadays healthy lifestyle became popular in the whole world and this trend suits me" (Mary); "It's so popular now. I always wanted and finally I'm here. (Julie)

4.3 Criteria for choosing a holistic wellness retreat

At the beginning it should be clarified that not all participants in a holistic wellness retreat expects nor experiences a transformative experience, thus, there are different segments of visitors who are attracted to this type of experience at the holistic wellness retreat. As the focus of the study is on those who did go through a transformational experience, the findings sections elaborate on only this group of people. A sample of eight participants proceeded through an identity transition process and experienced transformational outcomes.

To begin with, some guests shared that they chose this retreat based on personal convenience or curiosity to visit a new country. Alex shared, *"I had never been to Spain before so it ticked off a few different boxes for me"*; however, she was travelling back home straight after the retreat so she did not have a chance to travel around Spain after the programme was completed. Alex further shared that, *"I've never been to Spain and I always was interested and this came up."* However, he also mentioned that he had another week of holiday after the retreat to explore Madrid and nearby towns. For some of the participants, the price of the retreat was an important criterion: *"[A]nd more important, was price for me. I decided just to take this retreat because it's just a reasonable price and not so hard for me"* (Irena). Others chose this retreat primarily because of the weather:

"Well, the difference would be first of all the weather, much better in Spain.... so I looked for something that was open all year round and in the sun" (Lisa)

"I tend to always first look at Spain when I haven't had a holiday for a while, so you know you're guaranteed good weather, so it'd be my first port of call to look at Spain" (Jessica).

Another important criterion for choosing this place was the various services that the retreat promised to deliver:

"It was very important for me to have some services. What they offer is quite different around the world" (Irena)

"I heard that there's a few and the only reason I didn't go is because I like to go on my own and they don't pick you up at the airport and bring you to the retreat, you have to find your own way. When I go to a place I like to be collected and brought. It is easier" (Lisa).

Some of the guests stated specifically that they were seeking for a holistic approach during this wellness holiday: *"It is my first time for a complete holistic retreat. I have done some retreats before but it was narrower orientated I should say. It was a yoga retreat and I have never do a holistic retreat before"* (Alex) and *"I looked for wellbeing, not a yoga retreat, but wellbeing because I wanted something more holistic"* (Lisa). These examples demonstrate that people had some knowledge of what the holistic wellness retreat was and they expected to receive benefits that not only suited their personal

convenience and personal circumstances, but also allowed them to rest physically and mentally on a deeper level in a holistic environment.

Overall, participants were interested in various activities but also sought rest, relaxation, and a holiday frame of mind. Jessica, for instance, stated that, *“I wanted to plan a holiday, so I thought that what I needed at the time was to do exercise as well, yoga cos I love yoga and just to rest.”* During the observations, Jessica showed interest in the diversity of the activities at the wellness retreat; however, she preferred to undertake activities in a relaxed and balanced way, which meant attending some workshops while skipping others so that she could enjoy her own self, nature, the environment and so on. Rachel also mentioned that she was looking for a retreat that offered a fine balance between a healthy but not overly ‘strict’ approach: *“It [advertisement on social media] wasn’t too strict but it was healthy and it was vegan food, so that was perfect.”* She did not attend all of the workshops and instead chose to stay by the pool or have a nap in her room from time to time. Several times, she was also observed alone reading and writing something in her journal.

The holistic wellness retreat offered a healthy approach that included every element of wellness; however, at the same time, the retreat’s policy meant that no-one was forced to participate in all the offered activities. Retreat guests, therefore, were able to choose what to do and what to skip, meaning that they had freedom of choice rather than needing to adhere to a strict compulsory programme. This approach of working and resting at the same time in a balanced manner is named within this doctoral dissertation as ‘rest and work’ and is referred to and discussed often throughout this chapter and those that follow.

4.4 Motivations for a holistic wellness retreat

When discussing their criteria for choosing the retreat, the guests outlined that they were there for rest and relaxation. However, during the interviews, they contemplated their reasons for attending the retreat on a deeper level and more meaningful insights started to emerge, that is, they came to the retreat for a combination of purposes, the most important of which was to have a rest while also undertaking self-work. Working on self is a form of identity work that includes various actions towards self-improvements (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010). The following section, therefore, is divided into the relevant themes of rest, rest and work, and work. Table 5 below summarises these motives based on the themes.

Table 5: Motivations for Undertaking a Holistic Wellness Retreat

Rest	Rest and work on self	Work on self
Relaxation activities To feel taken care of To escape from routine & reality	To try a new experience Balance between rest and self-work To take care of self Social engagement	To look for a change through activities To become a better version of self To learn and discover new things about self To connect with the inner self To gain clarity on self and life

To rest

As mentioned above, the interviewees stated that one of their reasons for undertaking the retreat was to rest and relax. Some of them discussed the specific activities they wanted to try and were looking forward to them because they would help them to achieve mental or physical rest and relaxation. One of the most common examples of such activities was meditation:

I want to get my mind switched off for a little way, to rest.... I guess meditation cos that would be a chance to get away from everything and clear my mind. (Alex)

This year what I'm looking for is I want to completely relax my mind, to make less decisions.... I came for relaxation... I want to relax, unwind, forget about work, do all of those things. (Lisa)

An element of interviewees' desire for rest and relaxation was to feel they were being taken care of, that they were taking a break from their busy lives or were even running away from them. For instance, Lisa, who was sitting in the sunlight wearing sunglasses during the first interview, was very open that she wanted to have a holistic break where she did not need to worry about any of her usual duties:

I want to ... just be taken care of in terms of the food and the exercise and everything is organised ... needing that kind of grounding and support from someone ... just needing a break. (Lisa)

Generally, interviewees felt that their reason for attending the holistic wellness retreat was to take a break from a busy lifestyle or to escape from their problems, responsibilities, and routines. The data analysis revealed that some of the respondents wanted to hide from their stressful and sometimes even nerve-racking reality:

I think the first one was I wanted a break and because I'm taking time off work, it was a good time to do that. (Rachel)

I was looking for a getaway from a busy lifestyle. Lately I've been working non-stop, doing crazy hours, maybe 13-14 hours a day and I really wanted some time away, somewhere quiet and peaceful.... I'm really trying to get away from people but I guess I'm not worried about other people around me. (Alex)

I want to forget and get away from work and some issues at home. (Lisa)

In conclusion, analysis of interviewees' reasons for undertaking a holistic wellness retreat found that the theme 'to rest' was paramount. These guests arrived at the wellness holiday destination seeking rest and relaxation on mental and physical levels as well as in the hope of being taken care of while taking a step back from such daily duties such as cleaning and cooking. They also sought a break from a busy lifestyle and an escape from a stressful reality in order to engage in specific retreat activities that would lead to deeper relaxation. Once the respondents had settled into the retreat, they shared further reasons for undertaking the holistic wellness retreat during the first interview.

To rest and work on self

Guests shared that they felt that they were being taken care of and that they were in a safe and supportive environment while at the retreat premises. They felt able to unwind and exhale all their 'externally existing' life problems by just being, resting, and relaxing whilst also consuming and engaging in the various services and activities the retreat had to offer. Thus, participation in the retreat activities became 'self-work' for the guests. As a result, the second theme emerged: people went to the wellness retreat not just to rest but to combine rest and work on self simultaneously.

For instance, one of the predominant codes for this theme was the opportunity to try a new experience that incorporated both 'rest' and 'work on self' under one umbrella. In order to explain this phenomenon, it is beneficial to illustrate what the participants meant by a new experience. They wanted new experiences that involved trying new activities they had never experienced before within the safe and supportive environment of the holistic wellness retreat centre. The participants expected that new experiences would add fresh diversity to their lives and enhance their purviews, which is a type of self-work:

Now I just try to find out about everything. It's very interesting what they offer and I would like to have everything that they offer. I am very excited.... It just feels time and just something new for me.... I would like to have something new and try some health and lifestyle. They offer some interesting things that I can get here. (Irena)

My friend invited me to join her vacation and try a new experience of a holistic wellness retreat.... At first, I suppose to try something new every day and to bring diversity in everyday routine. (Mary)

The retreat guests also found it important that the rest and work ‘load’ occurred simultaneously and in a balanced way. For instance, Jessica shared during the first interview that she wanted to work on self but still wanted to experience the retreat as a holiday. Moreover, she was observed participating in a number of activities and workshops, while also having a great deal of time allocated for relaxation:

I wanted to plan a holiday, so I thought that what I needed at the time was to do exercise as well, yoga cos I love yoga and just to rest. (Jessica)

Furthermore, while they wanted to feel they were being taken care of, participants also shared that they wanted to engage in some form of self-care. This reflects a focus on self and self needs, putting the self first and being kind to self, and prioritising the daily schedule to meet individual requirements:

I'm here to care for myself, to give back and to fill my cup. (Lisa)

It is a nice thing to do for myself after working for a long time and working really hard. That was one reason, something to do. I dunno if this makes sense but being kind to yourself. (Rachel)

The participants shared that they wanted to rest for the first couple of days of the retreat programme and then work on self following that. Lisa was a returning guest and she knew the process ahead of her. She had lost the ability to deal with stress and to live a balanced life and went to the retreat with a conscious knowledge of her situation. Thus, although she came to the retreat to rest, a further underlying reason for her wellness holiday was to get back into a self-care routine, her rituals, and balanced well-being, and to return to a better version of self:

Yeah, so that's when it's really working. There are certain months of the year when I'm doing that. Just before I came over here, I was not doing that (self-care routine)... Yes, because of stress and because of time commitments and demands, so demands and then stress. (Lisa)

Because the holistic wellness retreat centre is a place where many people from different countries stay, it means the centre is a social environment. Participants perceived the social aspect of the retreat experience as both a reason to rest and to work on self. They shared that being in a social environment of like-minded people not only provided social opportunities to meet, talk, and share cultures and experiences (“I am looking for new acquaintances with likeminded people” [Mary]), but it also subconsciously motivated them to do more self-work while being in the social environment of the retreat: “[B]ecause everybody is here for self-care and so I get into that mindset of I'm here to care for myself” [Lisa]). Later in this chapter, this phenomenon of balanced socialising will be discussed in greater detail. For now, it is enough to state that it was imperative for the participants to be surrounded by like-minded people who came to the retreat with the same goal of socialising within a safe and relaxed atmosphere and to use this social support as

extra motivation to work on self. To conclude this section, the theme rest and work includes such attributes as trying a new experience in order to add diversity to life, to rest and work on self simultaneously in a balanced way, to undertake a self-care routine, and to rest and work through socialising.

To work on self

The final theme that emerged in terms of reasons for undertaking the holistic wellness retreat holiday was to work on self. For instance, the reason ‘looking for a change’ meant not just to rest but also to perform extensive self-work, while also exploring new and unknown activities that were offered by the programme. Rachel, for example, outlined in the first interview that prior to the programme commencing, she was looking for a change with the aim of trying new activities in order to enhance and improve her skills and work on self. She was prepared to put herself in an unknown scenario while feeling safe and supported within the retreat centre.

I had never done yoga before, so I think if I really want to get into yoga, I will need to practise it more and maybe do a bit more exploring about that.... That was one reason, something to do. (Rachel)

As the discussion progressed, another deeper reason for the retreat stay emerged. Participants were looking to work on self in order to become better versions of self or to make their individual lives better. The participants showed a high level of commitment to this goal by attending the workshops, improving skills in specific interest areas, working on their physical body to get fit, improving health through the daily juice detox programme, and so on. While the versions of self were different for each individual, the main goal remained the same – to improve and become better:

[A]nd maybe give me a boost in motivation, to be healthier and be more active. (Rachel)

I would like to get motivated, to be more disciplined, to get some new projects, to start doing something life changing, my life changing. I feel like I do wanna do anything.... I feel that there is more in our lives and I need to move there from there from this life to some other, where there is more good stuff and life changing stuff. (Julie)

I think we don't need to change ourselves, we need to stay ourselves but we need to work on ourselves, to get better on yoga, to change from.... I'm vegetarian right now. For a year now, I've wanted to change my life, my food habits from vegetarian to vegan, so avoid all the animal products and self- transformation, to be more mindful in life, to go with your meditations through all your life, 24/7. It's like self-work, self-development. I don't want say change, I don't want to change myself. I want but I think we need to work on ourselves as we are and don't try to change ourselves but change our habits, our life habits. (Julie)

Furthermore, work on self also included learning new things about self or the environment around them. The examples were different for each participant. For instance, Alex, who borrowed books from the retreat's library on various self-development topics, made the following statement during the first interview:

[A]nd maybe to discover the new sides of me as well.... I wouldn't mind walking around just because I'm at a new place and I enjoy seeing new places and exploring them. I mean, I'm not a big chef but maybe a cooking presentation could be great, like one of those demos that is in the programme. (Alex)

Another example is Rachel who wanted to improve her skills while also getting out of her comfort zone. She wanted to try a new type of diet that she had never experienced before, which is a plant-based diet. She wanted to experiment at the retreat and to see self as a vegan, while also engaging in yoga activities more frequently than in her usual environment at home:

I had never done yoga before, so I think if I really want to get into yoga, I will need to practise it more and maybe do a bit more exploring about that.... Another reason was to learn a little bit more about healthy eating. (Rachel)

Later during the retreat stay, however, observational data revealed contradictory details: one day Rachel said she missed drinking normal tea and coffee (rather than herbal tea) and therefore she left the retreat to enjoy those treats despite still being open and interested in the plant-based food served daily. According to a conversation with another retreat guest during the dinner gathering, this behaviour was due to her feeling of being forced out of her comfort zone. This might explain why she thought about her usual 'comfort foods' while still staying engaged in exploring the new activities and trying new self-roles. During the second interview, Rachel also shared the following:

I cheated a couple of times, so I wish I hadn't done that, just to see what the difference would be but at the same time, I wasn't going there to lose 10 lbs or anything like that. I wanted to enjoy my time there too. (Rachel)

To connect with inner self was another reason for self-work while at the retreat. This was clearly illustrated in Lisa's comments during the first and second interviews:

"I can just get back in and contact a connection with myself.... It's for my heart and my intuition and going deep and connecting with myself,... I came to connect with myself."

The reason for connecting with inner self was that the retreat environment offered a safe space to go inwards, slow down and connect with one's own needs but also to reflect on self and life. Lisa also added:

"[T]he workshop is for my heart and my intuition and going deep and connecting with myself, so I do that in the workshop because we don't share information. I write things down and it just comes out when I'm in the right zone." (Lisa)

During the observations, she spent time journaling, very often during siesta and free time, and past research supports that people journal for self-reflection and self-connection (Hubbs & Brand, 2005). Through the activity of reflective journaling, people start to critically examine their own feelings and thoughts through self-questioning and self-exploratory experiences (Wade, 1988). Another participant, Rachel, also mentioned the importance of

connection with self: *“Then, I’d say was to have some time to reflect.”* She used the retreat environment to self reflect and she often allocated time during the siesta to be alone to write or read or simply to sit and admire nature or go inwards, as she explained to others during the observations.

Lastly, gaining clarity on self and life was also part of the work on self. The retreat was a platform on which guests could clear their mind to gain clarity on self and life, as opposed to prior to the retreat when guests felt lost in terms of their life paths:

I need a bit of headspace to think about things in my life at the moment and to regain confidence, motivation and everything they’re offering, the detox. (Jessica)

[A]nd maybe gain some clarity of where I want to go next in life. (Rachel)

To summarise the findings from the above themes, it was clear that the holistic wellness retreat was used as a platform to not only relax and unwind but also to undertake enormous work on self. This work included such codes as looking for a change through new activities, becoming a better version of self, using relaxation as a form of self-care which then automatically lead to self-work, going back to a better known version of self or improving self to reveal a better unknown version of self, learning new things about self or trying a new self (trying a new role), connecting with inner self, and gaining clarity on self and life. The above findings demonstrate that participants used the holistic wellness retreat as a means to get deeper into the self. However, a large emphasis should be placed on the self-trial that participants wanted to engage in while at the retreat: they wanted to try self in a new and unknown role while being in the safe and supportive environment of the holistic wellness retreat. The reason for such emphasis is that self-trial occurred numerous times during the retreat programme amongst all of the participants. The holistic wellness retreat acted as a liminal place where the participants tried new and unknown experiences and learnt new things about self through these activities. This experience will be further explained later in this chapter. The participants of the current study came to the holistic wellness retreat to balance rest and work on self, and as the data analysis progressed further, it became apparent that they were also clearly looking for inclusive work on self in order to change or improve some aspects of self. Overall, the participants desired to rest but also to undertake self-exploration and self-work, which is strongly linked to the theory of identity work and identity play (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016; Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010) and is further elaborated on in Chapter Five.

It should be highlighted that some of the above themes are related to general tourism motives, however, this research provides a more extensive list of motivations that give the first overview of the progression from rest to self-work and then identity transition. While in some

types of travel, predominantly long-term tourism (i.e. White and White, 2004), there could be motivations for both rest and self-work, there is hardly any self-work occurring during short-term tourism. However, current research adds value by illustrating that holistic wellness retreat tourism as a short-term type of vacation could facilitate work on self.

A holistic wellness retreat involves not only taking part in relaxation-related activities but also learning different strategies and tools to make one's life complete, balanced, healthy, and happy in order to facilitate long-term holistic wellness. However, for that to occur, it is important that retreat guests have a desire to learn new activities and the motivation to engage in these activities. To summarise the above, a holistic wellness retreat provides a safe environment for self-exploration through rest and work on self by offering activities and programmes that suit guests' needs.

4.5 Meaning of wellness and the holistic wellness retreat experience

*“Wellness is finding yourself in an age of mega stress....
Well-being can, therefore, be understood as a holistic philosophy of life”
Schobersberger et al. (2004, p. 200)*

This section discusses themes relating to the meaning of wellness and how they emerged and transformed during the course of the holistic wellness retreat stay experience. While analysing the data from the semi-structured face-to-face interviews, various themes emerged that answer the research question and which will be discussed in this section. These themes were divided and allocated into ‘before’ or ‘after’ the retreat programme. The meaning of wellness before the retreat stay included the following themes: wellness of the mind characteristics, wellness of the body characteristics, and mind and body union. This clearly illustrates that wellness is about the mind, body, soul connection. The data on the meaning of wellness after the retreat stay showed more interconnected and progressive responses from respondents whereby the term ‘wellness’ was regarded as a sense of balance between all the elements and most importantly, an achievable state of being rather than just a ‘dream’ as suggested during the first interviews. A summary of themes and codes for the meaning of wellness is presented in Table 6 below. (HWR is the acronym for ‘holistic wellness retreat’).

Table 6: How did People Define Wellness (Meaning of Wellness) Prior to and Following the HWR Stay Experience?

Prior to the retreat	Following the completion of the retreat
<i>Wellness of the mind:</i> Calmness and mental strength Positivity Soul connection Nature connection <i>Wellness of the body:</i> Health and wellbeing Gentle and slow movements Glowing skin Confident physical posture <i>Mind-body union:</i> Healthy lifestyle Harmony and balance	<i>Inter-connection between mind and body:</i> Balance between wellness of mind and body that is achievable Wellness is a doable goal

In order to determine the meaning of wellness and its progression as experienced in an all-inclusive wellness retreat stay, during the interviews the participants were asked direct questions on their opinions about wellness and wellness retreat concepts and encouraged to share more meaningful insights through various questions built with the projective techniques outlined in Chapter 3. This approach allowed deeper inspection of the meanings they hold for wellness.

4.5.1 Meaning of wellness before the holistic wellness retreat stay experience

During the first interview, interviewees shared that they understood the deeper meaning behind their wellness holiday. In general, the interviewees' responses to the term 'wellness' focused on mental and physical health and wellbeing. This is further explained in the following subsections.

Defining Wellness (Pre-) Theme: Wellness of the mind

In the first interview, prior to the retreat programme, respondents identified wellness in simple terms, using words rather than full and complete sentences to describe it. For instance, wellness was firstly linked with the mind of a person with the use of terms such as mental health and mental balance, calmness and mental strength, a sense of positivity, connection with one's soul or a spiritual connection, as well as connection with nature.

The goal of achieving calmness during the retreat was expressed by referring to mental stability, finding time for meditations in daily life, and learning different meditation and mindfulness techniques at the retreat. This illustrates that mental strength and mindfulness were also strongly associated with wellness. Jessica shared that the 'wellness person' is someone "who is not going into panic thinking", while Mary shared that wellness for her is "mindfulness through your day".

Inner or mental calmness was also associated with wellness and strongly linked with positivity and friendliness towards self, others and life in general. In other words, wellness was regarded as the calm and positive perception of self, others, and various life events:

I just imagine, for me, it's just a first impression and just a calm person who is sitting in any place, for example, just looking around and just feeling good and just does only kind and some friendly ... how to say ... friendly environment from this person to other people ... who has some balance in mind, a calm person and a very friendly person to all environment, I think so... It must be all people, men and women, it doesn't matter. (Irena)

[S]omeone that is joyful in their life, someone who is not affected by what's going on around them and can carry out tasks without stressing out too much. (Alex)

An inward balance also incorporated a sense of connection with the soul, which was also found to be linked with the concept of wellness. An ability to connect with one's soul was linked with a person's spiritual development. Indeed, this finding supports past research that emphasises evidence of spirituality and spiritual identity development when describing the concept of wellness (e.g., Poll & Smith, 2003; Voigt et al., 2011).

It involves some soul, how you feel, just the health lifestyle and just really generally, it's like a healthy lifestyle and big meaning. (Irena)

[T]hat I am thinking less, I am connected with my spirit and with my sense of being. (Lisa)

Connection with nature means that a person, who has a strong state of wellness and wellbeing, lives closer to nature and in balance with nature: *“Wellness is about proximity to nature and beauty in all its manifests”* – said Mary, a mid-20s participant who lacked involvement with nature because she lived in a large city of many million people. Mary felt that being surrounded by nature would bring her closer to a desired wellness. This strong urge to be closer to nature was evident in Mary’s definition of wellness: *“She’s like a blossom tree, absorbed sunshine energy, softness of the water and strength of the earth.”* Furthermore, Mary was not the only participant who found a link between wellness and a person’s connection with nature: others also thought of this when expressing their associations with wellness:

I am imagining a young, naked woman - naked because I think that it is natural and it’s beautiful. It seems like they should be a [inaudible] nature and it’s who we are. She’s got some flowers in her hair and she’s also got so many animals and birds around her ... and so many small animals around her and birds. They also look happy and they’re just jumping around her and trying to get on her hands and jumping with her.
(Julie)

Defining Wellness (Pre-) Theme: Wellness of the body

The meaning of wellness also included body characteristics. In analysing the interview and observational data, the following factors emerged that connected health and wellbeing with the physical body: moving the body gently and slowly when walking or doing other various daily activities such as eating, talking, or any other movements apart from sport related exercises; having glowing healthy skin; and always having strong and confident straight spinal posture.

The interviewees mentioned that wellness was linked to having good physical health: *“In my imagination, he or she looks quite healthy”* and *“It’s definitely a healthy person.”* Their interview responses were also supported by observations whereby people at the retreat focused a great deal on the physical aspects of wellness by engaging in various physical activities and nourishing their bodies with healthy foods. Rachel discussed her role model, a social media public figure who motivates thousands of people to live a healthy and balanced life:

Wellness, I think having a healthy lifestyle, eating well, eating lots of fruit and vegetables, not eating a lot of fat or processed foods and then having a good amount of physical activity, so incorporating those two things into your everyday life. Yeah, that’s what I think ... she eats healthy and she gives them really healthy eating habits.... She posts on Facebook things that she makes, meals and stuff and she also tries to be active. (Rachel)

Another physical body characteristic of wellness was regarded as movements that are slow and gentle. The limitation of this code, however, was that the respondents applied this characteristic to only feminine aspects of wellness: *“She is just walking slowly and gently, like a real woman, so that’s what I imagine”* (Julie). Indeed, Julie purposefully walked very gently and slowly

when she was observed during her retreat stay. The statements of others also supported the study observations. For example, Mary, who shared that she lived a very hectic and stressful life in her home city, purposefully moved slowly and mindfully while at the retreat. In contrast, male respondents did not mention slow movements as a part of the wellness definition; nevertheless, they also slowed down during their retreat stay experience.

Having a healthy glowing skin was one of the most commonly stated associations:

“It seems to me an ancient goddess, with sparkling skin and blushed cheeks” (Mary); “Glowing, healthy and health wise, they would have a glowing look” (Jessica); “Their body and their skin is glowing and they just look well” (Lisa); “I guess, with clear stance, clear voice and healthy skin.... You know, people that you call glowing (Alex)

The fact that the respondents referred to glowing skin and external looks offers unique and valuable contributions to the wellness research. Further, this was also supported by the observational study where it was noted that the retreat guests had diverse experiences in terms of their physical body. For instance, the most extraordinary finding was that guests felt that experiencing detox in their physical bodies further purified their mental state. More specifically, some of the guests initially had a negative experience from activities and food they were eating at the retreat with the food in particular leading to headaches, digestion problems, laziness, craving for unhealthy food and alcohol, and mood swings, which are all normal symptoms of detox during a cleanse (Barton-Schuster, 2018). However, as their experience at the retreat progressed and they showed more commitment to the retreat rules and activities, the headaches disappeared and guests stated they improved their health either by losing weight or developing better skin (based on the comments made at social gatherings at the retreat). Towards the end of the retreat, once their physical body had normalised, the guests engaged in more activities and started to enjoy the new type of food offered at the retreat. Some even said that they would continue with the same diet once they returned home after the completion of the programme. The above observations show that participants’ association of wellness with a glowing skin, as shared during the first interview, had very strong support.

Wellness was also found to be strongly associated with an inner confidence linked to a straight spinal posture. More specifically, a strong and confident physical posture was associated with mentally strong people who have total self-acceptance and self-confidence. Therefore, it can be argued that a strong posture leads to confidence, which in turn facilitates wellness, not only physically but also mentally:

Okay, so they would be very light and standing, would have very good posture but not too straight but just that they're able to hold themselves more comfortably and more upright. (Lisa)

Someone who walks tall, with good posture, confident. (Jessica)

Defining Wellness (Pre-) Theme: Mind-body union

Mind-body union is an outcome of the analysis that emerged from the findings from the two previous themes. Wellness as a term was not limited to only mental or physical characteristics but also involved the interconnection between the two elements. In other words, it was found that physical and mental components co-existed together and were not perceived separately. Participants felt that the strong interconnection between physical and mental dimensions creates a healthy lifestyle with a sense of harmony and balance between physical and mental well-being.

In other words, in the minds of the participants, a healthy lifestyle was not limited to physical aspects; rather, they regarded an integration of physical and mental health as essential to a healthy lifestyle that one should aspire to in order to achieve wellness. To further support this, the participants were committed and engaged during their retreat stay to not only take part in fitness and related classes or to eat plant-based foods, but also to meditate and to read specific literature on mental health and how the mind works.

When I think of wellness, I think of it in terms of mind, body, spirit and gut. I think of it as I am eating well and that I am thinking less, I am connected with my spirit and with my sense of being, so mind and body. In terms of the body, that I feel relaxed and the tension is leaving my back and my shoulders and I just feel more grounded and overall, that I just feel well. So, that's wellbeing. (Lisa)

Furthermore, balance and inner harmony were other findings related to wellness on both mental and physical levels. The participants shared during their first interviews that this sense of balance acted as an end goal to total wellness:

It is a state of your mind and a state of your body where everything is working, nothing is missing, everything is a whole, when your body is as healthy as it can be and your mind is as healthy as it can be.... I guess wellness is the state where everything is like a clock, never missing a beat, everything is absolutely fine and the body is naturally healthy and the mind is clear. (Alex)

Wellness means to me harmonies, a combination of three components – body, mind, health. (Mary)

It doesn't matter if he or she is young or old but for me, wellness is again a balance between mental and physical condition. (Andrew)

She is a mum, she has three kids, she eats healthy and she gives them really healthy eating habits, partly probably cos of her job as a dietician. She posts on Facebook things that she makes, meals and stuff and she also tries to be active and it's hard when she has three kids. I think she does a good job. (Rachel)

Finally, the above outcomes illustrate that wellness prior to the holistic wellness retreat experience was strongly perceived as a state of balance and union between physical and mental health. An interesting metaphor emerged during the first interview with the participants – the association of wellness with a happy couple. This comparison emphasises the union between

mind and body and can be further linked to the connection between all elements of wellness and the union between them – yin and yang, man and woman, mind and body. This comparison beautifully ends this section of the findings: *“To me, wellness would be, I guess, a family or a couple, like the two parts of it, like a yin and yang” (Alex); “Man, woman, couple. Happy couple” (Jessica).*

4.5.2 Meaning of wellness following the holistic wellness retreat stay experience

Defining Wellness (Post-) Theme: Inter-connection between mind and body

The findings on the meaning of wellness after the holistic wellness retreat included further and more meaningful inter-connections between mind and body. Moreover, after completing the retreat programme, the participants no longer utilised simple statements or general characteristics of the wellness concept, as they tended to do during their first interviews; rather, they explained the concept of wellness as a doable goal and an achievable state.

Importantly, it should be taken into account that the positive outcomes participants spoke of could relate to how the holistic wellness retreat was marketed to them (including word of mouth), thus, their expectations of outcomes might be related to an advertising or communication material as well as word of mouth narratives they were exposed to when searching for a holistic wellness retreat that could help them.

The inter-connection between mind and body was also mentioned after the retreat and was strongly linked with the wellness concept. Initially, it may sound like participants' perspectives on the union between mind and body as discussed in the first interviews were the same as in the follow-up interviews; however, their meanings, even though centred on the same ideas, were deeper the second time. For instance, on the conclusion of the retreat, participants stated that,

One of the key things for wellness right now is a sense of balance, clarity and rejuvenation ... so wellness, mind, body, spirit, all of that balance.... I feel grounded, clarity and I feel I have that now. (Lisa)

It starts from good health, like mindfulness work, love, happiness, all the good feelings and then it grows to something more. I won't be able to explain. (Julie)

Overall, during the first interview, participants felt that even though they knew what wellness was, it would be hard to achieve as they did not know how. However, after the completion of the retreat programme, wellness was perceived as a doable and achievable goal. Furthermore, the participants also stated that they had developed a clear vision of how to achieve their goals and expectations of self and wellness that they had referred during the first interview:

To me, wellness right now, is a goal that I'd like to achieve and I can see how it is totally achievable. I also gained an understanding that wellness is something that we can do, something that can be easily incorporated into our life, we just need to try a little bit more and find less excuses for ourselves. I totally

think that this is something that we can all do. I think wellness is an achievable state that all of us should be in. (Alex)

Well I suppose with Brene Brown and I do feel that I do achieve that kind of sameness, you know, no matter what I achieve in life that I will always feel sameness for others and connection so I don't feel like we are as different, the similarities, I would like to have her as a role model because I like to continuously aspire to something and but maybe we're not as different. (Lisa)

To summarise, during the first set of interviews, the participants tended to define the concept of wellness with simple statements, along with their thoughts on the wellness retreat and what they wanted to achieve from it. However, they did not have ideas on how to achieve the lifestyle they imagined; instead, they hoped and expected that the holistic wellness retreat would help them. The definition and perception of wellness evolved following the holistic wellness retreat experience, with a greater emphasis on achieving a union between mind and body. The meaning of wellness shifted in the minds of the retreat guests to a more comprehensive and richer concept – people had gained a clearer understanding of how wellness is practically linked to the enhancement of a healthy lifestyle, as well as self and life improvements. Their goals for wellness were achieved and new explorations of self occurred. To combine the above information with the findings on the holistic wellness retreat role stated in a previous section, it should be emphasised that in the view of the participants, wellness is not a state but an achievable goal. This goal can be achieved through engagement with the holistic wellness retreat as a liminal place and through commitment to various retreat activities. This in turn supports the argument that wellness leads to the identity transition – a concept that is strongly linked to the next research question discussed below.

In summary, the findings show that wellness can be defined not as a state but an achievable goal through engagement with a holistic wellness retreat as a liminal place and through commitment to various retreat activities. More discussion on these findings is provided in the following sections of this chapter.

4.6 Perception of self

Personal transformation is a dynamic, uniquely individualized process of expanding consciousness whereby individuals become critically aware of old and new self-views and choose to integrate these views into a new self-definition.
(Wade, 1998)

The perception of self and how it may transform and evolve during a holistic wellness retreat experience are discussed below (Table 7):

Table 7: How did People Define Self (Perception) Prior to and Following the HWR Stay Experience?

Prior to the retreat	Following the completion of the retreat
<i>Mind:</i> Tired and stressed Unhappy Shy Frustrated/lost	<i>Body:</i> Recharged, rested Fresh and rejuvenated Balanced Cleaner and stronger <i>Mind:</i> Motivated Calm/inner peace Self-acceptance/self-care (focus within) Self-confidence <i>Outcomes and directions for the future:</i> Better version of self and belief in self

4.6.1 Perception of self before the holistic wellness retreat stay experience

Defining Self (Pre-) Theme: Mind

During the first set of face-to-face interviews, the participants talked about their perception of self by expressing their emotions and character traits. Prior to the beginning of the retreat programme, the participants often looked stressed and tired, and their responses during the first interviews displayed a negative outlook on self and current life situations. The retreat guests focused purely on how they perceived self mentally, with their emotions summarised as follows: being tired and stressed; frustrated and lost; panicking and worried; unhappy about self; shy; unmotivated and lazy. These feelings had links with their reasons for undertaking the retreat programme, especially their desire to rest and relax in order to improve their emotional and mental state. Research in psychology (e.g., Moksnes et al., 2010) shows that feeling negative emotions about self lead to negative perceptions of self. The participants mentioned prior to the beginning of the retreat that they felt very stressed and tired which resulted in them perceiving themselves as unhappy. Some were very shy and others also showed a high level of frustration and sense of being lost in terms of what to do in life or how to improve their state of wellness.

The participants started their first interview by pointing out how tired and exhausted they felt prior to the commencement of the retreat. Generally, tiredness for them included physical

fatigue; however, the focus was primarily on the mental and emotional drain of their lives. The observational study further supported this and it was noticed that at the beginning of the retreat, guests looked tired and less smiley. They also refused to attend some of the activities during the first day of the retreat programme and chose to sit or eat alone most of the time. The guests also discussed accumulated stress prior to coming to the retreat, which could have been a realisation in response to a new and unknown environment in which they were less social and less active:

Yes, because of stress and because of time commitments and demands, so demands and then stress.... Tired, drained, against the wall, needing that kind of grounding and support from someone so just feeling completely worn out and fed up, just needing a break. (Lisa)

During the year, I worked really hard and I'm really exhausted. I just feel that I need to have some rest. (Irena)

Not at the moment. I don't think I'm similar at the moment. I mean my mood goes up and down and it gets stressed every now and then and the mind just never stops.... This is what I feel right now, like I never stop, I never stop to think. This is to represent all the thoughts that is going on in my life, my busy lifestyle, so definitely number 3 looks the closest to my state right now. (Alex)

The first day I arrived, I was really, really tired because my flight took off at half five in the morning, so it meant I left my house at half one in the morning to get to the airport, so I was so tired on the first day.... I was tired, I think I had a mental block.... I was feeling run down for a while, especially after the winter.... Well, it's accumulated fatigue and a strong desire to relieve strain. (Jessica)

Some of the retreat participants also felt unhappy about self and their lives. This can be classified as a perception of self rather than an experienced emotion. For instance, prior to coming to the wellness retreat, guests experienced various changes in their lifestyle which resulted in a mental response that represented unhappiness. This may have been the outcome of an unwillingness to accept the negative amendments in their daily routines. However, an emotional response creates a new self-image and self-perception (Leary, 2007; Tracy & Robins, 2007). In this study it was a perception of self as an unhappy and unsuccessful person. This was clearly expressed by retreat participants during the first set of individual interviews:

I don't think I have one at the moment. I used to play quite a lot of sports, like soccer and be active like hiking, mountain climbing but I don't do any more of that. It's all faded away with my busy lifestyle. (Alex)

It's all about big city life, crowds of people, lack of time, awful ecology and traffic jams. That's why this is my choice, I feel like this.... Yes, everyday routine, as I have already said, it's something awful. (Mary)

While sharing their responses, it was obvious that participants wanted to take a break during the retreat to recharge, which supports the abovementioned finding that the primary motivation for the retreat guests was to rest and relax. However, as our interviews progressed, they began to further elaborate on their self-perceptions and more specifically, on how they wanted to change these perceptions through self-work while at the retreat. For instance, some of the guests mentioned that they perceived themselves as shy individuals who were afraid of other

people's judgements. This was further supported through observations, whereby they presented as shy people of a closed personality type and were unable to communicate with others around them easily. This was not an ideal state for them; however, their awareness of this trait showed that they were ready for a change and that this was an area they needed to work on:

I felt a bit nervous because sometimes I get shy because of other people.... During the transformation, we usually experience some emotions, some unusual feelings and I'm really afraid what I might feel or what I might experience because of that. I'm shy, I'm shy of what other people will think of me, how I behave, what I would feel. (Julie)

A further self-perception prior to the beginning of the retreat was being frustrated by self, life, and sometimes even other people around them. It was noticed during the observations that participants occasionally judged while at the retreat. The reason for this behaviour could be that they had placed high expectations on self and, therefore, on others around them too. For example, during one of the dinner gatherings, a number of guests were complaining that they wanted to eat their usual 'normal' meals and Julie said with annoyance, "Come on, we are at the detox programme, aren't we?" She quickly became silent and looked embarrassed about her self-expression in front of everyone in the room. This further supports two important findings, which are that participants showed they were aware of their frustration and that they were ready for self-transitions and changes in their lives as a result of participation in the holistic wellness retreat. This shows that they were eager and willing to do self-work to overcome the situation. Moreover, self-frustration can often be an outcome of feeling lost. Jessica shared that she tended to feel internally panicked when talking about the uncertainty in her life: "[G]etting a bit worried about things but maybe not showing it on the outside but feeling it.... Inside, I was panicking.... Some days, maybe within my thoughts or between making decisions." One of the other biggest examples was Rachel, who came to the retreat after quitting her previous job where she had spent years building her career. The feeling of being lost and the inability to find answers to what to do next in life next or even who she was created further frustration and a sense of loss of her old self:

I am feeling a little bit frustrated ... the decisions I need to make about what I wanna do, I'm unsure.... The person looks like they're frustrated, so I am feeling a little bit frustrated, the decisions I need to make about what I wanna do, I'm unsure. I think also just that person seems like they're tired and their posture, so just tired and run down a little bit and at a point where they're not moving forward, maybe a little bit stuck. (Rachel)

It also should be emphasised that prior to the retreat, participants focused deeply on the mental side of self – expressing a negative mental state of wellbeing and a negative mental perception of self. This was because they were soon to commence an identity search and a reconstruction process while at the retreat centre and their self-expectations were to work on their 'aspirational' (aspiring to become) selves. During these types of scenarios, people can find

themselves within a transitionally liminal state when they are in-between who they used to be and who they wish to become. The subjective feeling of being in a liminal state prior to the beginning of the holistic wellness retreat experience was found to provoke various but usually negative emotions and self-opinions, reflecting on participants' limiting self-beliefs and subconscious fears of being in an unknown environment or the need for a new self-role.

Finally, it should be outlined that the reason for only negative self-perceptions could be due to the nature of the holistic wellness retreat – people go there for a reason, and each case of the study had their own reasons, story or motives, i.e., they go there to explore self, change something or complete a form of self-work as well as rest and relax. This could be a potential explanation why the participants exhibited positive motivations for the holistic wellness retreat holiday (focusing on future outcomes), while their self-perception prior to their stay was negative (outlining what is happening at the present moment).

4.6.2 Perception of self following the holistic wellness retreat stay experience

Following the retreat, it was clear that self-perception had evolved and transformed dramatically over the course of the retreat. For instance, there were noticeable positive shifts in mental state and visible changes in physical body. Moreover, during the interviews, participants were more relaxed, open, and willing to talk about self and future plans.

Defined Self (Post-) Theme: Body

The perceptions of self that were relevant to the physical body included feeling recharged, relaxed, and rejuvenated, which were all outcomes of participants' rest while at the retreat. This included feeling rested from stress and tension and feeling energised again to live to life to its full potential. Participants also shared that they felt fresh and rejuvenated in their physical bodies during the retreat and after the completion of the programme. This was also evident in their glowing skin and the fact that they were smiling more often and looked generally relaxed. They also started to perceive themselves as more balanced, which in turn was an outcome of self-work while at the retreat. The above shifts in their physical being resulted in shifts in their perception of self in that they started to feel stronger and more powerful, realising they had the strength and potential to achieve their goals in life:

Just feeling the tension is gone, more relaxed, looking towards the light, feeling positive, feeling energised, fit and balanced, grounded and just feeling ready to go back and ready to rock. (Lisa)

I feel great. I think I recharged my body and I feel that I spent quite a good time and am relaxed now. (Andrew)

I feel good, I feel fresh, rested and I am so excited, just new emotions, experience and new energy inside.... Yes, relaxed and fresh and I feel really nice and different. (Irena)

It was quite nice, rejuvenating, feeling a lot better than I did when we met last time. (Alex)

I think just climbed a mountain or something, conquered something. I'm probably feeling fit and healthy after it. I've achieved what I came for, I suppose, rest and relaxation, along with all the physical activities, the physical side to everything. It's non-competitive but it's like you're achieving something for yourself. (Jessica)

I wish I would have done more activities cos then it would have been even more but I do think it helped me not in terms of weight loss or anything but the healthy eating. I just felt better at the end, so definitely there was something physical there. That was the main thing. (Rachel)

Feeling clean and strong was also mentioned. Physical transformations were due to the routine engagement with the retreat activity classes and other related activities, such as hiking, dancing, swimming, yoga, etc. For instance, the classes improved the physical level of some of the retreat guests and they started to feel stronger and more capable. Moreover, the physical changes were not primarily a result of weight loss but due to the changes in the bodies people experienced as an outcome of the plant-based diet and juice detox programme at the retreat. This was an unexpected transformation for the guests:

Actually, all the activities were nice and even in some classes of hatha yoga, some stuff was difficult for me, I still started to accept all this stuff. Actually, it opened yoga in a new way for me. I learned how to relax in all the positions and poses. I learned how to breathe in them, so it makes it so much easier, the breathing is so important. I really enjoyed even all the difficult stuff that at first was so impossible for me, then it was so nice. (Julie)

It's very funny but it's fresh juice squeezed. I think I'm going to practise this every day. I had a one-day juice detox and a big charge of energy relief that one can get in one day and it's really amazing. (Mary)

Maybe I lost weight but that wasn't the point, that wasn't the reason to go to this retreat but I feel clean inside.... I felt some changes in a physical way. (Julie)

In summary, it is important to point out that the retreat attendees did not have any prior physical medical condition or illness and, thus, they chose the wellness retreat not to cure any existing condition, but rather to combine a new type of holiday with work on self development in a holistic way. While participants did not specifically focus on physical improvements, these improvements were visibly noticeable for some (body shape, more energy, etc.). Several of the participants shared they felt different in their physical body after the retreat as a progression from and result of the food and activities, which again would not have happened without their commitment and desire for self-work.

Defining Self (Post-) Theme: Mind

*While there was a physical improvement, there was definitely a lot more that's been done to my mind, so definitely more of a mental transformation....
My biggest transformation, for me, would be my state of mind. (Alex)*

Mental transformation was evident among the participants and all of them shared various insights and feelings concerning how their emotions, perceptions, and identity changed during the retreat. The main meaning behind these mental transformations was that during the programme, they realised that they felt and thought differently about self and the surrounding world. The retreat participants shared positive perceptions about their self-image. For instance, self-motivation became one of the noticeable changes. Prior to the retreat, they expressed the desire to do self-work while feeling unmotivated and lazy at the same time. In contrast, during and after the retreat, they had a far more positive attitude and showed a high level of motivation, commitment, and willingness to do self-work during and after the retreat. Additionally, the motivation included the desire to continue living the same or a similar lifestyle to the one they had experienced on the retreat. Some guests, even though travelling separately, were from the same cities or countries. During free time, they discussed the different options amongst vegan cafes or yoga studios in their home places. Sharing obtained knowledge was another motivation. For instance, on one occasion, Julie commented during dinner that she could not wait to go back home and share the knowledge she had received at the retreat with her family and clients, while Mary added that she was very eager to do yoga and meditation with her friends more often from now on:

Also, I feel like picture number four because I'm ready to go and do some good stuff in my life so I feel motivated and know what to do next right now and know definitely what are my plans and what are my dreams. (Julie)

Well, active life position is what I'm feeling right now. (Mary)

While prior to the retreat some of the participants felt lost and panicked, after completing the programme, they stated that they gained a sense of temporary calmness due to the relaxing environment of the holistic wellness retreat while also being away from their usual routines. Calmness during the retreat programme was predominantly visible through the participants' non-verbal language including body position during the interview and also when talking to other people. Moreover, the tone of voice, neutral smile, and lack of emotional reaction to subjective negative events such as timetable delays, cold food, or disabled Wi-Fi were also obvious and proved that the participants had become calmer about the outside environment and the people around them. The frustration towards self, environment and others had dissolved:

Now I feel like calm and I am not afraid of other people.... Inside, I feel like picture number seven. There is a peaceful person sitting there in a lotus pose, meditating. (Julie)

[H]ow peaceful it all was and how calm I could get, how things all of a sudden didn't stress me out as much.... I'm feeling a lot calmer. (Alex)

Perhaps a few things in a more positive frame of mind. I think I feel better now to be able to do that. For conversations, doing things more calmly instead of in an argumentative type of way, that sort of thing. I feel stronger than I did a few weeks ago, physically stronger and mentally stronger. I think I feel definitely calm. (Jessica)

Lack of frustration further led to participants' self-acceptance and growing self-love. Newly developed self-compassion led to self-approval for everything they had done in their lives no matter if it had been negative or positive behaviour. Self-approval included not only the acceptance of their own behaviour but also self-acceptance of who they were and who they had become so far in their lives. One clear example was that at the beginning of the retreat, observation showed that Julie tended to judge herself for mistakes, as well as others, for not being perfect in her eyes. However, when Julie started to develop self-acceptance, she also became more neutral to what other people did around her, be it missing a class or going outside of the retreat to consume the usual types of food that were prohibited on the retreat premises, etc. She instead focused more on her own work and she was calm and focused inwards. For example, when towards the end of the retreat people were talking about foods that they were missing, she simply listened without negative emotions and she even added with a smile that she also wanted something sweet but still vegan. Others started laughing, implying that the situation was all about acceptance of self and others and focusing inwards rather than spending energy and time on judging self or others. Generally, the mood within the wellness retreat centre shifted to become more peaceful and friendly as people started to focus inwards and to develop a higher level of self-love and self-acceptance. During the second interview, the participants focused on this self transition. The participants shared that they wanted to establish a high-quality self-care routine as a part of their identity work process while at the retreat. Importantly, this inner transformation towards self-acceptance led to a higher focus on caring about self and placing self as priority:

I feel more compassionate, so I have more self-compassion. I definitely have gotten back that compassion and that is really important because I had lost that. I wasn't compassionate with myself, I still had very high standards and not dropping despite the challenges I was going through. I think that that's very important, so it's reminded me, it's changed my perspective towards that.... I feel like I am grateful for my life and being here has reminded me of how far I've come and what I've achieved and the difficulties that I've overcome, so definitely that self-compassion, self-love is coming back ... and my self-care is starting to come back. I've gotten more focused on that, looking after myself. (Lisa)

Maybe sometimes, I feel like I really, really love myself but I need to work on that, to get this feeling all day long, 24/7. I feel love for myself, not all the day long but sometimes and I accept myself as I am. Before, I

used to think that when I lose some weight, when I get fitter or when I do achieve some stuff in life, then I will love myself but now, I know how to just love myself as I am and then with this love, to help me to achieve the stuff I wanted to do before. Definitely I feel now that I accept myself as I am. (Julie)

Self-confidence was the next outcome of growing self-acceptance and self-care. From being shy and closed types of personalities, the participants evolved into being self-confident and open with others. For instance, Rachel, an introverted young woman, looked more confident with self and when communicating with others as the retreat progressed. During the observations, she was clearly an individual who had grown in self-esteem and had started to listen to her own needs and wants, which she had previously neglected in order to please others around her. She noted this change in herself during the observations a number of times when talking with others during the social gatherings. She further shared several self-noted transformations during the second follow-up interview:

I think it got me out of my comfort zone a little bit because I travelled by myself and also the setting was pretty social. I'm usually quite introverted, so I think I came out. It was more social than I am normally am.... I do think that was the first time I've really gone on a vacation by myself and to another country, so it was empowering. I feel maybe I am a little bit more confident now. (Rachel)

Other retreat guests also talked about self-confidence as an outcome of mental transformation. Andrew opened up when talking to others, particularly when discussing the mantra workshop with others which was a new topic for him that he lacked experience in. He mentioned during the first interview that he was usually not very talkative; however, during the retreat, he was observed having deep conversations with Alex about different things. Andrew's relationship with his wife improved – they tried new bonding activities and were observed holding hands, talking nicely to each other with smiles. Opening up about self and expressing self-confidence was a consequence of self-exploration throughout the wellness retreat activities and included trying new self-roles (i.e., chanting mantras or a loving husband who was no longer afraid to show his feelings in public):

I feel more confident. ... I think it helps me in my career, in my life and my social life. (Andrew)

Defined Self (Post-) Theme: Outcomes and directions for the future

The above findings show the participants' progression from rest to work on self while at the holistic wellness retreat. The main shift in participants' self-perception was evident in the fact that they changed to a better version of themselves by the end of the retreat stay based on their self-expectations and individual goals.

The above sections highlight the participants' self-perceptions before and after the programme and illustrate how these perceptions shifted as they progressed through the retreat experience. Some of the participants came to the retreat in a liminal state, where they were not

sure what to do next in their lives (i.e., after a career change, quitting a job, losing a family member and going through grief), or they experienced liminality while at the retreat (i.e., they explored new self-roles through activities and the overall retreat environment). Some of them became new versions of themselves or set new paths for becoming new selves:

It was an attempt to go beyond the ordinary perception of the world. This is the first step in a conscious life and I feel stronger now. ... This holistic retreat gave me an opportunity to become more friendly and to think not about only myself and my interests.” (Mary)

I think it got me out of my comfort zone a little bit because I travelled by myself and also the setting was pretty social. I'm usually quite introverted, so I think I came out. It was more social than I normally am.... I am very introverted, so being in a setting where it is very social and you are meeting lots of people, I think that it made me realise that I am a little bit more social than I thought it was. That changed about me. (Rachel)

I feel happier within myself cos I was feeling sad because we had bereavement in the family over the winter, so we went through a tough time, so I was feeling very low at times. I think I feel more in a happier frame of mind for going forward towards doing new things..(Jessica)

Yeah, I remember I said that it was my partner and after that, I even thought about that more. Before, I didn't realise how he is affecting my life and how he changes my thoughts, my thinking in a positive way, from negative (to) positive way and how it really helps me in my life.... There's so many changes happening inside of me but I can't put it in words because I am not even sure what is happening. It is a good thing, it's definitely in a good way. (Julie)

Others returned to their old desired selves that were lost because of various life events or other circumstances:

[A]nd I absolutely did that. I nearly had to remind myself to think of things when I was speaking to my husband because it completely went out of my mind. I got refocused completely on my wellbeing and getting back to myself and feeling positive, so I've done that. (Lisa)

The holistic wellness retreat was absolutely life changing. I came with stress but left light and with love for my part.... Well, I returned a better version of myself. (Mary)

Nevertheless, whether it was a transition from being lost to coming back to an old self or a new self as discussed above, the outcome remained the same – participants felt they were leaving the retreat with perceptions of themselves as better people. This perception resulted in an identity change. Examples of these transitions are shown in their quotes above and are discussed in the next section of the chapter.

Sections 4.5 and 4.6 answered the first question of this doctoral thesis – *What are participants' (a) perceptions of self and (b) meanings of wellness and the holistic wellness retreat experience, prior to and following attendance at the holistic wellness retreat?*

The major findings relating to the first research question can be summarised as follows. Generally, the meanings of wellness and perception of self expanded, evolved, and transformed during and after the holistic wellness retreat experience. Prior to the retreat, the study

participants gave simple statements when defining the concept of wellness. A deep analysis of their answers during the first interviews confirmed that the respondents did not have a complete understanding of what wellness means from different perspectives. The future retreat guests tended to provide short answers that portrayed limited characteristics of the concept. In contrast, after the completion of the holistic retreat programme, they no longer provided simple statements and characteristics of what wellness is, but instead defined wellness as an ongoing process. The participants provided a deep analysis of self, developed while at the retreat, thus showing progression in their understanding of wellness and self. An important outcome is that they referred to their clear vision of how to achieve the wellness statements they shared during their first interview. In conclusion, the shift in the meaning of wellness accompanied identity transition.

The author of the research aimed to discover whether or how the perception of self transformed during and after the completion of the holistic wellness retreat experience. Prior to the programme, the interviewees showed that they were predominantly focused on the mental side of self. Furthermore, the mental well-being of the guests appeared to be exceedingly unconstructive as illustrated by their negative perceptions of self and life. Although they were excited about the retreat and had positive expectations of self and the programme, the study participants did not share a positive self-image. In contrast, after the completion of the retreat programme experience, the situation had reversed. During the conversations in the second follow-up interview, participants talked not only about mental well-being but also about the physical side of self also. Most importantly, there was a noticeably positive shift in participants' perception of self and their holistic sense of well-being. The data from the observations and second interviews provided additional evidence that the retreat guests were capable of deeper analysis and connection with their inner selves. The changes in identity were positive. This, in turn, built a solid and promising foundation for the second research question.

4.7 Identity transition and exploring self

Human beings as self-contained unitary individuals who carry their uniqueness deep inside themselves, like pearls hidden in their shells, waiting to be found.”
(Burkitt, 1991, p. 1)

The findings show that the self-work conducted during the holistic wellness retreat experience resulted in identity work and identity transition. This section discusses these findings in greater detail.

Even though participants knew they had come to the retreat to rest and work at the same time, they were initially unaware of how transformative the overall experience would become, whereby they would find themselves in a state of liminality in which they were no longer their old selves nor their new selves. The liminality, even though unsettling, was still perceived with trust, thanks to the team at the holistic wellness retreat who knew exactly what their clients were going through and, thus, supported them in every way possible during the experience. Each of the retreat guests was unique and each showed their own type of identity transition and transformation, shaped and influenced by their participation in the retreat. However, despite each of the guests going through individual liminal processes, they all went through an experience of transition as part of self-transformation. The remainder of Chapter 4 shows this remarkable journey.

This section of the chapter, therefore, looks closely into the second research question: *“What shapes and influences identity transition while at the holistic wellness retreat stay and how does this occur?”* More specifically, it elaborates on how work and rest facilitate identity transition and how and in what ways liminality promotes identity change. The discussion on the findings is summarised as follows: first, the process of the participants’ transition from rest to work on self while at the retreat is provided. Second, the concept of liminality and how it applies to the wellness retreat (a retreat as a liminal place) and how participants’ liminal states influenced identity change while at the retreat are discussed. Finally, the overview of the specific outcomes of identity change is outlined. Identity transition and its results and overall outcomes are also illustrated in Figure 14 that is presented in this chapter.

Transition from rest to self-work and liminality

According to the findings discussed above, the participants' desire for self-work was present from the beginning of the retreat programme: *"To be honest, I don't really do that much. That's something I need to work on. When things get busy, I don't really take the time to do that. That's something I'm trying to work on"* (Rachel). However, a careful analysis of the participants' responses shows exactly when and how the transition from rest to work occurred. Firstly, in order for self-work to begin, the desire for rest and relaxation needed to be fulfilled:

I think just climbed a mountain or something, conquered something. I'm probably feeling fit and healthy after it. I've achieved what I came for, I suppose, rest and relaxation, along with all the physical activities, the physical side to everything. It's non-competitive but it's like you're achieving something for yourself. (Jessica)

And with Brian he's an exceptionally good listener, I feel I always need to improve on that and when I'm more relaxed with myself I can be a better listener, more grounded and so on which I feel Brian is, so maybe the gap is not as big as I thought, they're still role models but the gap might be smaller than I thought. (Lisa)

During their period of rest and relaxation, which was their predominant focus for the first couple of days, participants concentrated on such behaviours as slowing down, gaining peace, meeting new people, and engaging in various relaxation activities. The main element of their transition from rest to self-work was time for adjustments, which means that the participants needed to obtain full relaxation and then to have time available to adjust, including adjusting to the retreat settings, social environment, and the overall programme.

When I arrive, I'm quite conscious that other people have been here a few days and they're quite relaxed and so it takes me a couple of days. As the days go on, I will get more social. At the start, I don't know people and even though I've been here before, it's still new because the people are different. That takes me a little bit of time but after that, I'm fine. (Lisa)

I expect that there will be a period when I will be close to surrender, when there will be no desire to get up early in the morning and go to classes, so the most important thing is to overcome it.... I will try to not give up. (Mary)

Secondly, another aspect that further facilitates the smooth transition from rest to work is the liminal nature of the holistic wellness retreat. The concept of liminal place was introduced by Casey (1993), who stated that liminal place and its experiences are bound with people's ability to dwell within them. Thus, this term applies to this research in that the participants transited from rest to self-work while at the holistic wellness retreat by trying various self-roles during their participation in activities. The retreat programme included a detailed schedule of allocated time for various activities, rest breaks, mealtimes, workshops, guest speakers, etc. The value of the retreat centre is that it provides all the necessary services that promote self-exploration and transition from rest to self-work under one roof. An individual is exposed to the practices of the

holistic wellness retreat 24/7 through the whole length of the stay. Moreover, the holistic wellness retreat provides safety, support, professional knowledge, care, etc. Participating in this schedule became a daily ritual for the participants within a valuable, unique, safe and supportive environment. Thus, the holistic wellness retreat acted as a liminal place that facilitated participants to transit from rest to self-work.

In addition, elements such as the social environment of the retreat, the staff team, specific activities, and overall atmosphere were further supporting factors in participants' transition from rest to self-work: “[A]nd from what I can see, they offer a lot of things to do, so I’m quite impressed. I think it is going to be just right for me and I find it quite positive so far” (Alex); “I really adore staff and our coaches, who encourage us every day and support every step that we take” (Mary); “[W]ith nature everywhere, trees, flowers and birds singing, everything for mindful, calming, peaceful atmosphere” (Julie).

Apart from the retreat’s environment and atmosphere and the design of the programme, the retreat staff team also positively influenced participants’ identity work:

The meditation sessions were great as well, I really liked them.... I don’t know what to call him, the instructor I guess, the person who was doing the mediation sessions for us, was really great. I could understand him, I could understand what he was trying to do for us and I could follow his instructions, so I really, really enjoyed my time during those sessions. I got a few insights about it and definitely can feel that I can manage a bit better now. (Alex)

Finally, the retreat’s diet philosophy and detox programme also strongly enhanced the participants’ self-work. The retreat positions itself in the wellness market as a strictly plant-based environment with no sugar or salt added to food. The policy also prohibits alcohol and drugs on retreat centre premises. The retreat guests have a choice between meals and juices every day. They can, for example, choose juice for breakfast and dinner while having a meal for lunch; alternatively, people can choose a full juice detox programme for one or more days where they have a specially designed menu of juices that incorporate all the essential minerals, vitamins, and supplements in the juice recipes. The participants mentioned that the plant-based diet together with the juice detox gave them an opportunity to try new self-roles and try different diets that were unknown to them prior to coming to the retreat. The interviewees shared that this experience helped them to learn new information and also to learn more about themselves by exploring how their bodies and minds reacted to the new lifestyle. Further, they stressed that they would incorporate the new knowledge and plant-based lifestyle into their lives:

Yeah, vegetarian and maybe I think I ate a lot of meat before but now just a little, in a different way and just thinking that I need to drink a lot of water and fresh juices. I just tried to take one day just drinking juices during the day. It’s very exciting, a very nice experience and after that, I felt very light, just energetic. (Irena)

I think try to learn what your body and how your body is talking to you and some information from your body. I understand how correct to feel the food and how it influences the body and the mind (Andrew)

Maybe I lost weight but that wasn't the point, that wasn't the reason to go to this retreat but I feel clean inside maybe because we changed our diet or we didn't eat any junk food, just a plant-based diet. We also had some cleaning stuff, like we were not eating all day, we were drinking juices. That was a really good experience to clean our stomach.... I am so excited about all this vegan diet and I found out so many recipes. I found out about so many ways how to change products, like what can you use instead of eggs or instead of meat. I opened for myself so many new recipes and I'm already thinking about buying new blender, about buying some new kitchen stuff that will help me in preparing my plant-based food. I'm already thinking about the shops that I would love to go, where they have all the yummy vegan treats. Of course, I'm planning on living the plant-based life and plant-based diet. (Julie)

There are several examples in which participants were between two states: one was the old-self and old way of being and the second was a choice of a new way of being and a new self. For instance, the retreat guests started new meal routines that involved a strict time for meals and a totally plant-based diet. However, observations showed that some of these participants felt strongly connected to their old habits, such as dining out in a restaurant with a bottle of wine or purchasing cheese and crackers in the local supermarket. This may be because some of them felt lost during the process of identity work, that is, caught between their old and possible future new selves. For instance, Andrew went out to eat a steak meal in a restaurant but returned back to the retreat centre feeling unhappy about himself and his behaviour. During one of the dinner gatherings after his trip to the restaurant, Andrew commented, “[N]ot that I have become vegan or anything, I just signed up for the retreat, but fail to follow the instructions, you know. I didn't enjoy it; maybe I don't want to eat meat anymore.” In his comment, Andrew was sharing that he was not happy with his old-self behaviour in which he went to the restaurant for his usual meal. This indicated that he was in a process of realisation that he was no longer his old self. This is a good example of self-reflection in the identity transition process between the identity play and identity work states. After this event, Andrew had a chance to reflect on self, and thus, his commitment to self-work was further enhanced. This was observed in his increased frequency of identity work, which in turn shows that more frequent identity work becomes a form of ritual.

Lastly, the holistic wellness retreat was also found to be a liminal place that allowed the participants to temporarily withdraw from their normal lifestyle and modes of social actions, thus allowing them space for self-reflection and identity work. A concept of liminal place was introduced by Casey (1993) where he argued that liminal place and its experiences are bound with people's ability to dwell within them. The retreat guests had an opportunity to try different self-roles and new experiences while at the retreat, with a focus on improving their physical body while also having fun, finding balance between the retreat activities and rest, reflecting on life, detoxing, and connecting with the inner self:

I would like to have something new and try some health and lifestyle. They offer some interesting things that I can get here.... I prefer to try everything that they offer. It's a lot of things, different things and I prefer to just take part in different activities. I will use everything, honestly. (Irena)

Most of all, I am interested in aqua aerobics. It's the easiest way to lose weight and bring the muscles into tone. I'm sure we will have a lot of fun there.... I came looking for some new tools and practices, to build into my day. (Mary)

The complete focus on self-work further involved learning to connect with the body, becoming disciplined, incorporating new healthy habits into daily life, gaining self-compassion, caring about self, changing their current diet, and solving personal problems:

I'm vegetarian right now. For a year now, I've wanted to change my life, my food habits from vegetarian to vegan, so avoid all the animal products and self- transformation, to be more mindful in life, to go with your meditations through all your life, 24/7. It's like self-work, self-development. I don't want say change, I don't want to change myself. I want but I think we need to work on ourselves as we are and don't try to change ourselves but change our habits, our life habits. (Julie)

As discussed in Chapter 2, past research has found that tourism generally provides an opportunity for people to escape their current reality and engage in alternative realities while travelling, thus providing various ways of perceiving self differently (Cohen, 2010). In this research, it was found that a holistic wellness retreat, as a part of the wellness tourism segment, provides a unique opportunity to escape daily routines and current life situations, allowing people to engage in different activities that promote and encourage rest. A retreat also provides people with valuable time to reflect on self and try other identity roles in a safe and supportive environment, thus allowing them to engage in identity work. Therefore, it can be argued that the holistic wellness retreat acts as a liminal place and space for guests, where they can be positioned in different scenarios that allow them to consider other lifestyles they could live (healthy lifestyle leading to holistic wellness in this case).

Nevertheless, even though the holistic wellness retreat provides many opportunities for liminal and identity construction practices, the research found that any self-work should be the outcome of self-commitment and a desire to work on self. The transition from rest to self-work discussed above illustrates that the participants were self-encouraged to undertake this process prior to the beginning of the programme, and that the holistic wellness retreat as a liminal place and space facilitated it further.

What shaped and influenced self-work and identity transition?

This section discusses what was found to trigger the identity transition. The holistic wellness retreat provided participants with a programme, diet, overall environment, and staff team, which acted as the starting point for identity work. However, there were other aspects that facilitated self-work during participants' stay. For instance, the participants' trial of different self-roles was facilitated by participating in activities and their sense of commitment. Furthermore, self-work was present through the social aspects of the retreat and the shared experiences the guests had. In other words, the participants were driven by the motives for social and shared experiences which are important aspects of the studied phenomena and this facilitated self-work and identity transition.

The shared activities meant that the participants established mutual shared plans for physical activities during and after the retreat programme (i.e., attending Pilates classes together in the same hometown after the completion of the retreat; the ritual creation of a shared lunch every day at the exact same time and place while discussing topics on self-reflection, progress with meditation and yoga practices, achievements, and obstacles faced during the day. Regular shared discussions during and after workshops are another example. Moreover, during these workshops, the participants created mind maps together in groups of two or three people on such topics as healthy eating, stress management techniques, etc. All of these shared activities facilitated the identity transition experience and enhanced the commitment to identity work.

The encouragement, understanding, and constant support from the retreat staff and co-guests also highlight the social aspect of the retreat and how this influences the transition from rest to self-work. People felt sufficiently safe and secure to talk about their experiences of being on 'waves' between their old and possible new selves. The social engagement and encouragement as well as shared experiences with others enhanced participants' dedication for self-work:

Actually, all of my worries were for no reason. I shouldn't worry about other people because it is even great that there are other people because there is even more work on yourself. We all live in society and we can't just close our apartment, just stay there and meditate and be happy with ourselves. We need to still go into society and learn how to meet there. Actually, with all the people, at the end, we felt like we were some kind of family.... We felt some kind of connection that we are all here for a reason. They all were so supportive; they supported each other and also shared their experiences (Julie)

As discovered during the first set of interviews, the participants were already prepared for identity search and self-work prior to travelling to this holistic wellness retreat. For some it was their primary goal, while for others it was their secondary goal after receiving the desired rest and relaxation. Regardless of their goals, people in both scenarios readily engaged in so-called 'identity trials'; that is, they were willing to try different roles of self while at the retreat based on

their perception of the location and overall environment of the retreat as safe and secure and a place in which no judgment would occur. These trials, therefore, became one of the steps of self-work.

I think learning new techniques and how to do things.... I've gained a lot of knowledge about a new type of diet or food, healthy eating and all the vegan type cooking. I learned new recipes, learned new yoga movements, different/various techniques, like the tapping and the vision boarding. I learned lots throughout the week. (Jessica)

Engaging in specific activities helped the participants to expand their knowledge and incorporate new practices in their lives as part of their self-work. Through exploration and learning through workshops and other people, as well as through the participation in activities, participants' expanded their knowledge of selves and the perceived world:

I really liked how they incorporated vegetables into the meals. They did it in some ways that I would never thought of. I always struggle to have enough vegetables so I want to try different ways of doing that (Rachel) (when talking about her behaviour after she returns home)

The interviewees were also surprised by some specific classes and the fact that they were able to build new life skills from these activities. The participants talked about their favourite classes that gave them new skills and the opportunity to try different self-roles. An opportunity to engage in new and earlier unknown experiences led to self-exploration and further self-work. For instance, one day Andrew and his wife Irena took part in a Latin dance class. Andrew appeared to hesitate but finally joined the class due to the insistence of Irena. While the actual class could not be observed, the couple looked very happy afterwards. Later, they shared that Irena had always wanted to do Latin dancing but had never had an opportunity because of Andrew's refusal to join her and she did not want to learn dancing with anyone else. They found out that it was on the programme at the retreat, and Irena begged Andrew to try it with her. They shared their experience during their second interviews:

Well, it was great. It was a great time and the reality has exceeded my imagination ... each day was unique. Every time, a good, new experience, so it looks like I spent one month in this place.... Each day was unique and each time, I tried different experience. I like yoga and I like to try myself on some physical experience. For me, it was exercise and dancing cos I never tried and I feel myself not comfortable when somebody asks me to dance but I think it's good place to train. (Andrew)

What was more memorable and more excited for me, it was Latin dancing. I couldn't imagine but it was my dream in my life and I didn't know about that but when I find out about these classes, I was so excited and I tried it and I can say I can dance a little bit now. (Irena)

Furthermore, engaging in different roles of self and establishing a different routine and behaviour led to positive non-expected outcomes. For example, some of the retreat participants did not expect the amount of joy from self they received through these experiences:

I guess it was memorable for me, for something like the dinners, having dinners with a group of people and just talking to them and getting to know them and learning about people from all different countries, that

stands out for me. I think because maybe I wasn't expecting that. It was just nice. ... Yeah, I just had not pictured that and I enjoyed that, so that's one that stands out for me. (Rachel)

The self-work and new self-role trials were undertaken in a balanced way; that is, the retreat provided a flexible programme that allowed guests to choose how much or how little to engage in activities. This illustrates that while the retreat provided all the essential elements for guests to engage in self-work, in the end, it was up to guests to decide to what extent they would use this opportunity to do the work. The findings show that the participants were motivated to do self-work, and the flexibility of the programme increased their motivation through the perceived freedom. While having an opportunity to try diverse wellness related experiences, the participants said that they were also happy that their expectations regarding flexibility were met, thereby giving them balance between identity work and play:

There's activities scheduled throughout the day but you participate as you like, the same with the food. There's really no pressure about anything so that was probably the comment I personally heard the most, was just people really liked the flexibility of it.... Yeah, for sure. Saying you have to do every single activity would take the fun out of it and it would feel like work, as opposed to like doing it because you want to do it. Yeah, flexibility definitely. (Rachel)

I think I enjoyed everything. Two of the days were really busy doing yoga and workshops. I think I spent two days doing all the classes, had time out for sunbathing and swimming but I don't think it was actually that type of weather anyway. I'm glad I did everything I did. I had days where I had my own time to go off to old town and to the market, so overall, I achieved everything that I wanted to do (Jessica)

Overall, the activities that influenced identity search and self-work were different for everyone, based on their interests, life situations, personal goals, etc. No matter the type of activity, workshop or class, everyone was committed to exploring self in a new environment by engaging in unknown activities:

I feel I did get inspired to be healthier because of the food that we had and the activities. I liked swimming in the pools.... Yeah, it was so nice, especially I know not a lot of people did it but for me, after getting hot doing something, it was so nice to just be able to jump in a pool cos I can't do that at home so I liked doing that. (Rachel)

The main thing would be physical activities to keep me fit, I suppose. The yoga was the main interest, so everything else in addition, learning the tapping and all the cooking demos and obviously the walks.... I think doing the vision boarding workshop helps with all the pictures and making what you think you want or the ideas you have in your head. (Jessica)

We often use vacations as an excuse to stay up late, eat junk food, drink too much alcohol and lay around. Mindfulness, meditation, yoga and other methods is the right way to improve focus, memory, relationships, expansion, while reducing stress, rumination and emotional activity. The biggest transformation is meditation for me. I've never tried it before and now I can speak to myself without self-deception. (Mary)

I think that kundalini yoga was one of the classes. That was a like a new yoga for me so I never tried it. I used to do hatha yoga and that was the kundalini yoga, the first class. This, I think that I remember the most. I felt like body and my energy. I really felt like it really exists, so it was a really great experience

and I remember it ... I think so yeah, definitely. I will still continue hatha yoga and kundalini as well.
(Julie)

The findings of the study also further revealed that all participants' expectations of meeting friendly, supportive, and like-minded people were met. For example, the social aspect at the holistic wellness retreat included motivating one another on a daily basis during the retreat programme. The social aspect facilitated identity work because people were motivated by others to engage comprehensively in self-work:

The people that were in my age group, I felt they were good examples of how to be healthier. When you're around people that seem healthy and they can do all the activities and they just seem they're healthy in everyday life, it makes you wanna be more like that. I think that was another thing that I got out of it.... Being around healthy people, who are mostly quite healthy, it made me realise that I do have work to do. Just to give you an example, one of the hikes, I thought it was actually hard and no one else seemed to think it was that hard, so that made me think I need to improve my physical fitness. I always knew I needed to improve it but that was just like I really do need to get better. (Rachel)

I noticed this a little bit the last time but I've noticed it so much this time that I know I have to change now, is how rigid and inflexible my body is and how I'm looking around the room at other people, how they can move and what they can do with their legs and arms and back and so on. It's nearly like I've made a decision after this trip that that's not acceptable. I'm not old enough for how rigid my body is, so that's why I'm going to do the yoga, the meditation, the Tai Chi. This morning, when I was doing the workshop and this is my last day and I'm going home and I made a decision that when I come back here next year, I will come back here as a different person physically. I will be able to participate in intermediate yoga and I will be able to move my arms and my body and my legs and my back how others are able. I won't be as flexible because I do have a spinal problem but I will be much more flexible than I am now. (Lisa, when sharing her thoughts on motivational aspect of social component that enhanced her commitment for the self-work.)

However, a search for balance was also present in this regard. Participants were consciously seeking balance and free alone time between the activities and the conversations in order to re-evaluate or rethink their experiences. Therefore, the most important aspect of social life at the retreat was the fact that it was well-balanced; that is, socialising provided a balance between self-reflection and participants sharing of their own experiences with each other. In other words, the retreat participants liminally practised a comprehensive yet balanced dialogue between the self (self-reflection) and others (socialising):

Meeting people, meeting you. The first girl who was here when I arrived, we got on very well as well and obviously our next-door neighbour. It's nice to be able to click with some people. It was very special, so I was happy. It's nice as I'm used to meeting people through work and at home. Here, it's nice that everybody comes together and then you obviously get people who get on better with others. It's nice to be able to have your own space later on where everybody heads off to do their own thing. It's a different type of holiday in that way.... Overall, I achieved all the main aspects of it.... I think everybody was concentrating for their own purposes and there was also friendliness towards each other, that if anybody needed help, there was always someone else there for you. (Jessica)

I think it's one of the important stuff, working in a group, being in society, share our emotions towards experiences and so it is even so much better in a group. Sometimes, I was feeling like I don't wanna to speak or to talk to anyone, just wanna be with myself and sometimes I felt like I just wanna share to someone and talk, talk, talk about all the feelings and what was happening to me.... People here are really

nice, friendly and they look really happy. You look at them and you feel happier. ... People here also arrived with their intention to change their lives to a better state, to transform their lives and to work on themselves. I think that everyone will just think of themselves and don't look at other people. (Julie)

The above discussion illustrates that both self-work and identity transition are driven by motives of self-exploration, learning and participation in different activities as well as by shared experiences and by socialising with like-minded people while at a holistic wellness retreat. However, the findings again support that in order for self-work to occur, people need to have a high level of self-commitment and self-motivation.

To summarise, it was found that even though participants had expectations, they did not place a high priority on these expectations. Instead, they focused more on self-work while at the retreat rather than letting the retreat do the work for them. More specifically, participants expected that the retreat would provide them with various resources that would allow them to experience both work and play; however, the actual work and play were to be done by the retreat guests based on their personal willingness and commitment. Therefore, their goal to rest and work at the same time was found to be a vital approach that shaped and influenced identity transition while at the retreat.

4.8 Results and outcomes of the whole experience

Based on these findings, the framework illustrated in Figure 14 was created to summarise and illustrate the whole experience of identity transition during the holistic wellness retreat experience.

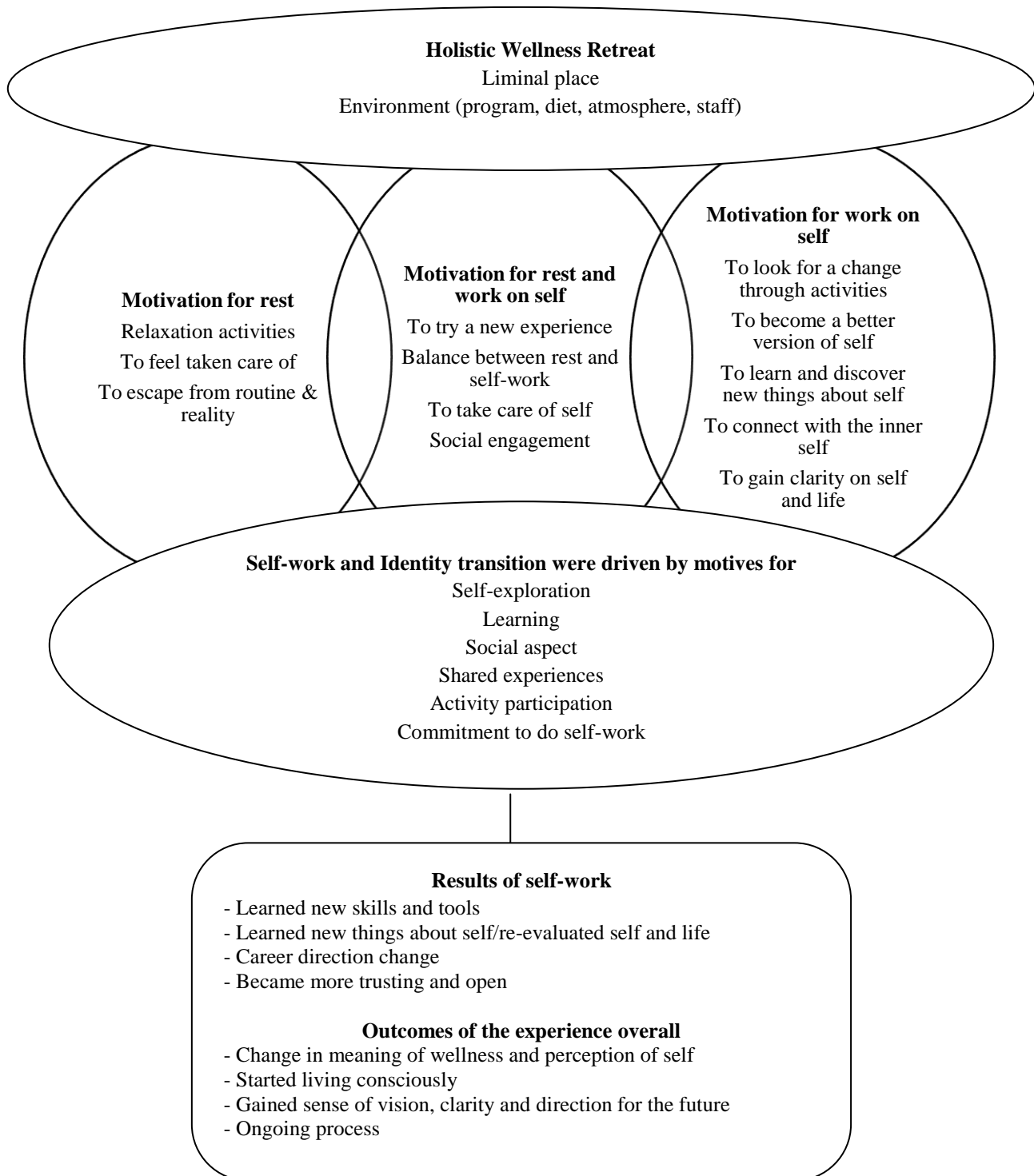


Figure 14: Self-work and identity transition while at the holistic wellness retreat

Results of the self-work

The results of retreat participants' self-work included various types of identity-transformational experiences. The participants learned new skills and tools as well as new sides of the self which allowed them to re-evaluate the self and life around them. Furthermore, some of the participants either started to think about major changes in their lives, such as a career change, while some had already taken this path. They also noted that they had become more trusting and open with others.

Learned new skills and tools

One of the most noteworthy results of self-work at the holistic wellness retreat was the amount of knowledge obtained and skills learnt by the participants. All of the participants finished the retreat with new information, knowledge, skills, and tools that were an essential element of identity transition through self-work. For some of them, this knowledge and information became a take-away practice they would continue working on at home. As per the observational notes, some of the participants shared during the social gatherings or after the activities that they would continue doing a 'tapping' activity as a stress and fear releasing technique, and also practising the vision board ritual and re-evaluating their food habits:

I've gained a lot of knowledge about a new type of diet or food, healthy eating and all the vegan type cooking. I learned new recipes, learned new yoga movements, different/various techniques, like the tapping and the vision boarding. I learned lots throughout the week.... I'd include the movements in my own routine at home, if I remember them. There are so many of them, I think I remember some of them. The taping is quite a handy one to know cos you can do that anywhere, so it's good to learn that as well.... Yeah, I'll try focusing on a particular thing and see if it works. (Jessica)

As I said, I liked kundalini yoga, so there were a few more classes after the first one. Actually, all the activities were nice and even in some classes of hatha yoga, some stuff was difficult for me, I still started to accept all this stuff. Actually, it opened yoga in a new way for me. I learned how to relax in all the positions and poses. I learned how to breathe in them, so it makes it so much easier, the breathing is so important. I really enjoyed even all the difficult stuff that at first was so impossible for me, then it was so nice. (Julie)

I now have tools to control what's going on in my mind. I can see that I've got some ways that I can manage stress, definitely ways to manage my wellness. I've gotten now tools, that I can work with, to help me deal with the stress, to help me calm my head and go through the challenges in life easier and more with a smile. (Alex)

I think try to learn what your body and how your body is talking to you and some information from your body. I understand how correct to feel the food and how it influences the body and the mind.... Everybody is unique and we are in different station of our lives so for me it is learning about my body, learning about me mentally (Andrew)

Yeah, I just know what I will exactly do during next year, in how to support myself during some difficult times and when I have some difficult times and when I'm exhausted in my job. Now I know how to manage it. (Irena)

Learned new things about self and life / Re-evaluation of self and life

The participants re-evaluated their lives and possible selves while at the retreat at the same time as participating in various activities. In other words, during the retreat, they had an opportunity to learn new things about self which were previously not known to them or if known, they had not had these experiences before. For instance, Alex gained a new perception of self and his life and was able to look at things from a different earlier unknown perspective, while Lisa explored new sides of her personality and Mary learned to listen and understand self through trying different meditation techniques:

Well, I'd say it (wellness retreat) helped me to put things into perspective. It helped me to see that it's not as hard to live well, to be well, to think well. (Alex)

The biggest transformation is meditation for me. I've never tried it before and now I can speak to myself without self-deception. (Mary)

When I'm more relaxed with myself I can be a better listener, more grounded. (Lisa)

Career direction change

Following the holistic wellness retreat, thoughts and actions about career change were the biggest example of transformation as they represented a major life event and changes that could affect many areas of a person's life generally.

It reminded me of the fact that the big career change, so I was doing the same career for 17 years and I made a career change 12 months ago. It was because of here, so I made that decision to change my career and what I was going to change it to here two years ago and when I was back on the retreat this time, I've made some new decisions about new things I'm going to do and how I'm going to approach the new career. It gives me the space that I need to feel what the next right move is, so meeting people and getting the space to find my next right step on my journey - that's been the best and most memorable part. (Lisa)

Became more trusting and open

The participants shared that as a result of participating in the retreat, they had become more socially active and they had learnt how to develop more open and trusting conversations and relationships with others around them. They saw this as leading to an overall improvement in their lives in the longer run:

This holistic retreat gave me an opportunity to become more friendly and to think not about only myself and my interests. (Mary)

I am very introverted, so being in a setting where it is very social and you are meeting lots of people, I think that it made me realise that I am a little bit more social than I thought it was. That changed about me. (Rachel)

Outcomes of identity transition while at the holistic wellness retreat

It can be concluded that the abovementioned results of self-work amongst participants led to identity transformation that further resulted in the outcomes that are discussed below. The outcomes of self-work that led to identity transformation included self-perception changes where participants started to believe in themselves and to perceive themselves as a better version of themselves. This meant that the meaning of wellness became an achievable goal, as discussed in the previous sections of the chapter. The participants also started living more consciously and they gained a sense of vision, clarity, and direction for their future. Having developed new goals, their paths became clearer.

Conscious living

Conscious living was shown to be an outcome of self-reflective practices while at the holistic wellness retreat. The concept of living consciously is summarised in the following quote:

“Becoming conscious means becoming increasingly aware of what’s going on inside us and around us. We’ve all lived in a certain level of denial, and we are in the process of awakening from that unconsciousness. Consciousness is not about fixing ourselves or improving ourselves; it’s about coming to know ourselves in all our many aspects and thereby living life more fully” (Gawain, p. 2).

Conscious living, therefore, includes being mindful and aware of one’s self, one’s lifestyle, and one’s surroundings. Moreover, it was found that this further consists in being conscious about thoughts and beliefs, including self-beliefs and perceptions of self as well as choices. One of the clearest outcomes of self-work during the holistic wellness retreat experience was that the participants started practising conscious living, which in turn became a facilitator for identity transition. For instance, while trying different self-roles in the liminal place of the holistic wellness retreat, some of the participants realised that there are deeper and more meaningful things in life that were not previously noticed by them:

It was an attempt to go beyond the ordinary perception of the world. This (the retreat) was the first step in a conscious life and I feel stronger now.... To my mind, it's more a mental transformation, to get less selfish and closer to nature. That's what I feel.... No, in everyday routine, you think a lot for yourself and not about other people and their feelings. This holistic retreat gave me an opportunity to become more friendly and to think not about only myself and my interests. (Mary)

Gained a sense of vision, clarity and direction

After the completion of the holistic wellness retreat programme, the participants commonly talked about their personal achievements. This largely represented their evolved opinion on the concept of wellness. For instance, the participants said that they had gained a sense of clarity on self and life, and that having a vision of self and life in terms of the next steps

was what wellness was also about. The new vision and new perspectives were an outcome of the engagement in the retreat activities. Through these workshops and classes, the participants were able to try new experiences in an unknown environment and to learn new skills. At times, they were forced to do activities that would provide new self-roles for them. For instance, as well as being taken care of, participants were allowed to let go of the roles they practised in their daily lives and to forget about their problems. At the same time, they tried living with a new type of diet and doing activities that they had never tried before. All of these practices and experiences make holistic wellness retreat a liminal place, a place where people can try various self-roles through different activities and consequently expand their knowledge and thoughts about life, self, and others around them. The outcome of this practice is gaining a sense of vision of “where to from now”:

I think doing the vision boarding workshop helps with all the pictures and making what you think you want or the ideas you have in your head, seeing it on picture, makes it a bit more clear. Hopefully that will help in the future. (Jessica)

I feel that, with the clarity that I have been able to think, not even think but feel my way through a few things that I was worried about, my first day, before I came over here, things that I was worried about. It's helped me get things into perspective. (Lisa)

The participants created a clear vision and specific goals for what they wanted to achieve in the future, as well as developing a sense of direction or a path they should follow from now on. These outcomes eased many things in their subconscious perceptions of their lives. They also opened new opportunities for them and they safely created new self-identities they planned to carry on with after the retreat. Below are some examples of how participants' inner transformations led to changes in the way they perceived future work on self, as well as in their ability to listen to their needs and to feel mentally and physically, something which they were unable to experience prior to the retreat:

The retreat gave me a goal that I can aim towards. Number seven is the state where I'd like to be but I think number four describes it better because I can see my goal.... I can see where I'm heading, in which way I should be going, and it's in transition between number four and number seven, so eventually I'll reach number seven. That's the ultimate goal but right now, number four is what I think it is. (Alex) (when talking about the picture selection)

I feel so great and so excited and got so many plans of the future.... I know what to do next right now and know definitely what are my plans and what are my dreams. Maybe I am not sure of all the ways I could achieve all of the dreams but now I know which way to go.... I am so excited about all this vegan diet and I found out so many recipes. I found out about so many ways how to change products, like what can you use instead of eggs or instead of meat. I opened for myself so many new recipes and I'm already thinking about buying new blender, about buying some new kitchen stuff that will help me in preparing my plant-based food. I'm already thinking about the shops that I would love to go, where they have all the yummy vegan treats. Of course, I'm planning on living the plant-based life and plant-based diet. (Julie)

I need to start meditation and yoga. I'm doing affirmations at the moment but I will start doing meditation and I'm going to join yoga when I go back.... I also want to join Tai Chi. I know it's for me, I know the movement and flow is for me... When we went down to the beach and I saw them doing Tai Chi, it made me realise that I want that in my life, Tai Chi definitely but meditation on my own, so doing it on my own, my own practise and joining yoga. I would like to do those, I will do those when I go back. (Lisa)

More comprehensive knowledge of self led to a clear vision and direction for the participants and future goals to work on the physical body increased. While participants' transformation and self-work were more internal, as per their comments, their future direction and goals to work on self were about their physical bodies:

I'd include the movements in my own routine at home, if I remember them. There are so many of them, I think I remember some of them. The tapping is quite a handy one to know cos you can do that anywhere, so it's good to learn that as well.... Yeah, I'll try focusing on a particular thing and see if it works. (Jessica)

I noticed this a little bit the last time but I've noticed it so much this time that I know I have to change now, is how rigid and inflexible my body is and how I'm looking around the room at other people, how they can move and what they can do with their legs and arms and back and so on. It's nearly like I've made a decision after this trip that that's not acceptable. I'm not old enough for how rigid my body is, so that's why I'm going to do the yoga, the meditation, the Tai Chi. This morning, when I was doing the workshop and this is my last day and I'm going home and I made a decision that when I come back here next year, I will come back here as a different person physically. I will be able to participate in intermediate yoga and I will be able to move my arms and my body and my legs and my back how others are able. I won't be as flexible because I do have a spinal problem but I will be much more flexible than I am now. (Lisa)

Ongoing process

The main outcome of participants' experience, that also summarises the findings, is that self-work and identity transition were perceived by the participants not as an end goal that once achieved could then be maintained, but rather as an ongoing process of learning about self and working on self – that is, an ongoing transition that is always changing and modifying as a result of self-work and new discoveries:

It is self-transformation I think.... I think we don't need to change ourselves, we need to stay ourselves but we need to work on ourselves, to get better on yoga, to change from ... I'm vegetarian right now. For a year now, I've wanted to change my life, my food habits from vegetarian to vegan, so avoid all the animal products and self- transformation, to be more mindful in life, to go with your meditations through all your life, 24/7. It's like self-work, self-development. I don't want say change, I don't want to change myself. I want but I think we need to work on ourselves as we are and don't try to change ourselves but change our habits, our life. (Julie)

Mary: The skills acquired in training will stay with me forever, I think. I am going to include yoga meditation in my everyday life.

Margarita: You think you've done self-development during this retreat?

Mary: Of course, I have. I can count how deeply it was. I feel transformation and I think I could better give. I will continue different practises. It's just started but everywhere starts with the first step and I'm on this way.

The fact that the participants shared that after the retreat they perceived wellness as a state that is easily achievable with the right knowledge and tools, and that it changes one's-self,

illustrates that they had gone through identity transition while at the retreat. The concepts of self-work and identity transition together represent an internal process that a person experiences when in a state of liminality at a holistic wellness retreat. This then further expands into the process of growing self into a deeper and more conscious life as well as the process of learning about self more deeply and growing through identity transition and changes in perception of self and what one should do in life – changes and learning processes that occurred during participants' stay.

4.9 Summary of the findings and conclusion to the chapter

Identity transition while at a holistic wellness retreat was examined by studying how the holistic wellness retreat experience illuminated changes in perception of self and the meaning of wellness. Findings illustrate that this retreat facilitated participants' identity transition as it acted as a liminal place where they could explore self in a new and unknown experience while being in a safe and supportive environment. Identity transition was further shaped by co-creation and self-exploration. Such themes as the social aspect, shared experiences, and interactive relationships between guests facilitated a co-creation of identity. Self-exploration, on the other hand, included participation in activities and learning about self while engaging in new behaviours. While self-exploration and co-creation only supported and facilitate identity work, the main attribute the participants needed to have for self-work was their own willingness and commitment to do the work on self.

As an outcome of their commitment, the consumers of the holistic wellness retreat experience gained new skills and expanded their knowledge of self and life through self-exploration and co-creation. They had an opportunity to re-evaluate their lives and selves while at the retreat. Furthermore, they learned new skills and tools while participating in various activities and became more social and trusting towards one another as a result of co-creation and the social aspects of the retreat. Finally, the respondents shared that they had started to live consciously during and after the completion of the holistic wellness retreat.

As a result of these outcomes, the perception of self was found to shift during and after the retreat. The holistic wellness retreat experience illuminated changes in perception of self in the following manner: prior to the programme, the respondents showed a negative mindset concerning self and negative self-perception. However, as the retreat stay progressed and the guests were involved in the liminal place, co-creation, self-exploration, and self-perception started to change. There was a noticeably positive shift and improvements in the perception of self. Moreover, the holistic wellness retreat experience illuminated changes in the meaning of wellness in a way that the understanding of the concept evolved during and after the retreat stay. Prior to the start of the retreat, participants talked about wellness as a state that they wanted to achieve; however, they were not sure whether or how this was achievable. However, during the second follow-up interviews, wellness was perceived by participants as an achievable state and a doable goal with a feasible process of self-learning and transition. Changes in self-perception and the meaning of wellness, therefore, also contributed to identity transition during the holistic wellness retreat experience.

As an outcome of this inclusive process of self-work, the retreat guests stated that after the retreat, they had become a better version of self; they re-evaluated their roles and life and started living more consciously towards self, others, and the environment around them. Moreover, they gained a sense of vision, clarity, and direction towards a new life and a new self. Identity transition within the liminal place of a holistic wellness retreat was found to be a starting point; that is, the transition was viewed not as an end goal, but a changing and ongoing process which the participants referred to as self-improvement and self-development. In summary, it is maintained that the journey to self is about the transition, not the destination.

*“Self-development is the only aim that you need.
I think it's the best that you can get in this world.” (Mary)*

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusions

*The journey of consciousness is life-long.
But when you really think about it, what else is there to do?
(Gawain, 2006, p. 2)*

5.1 Introduction

This research has successfully addressed the research aim and the two research questions, thus, filling gaps in the marketing literature. The aim of this study was to examine identity transition by exploring how the holistic wellness retreat experience facilitates, illuminates, and changes one's identity through the inspection of changes in perception of self and the meaning of wellness. The study explored two research questions: (1) *What are participants' (a) meanings of wellness and the holistic wellness retreat experience and (b) perceptions of self, prior to and following attendance at a holistic wellness retreat?;* and (2) *What shapes and influences identity transition while at the holistic wellness retreat and how does this occur?* The data was obtained from the visitors to the holistic wellness retreat through a set of qualitative methods including face-to-face interviews and observations during the stay.

The goal of this chapter is to bring together the answers to the above questions and reflect upon these findings through appropriate theoretical lenses to explain the findings in greater depth. The chapter, therefore, provides a detailed discussion on the findings of the research and its applications to theory. Next, the chapter provides an overview of the significance and contributions the study offers theoretically and managerially. Limitations and future research ideas are outlined followed by the conclusions and the epilogue to close this study.

5.2 Summary of findings

Holistic wellness retreat – from escape to transition

Past research has tended to link tourists' desire for a retreat stay with their desire to escape. Academics have sought the reasons why people want to get away and what they are getting away from (e.g., Cohen, 2010; Edensor, 2001; Kelly, 2010). In contrast, there is a need to see beyond the surface and study not only what people are 'running away' from when engaging in retreat tourism and why, but also what they are 'running towards' when deciding to buy a retreat holiday package. That is, it is already known that people's motivation for attending retreat places in general is linked to their desire to escape; however, their desire to escape is linked to their desire to seek. Retreat tourists escape from some aspects of their everyday lives in the hope of finding new ways of being (Cohen, 2010). The findings of this research support this argument. People escape the old in order to find the new and the holistic wellness retreat is a place where their search begins.

The holistic wellness retreat acts as a place where people can experience selfhood outside of their normal lives and everyday roles and provides them with an opportunity for change and transition. This, in turn, gives the retreat guests the opportunity to not just relax and recharge but also to stop, realise, and reflect while combining holiday and self-work. The holistic wellness retreat stay experience gives some an opportunity to redefine their roles and even careers, while for others, it gives new goals and clarity on what they want to achieve in life. The holistic wellness retreat represents a transitional place at which the retreat guests are able not only to be physically, mentally, and spiritually (in other words – holistically) revived, but there they are also able to enhance their knowledge of self and the world around them. This results in identity transition as they leave the retreat with a sense of clarity, direction, knowledge, tools, and a strong belief in self and their futures.

This research extends prior research on consumer behaviour by introducing the notion of identity transition to explain how wellness tourists attempt different self-roles and re-construct their identity in a liminal place such as holistic wellness retreat. The aim of this chapter is to discuss the findings of the research and examine them through appropriate theoretical lenses to understand how and why these findings occurred.

A brief summary of the findings includes the following. The findings on research question 1 (a) show that the meaning of wellness and the holistic wellness retreat experience changed in the minds of the guests during their experience at the holistic wellness retreat stay. The term 'wellness' transformed from a desirable to a doable goal and started to be perceived as an achievable state with a feasible process of self-learning and transition. The prior perception of

self was predominantly negative and included unconstructive mental self-characteristics. After attending the holistic wellness retreat, the perception of self had evolved dramatically. In short, the perception of self transformed into a positive self-picture and the retreat guests gained a strong sense of self-confidence and self-compassion at the same time. Generally, the mental changes in perception of self were more common than physical changes. Changes in self-perception and the meaning of wellness, therefore, also contributed to the identity transition process.

The findings on research question 1 (b) show that before and following attendance at the holistic wellness retreat, people differed in their perceptions of who they are and what they do, but also why they do it and how they do it. Specifically, the second research question led to an in-depth look into whether and how identity transition occurs. More specifically, it was possible to see what triggered and influenced the identity transition of the visitors to the holistic wellness retreat.

Overall, the answers to the first research question, whether and how the perceptions of self and meaning of wellness change during the holistic wellness retreat experience, showed that both of these constructs changed during the holistic wellness retreat experience. Moreover, the holistic wellness retreat experience illuminated changes in the meaning of wellness in a way that the concept and its understanding evolved during and after the retreat stay. There was a noticeable positive shift and improvements in the perception of self amongst guests. Changes in self-perception and the meaning of wellness, therefore, were found to be strongly linked to the identity transition process. This supports the importance of studying identity transition during actual engagement in a tourism activity.

The findings on the second research question indicated that the holistic wellness retreat itself triggered the changes in identity and facilitated identity transition because it was found to act as a liminal place where the guests could freely explore self as well as try different self-roles in a safe and supportive environment. Moreover, the identity transition was shaped by co-creation (of identity) with other retreat guests that included social aspects, shared experiences of the programme design, and interactive relationships between the guests. It was also shaped by self-exploration which included participation in retreat activities, but most importantly, an individual willingness and commitment to self-work. The outcomes of this exclusive experience included an opportunity for guests to re-evaluate their lives and selves, to learn new skills and tools while participating in various activities, and to become more social and trusting towards one another as an outcome of co-creation and the social aspects of the retreat. Finally, the participants shared that they had started to live consciously after the retreat.

As an effect of the retreat, participants gained a sense of vision, clarity, and direction toward a new life and a new self. Identity transition within this liminal place of a holistic wellness retreat was found to be a starting point, while the transition can be viewed not as an end goal, but a constantly changing process that is based on self-acceptance rather than self-judgement. To clarify, the participants came to the holistic wellness retreat with two primary goals: to rest and relax as well as to do self-work in order to fix self (or become fixed) as they were not happy with self. Following the retreat, participants talked about their increased commitment to do self-work both while at the retreat and after they had left the place. They left determined and committed to constant self-exploration and self-improvements as a result of their enhanced self-value and self-perception.

To summarise, the findings show that participants underwent a re-construction of self-perception that led to self-acceptance, while the meaning of wellness evolved into an achievable state. Identity transition was facilitated by the liminal place of the holistic wellness retreat and further shaped by co-creation (including social aspects, shared experiences, and interactive relationships between guests) and self-exploration (including activity participation, new self-role trials, as well as willingness and commitment to self-work).

All of the above findings may be explained by the following three theoretical concepts: identity work and play, the creation of rituals in order to recognise self-roles, and identity transition and stages of knowing self. These theoretical bases are discussed in greater detail in the following sections.

5.3 Discussion of the findings

5.3.1 Contributions to the theory of identity transition –identity work and play

Based on the review of the past literature that has focused on transformational experiences, identity change, and the state of liminality, which were discussed in previous chapters, and together with the findings of the current study, there is a solid argument that consumers seek self-transformational experiences through holistic wellness retreat participation. Moreover, while some of the past research has stated that tourism activities are mainly ‘play’ (e.g., Urry, 2002), this thesis argues that wellness tourism activities can be perceived as both play and work in people’s identity transitions. The findings of the current research indicate that the concepts of identity work and identity play (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2010) are the mechanisms through which the holistic wellness retreat experience influences and shapes the identity transition process. Specifically, both of these constructs were found to be interlinked in the participants’ experience. Moreover, it became evident from the data analysis how exactly an individual progresses from the state of identity play to identity work. Furthermore, identity work and play are closely linked to the concepts of transition and liminality. It is important to focus specifically on how the holistic wellness retreat experience influences the mechanism of identity transition at work.

Prior to discussing the application and contribution of these two constructs to the research findings, it is necessary to provide a brief outline of the historical development of identity work and play in previous research. The concepts of identity work and play are derived from identity theory and the identity transition concept (Van Gennep, 1960). Identity transition includes the concept of identity work, which is regarded as an individual’s effort to project the desired self to the outer world (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Identity work is then further shaped by experimentation, reflection, and recognition practices in identity work (Beech, 2011).

The state of liminality (or being in-between) and identity work go together because one is never fully emplaced or fixed (Daskalaki et al., 2016). Past research has suggested that in order to transit to a new self, individuals should understand their past self, and more importantly, the open possibilities of self in an anticipated future (Daskalaki et al., 2016). Identity work, therefore, involves transitions from one self to another with self-transformations occurring through the unfolding of things earlier unknown (Daskalaki et al., 2016).

Moreover, following the data analysis and the emergence of findings on participants’ personal reasons and motivations for undertaking a holistic wellness retreat holiday (see Table 5) and their overall experience, it was found that participants tended to progress from a mode of rest

and relaxation to the conscious desire to work on self while at the retreat. This transition from rest to work resonates with the concept of identity work and play discussed in the past literature, which is referred to by Ibarra and Obodaru (2010) as a response to liminality and experiences of identity change. Therefore, rest and relaxation is a synonym for identity play in this study, whereas work on self is strongly linked to the concept of identity work inclusively.

An example of the transition from play to work is illustrated in the case of Jessica where it became apparent from the observational data that she designed her own schedule for each day with a specifically allocated time for rest (i.e., siesta, sunbathing by the pool, listening to music on veranda, etc.) and time for work (i.e., carefully choosing which yoga and fitness sessions to attend based on the level of intensity of the classes, time for morning hiking, etc.). Another example of the transition from play to work is illustrated in the behaviour of Rachel, who spent the first couple of days purely relaxing without continuously participating in the scheduled activities; instead, she slowly started to build her 'working' routine, increasing it on a daily basis. During the follow-up interview, she then shared that after obtaining full relaxation, she realised she had an increased interest in some of the activities that would help her in achieving her self-development:

The concept of identity play differs from the concept of identity based on its primary driver of seeking enjoyment and discovery (March, 1976). In other words, a person approaches a 'pleasurable route' to activities and experiences rather than a 'strict target'. The main argument for this concept, therefore, is that work and play denote different ways in approaching activities rather than differences in the activities themselves (Glynn, 1994). This, in turn, as Ibarra and Obodaru (2016) state, leads to the presence of intuition, emotion, and discovery in people's decision-making process, that are further expressed in creativity and exploration behaviour. Applying this to identity transition, Ibarra and Petriglieri (2010) argue that it is important that purpose and process distinguish identity work and play. The clear difference between these two constructs is discussed next.

Identity work requires strict engagement in forming, repairing, maintaining, or revising self-identity (Brown, 2015; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). In other words, identity work is a process through which an identity is created, expressed, or modified. The concept of identity work includes 'working' towards a known chosen ideal-self or identity. The concept of identity play, on the other hand, is defined as provisional trials and exploration of possible future selves. Identity play tends to facilitate motivational dimensions of the creative process (Hunter et al., 2010; Sandelands, 2010). Furthermore, to explore and differentiate these two concepts, identity work is conducted in the real world, while identity play is within current reality and future

possibilities (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016). Identity work has a direction outwards, seeks validation, and has a high level of self-awareness, which means that an individual's identity is the current understanding of self (e.g., Kreiner et al., 2006; Watson, 2009), while identity play has a direction inwards – the main aim is the discovery of self, and self-identity is often perceived as still unknown (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010).

It is noted that the concepts of identity work and identity play have been referred to interchangeably in past studies; however, Ibarra and Obodaru differentiate these terms. These notions have potential for future studies and further investigations. For instance, recently the concepts have been used to describe identity transitions in organisational studies on career change (Fachin & Davel, 2015). Thus, due to the emerging popularity of these concepts among various disciplines, these concepts of identity work and play have been well applied and further distinguished and defined within this research on identity transition within a holistic wellness retreat environment.

The contribution of the current research is in the finding concerning when and how the transition from the state of identity play (or rest, as it is termed in Chapter 4) to the state of identity work occurs. Firstly, as findings show, the desire for rest and play was participants' predominant focus at the beginning of the holistic wellness retreat stay. This desire for relaxation was fulfilled before moving on to self-work. One of the major elements involved in the successful transition to identity work was the availability of time to adjust to the retreat settings, the social environment, and the overall programme. Another important component for the successful transition from identity play to work was the liminal nature of the holistic wellness retreat. Moreover, such elements as the social environment of the retreat, the staff team, specific retreat activities, and the overall atmosphere further supported participants' transition from rest to self-work, or from identity play to identity work. Furthermore, it is important to highlight that the most significant factor that guaranteed a successful and complete progression from identity play to work appeared to be participants' commitment and desire for self-work.

The overview of the actual transition from identity play to identity work contributes to theory and enhances the identity transition concept. This finding extends our knowledge of identity work and identity transition by exploring the process through which the transition occurs. Therefore, the idea that identity work and play serve as a mechanism that influences the holistic wellness retreat experience of identity transition is a theoretical insight that contributes enormously to the body of knowledge.

Moreover, the recent research aligned with liminal experiences in tourism has suggested that future research should investigate the consequences of liminal experience such as

destination loyalty (Zhang & Xu, 2019). This research has addressed this issue by suggesting a positive liminal experience need not always lead to destination loyalty. All of the participants in the current study acknowledged that they were willing to continue their identity work and visit other retreats in order to expand their knowledge of self and the world, but they were less inclined to visit the same retreat again. Therefore, my study illustrates that the consequence of liminal experiences is the determination to continue identity work, identity transition, and possible self-transformation while exploring other wellness retreats and other locations around the world. This provides the promise that wellness tourism will only continue to grow and expand on a global scale. Thus, in this case, the consumers had identity work loyalty rather than destination loyalty.

5.3.2 Contributions to the theory of ritual creation and consumption, liminality and identity transition

The transition from identity play to work can be applied to the liminality concept. To elaborate, according to past research on liminality and relevant concepts, consumption by liminars is used in three major ways: ritual – for example, high school proms that mark progress through liminal transition (Tinson & Nuttall, 2011); liminal products (e.g., prams as consumption of this product is significant during parental transition (Thomsen & Sorensen, 2006)); and consumption that resolves problems (e.g., a wheelchair (Mason & Pavia, 2006)). The current study, adds value to the stream of research on ritual, and further explains how ritual activities contribute to the transition from identity play to work while in the liminal place of the holistic wellness retreat. This valuable insight is further described in this section of the chapter.

Past research on self-identity has explored people's responses to threats to their sense of self, describing how identity work is used to defend personal identities from unwanted role expectations or to repair professional identity violations (e.g., Kreiner et al., 2006). This study, on the other hand, sheds light on scenarios in which people recognise the difference between their old self and the desired self they want to become. This desire was fulfilled through ritual creation and ritual consumption while in the identity work stage at the holistic wellness retreat centre. Based on this, the present study argues that ritual consumption contributes to the transition from identity play to identity work. In order to further elaborate on this argument, it is important to note that when engaging in activities associated with identity play and identity work, the retreat participants utilised a specific form of creation and engagement in various rituals that were performed with an aim to enhance their holistic wellness and improve self. Therefore, it is beneficial to look at the findings of this study through the lens of consumption

rituals in liminal places and to discuss how these concepts are enhanced further with the application of identity work and play theory.

In the marketing literature, rituals are defined as “a type of expressive, symbolic activity constructed of multiple behaviours that occur in a fixed, episodic sequence, and that tend to be repeated over time. Ritual behaviour is dramatically scripted and acted out and is performed with formality, seriousness, and inner intensity” (Rook, 1985, p. 252). More specifically, consumption rituals are defined as practices surrounding a special occasion or an event (Rook, 1985). Consumption rituals give ‘meaning to the world’ and those who perform the ritual (Montemurro, 2002). In the liminality literature, it has been found that during the transition from one role to another, consumption rituals provide various adjustments to new self-roles and thus, promote conformity to the new social groups (e.g., Afflerback et al., 2004; Friese, 2001; Smith, 1999).

Rituals gain a symbolic meaning for individuals who perform or engage in these rituals on a regular basis. The retreat participants, through identity play and work, engaged in the various activities of the retreat programme, which in turn became a new routine that they were exposed to on a daily basis while in the safe and supportive environment of the liminal place of the holistic wellness retreat.

Furthermore, past research has shown that rituals are generally repetitive, playful, liminal, and operational (Wulf et al., 2010). Applying the theory of ritual consumption and ritual creations to the findings of this study assists in explaining why the retreat acted as a liminal place for the guests and why their commitment to the identity work process took place. For instance, increasing the retreat guests’ engagement and commitment to identity work assisted with the consumption rituals while at the holistic wellness retreat. These consumption rituals, in this setting, included regular participation in activities, social aspects, and time to play and self-reflect. More specifically, the rituals included the elements that created a balance between active activities for the physical body and workshops for mind enhancement that comprised meditation, yoga, hiking, cooking and juicing demonstrations, guests speakers, fitness and aqua fitness classes, and so on; however, the rituals that began at the retreat also included balanced between time alone and time socialising, a specific schedule for food intake, and an overall schedule for sleep and awake hours that was closely monitored by the retreat facilitators. The guests also had a ritual of a daily free time to play and relax in their own way on or outside of the retreat premises. Within these rituals, the retreat guests acquired and then organised their new lifestyle accordingly in order to facilitate identity transition.

Ritual consumption within the holistic wellness retreat settings led to an increased commitment to engage in the identity work process. These rituals became new habits for the

guests, through which they created opportunities for new self-roles in a balanced manner. Furthermore, the ritual creation process was linked with self-reflection practices as well as social aspects and activity participation while at the holistic wellness retreat.

In summary, the process of ritual creation and ritual consumption is another explanation for the underlying mechanisms involved in the identity transition process and identity work and play theory. As the research findings in Chapter 4 indicate, both social engagement and encouragement as well as shared experiences with others smoothed and further enhanced the guests' dedication to the identity work during their holistic wellness retreat stay. Both social engagement and shared experiences can be linked with ritual creation since all of the retreat activities were shared among the guests on a daily basis. Thus, the activities and the overall environment became a new ritual for participants that they shared between each other. The process of ritual creation and ritual consumption, therefore, is linked to identity transition.

To conclude, it was found that increasing engagement and commitment to identity work was assisted by consumption rituals while at the holistic wellness retreat. These consumption rituals in this setting included regular activities participation, social aspects, and time to play and self-reflect. Within these rituals, the retreat guests acquired and then organised their new lifestyle accordingly to facilitate their identity transition. This explanation further adds value to the theory of identity work and play, arguing that ritual creation and ritual consumption have a direct influence on the identity transition process through the underlying mechanism of identity work and play.

5.3.3 Identity transition and the stages of knowing (self)

The holistic wellness retreat is a place that provides a safe and supportive environment that allows guests to stop and re-connect or find new ways of living. The retreat itself acts and serves as a liminal place where guests can find themselves in a state of 'in-between-ness' where their knowledge of self and self-work begins to augment. Time at the holistic wellness retreat was found to provide an opportunity not only to renew and reset, relax and unwind, but also to reflect, explore, play, and work with identity as new knowledge of self and world, and tools for better and balanced life emerged for the retreat guests. This finding is further supported by the argument that one of the main features of tourism consumption is the search for the authentic experience which tourists use as a way to develop self-consciousness about their places in the world (MacCannell, 1989). Moreover, it has been found that the wellness tourism experience also assists in developing and increasing people's knowledge and consciousness of themselves as individuals. Holistic wellness retreat places act as a perfect platform where people can explore,

try, learn, create, and use (apply) new roles and new identities through the process of identity work and play. This can be explained with a modified application of the Johari Window Model (Luft & Ingham, 1961) and 'Stages of Competence' model (Burch, 1970) that were shown in the Chapter 2 of the thesis.

Based on this theory and the findings of the current research, it is possible to apply this theoretical base when discussing the path the retreat guests undertook – from identity play to identity work and identity transition. Most importantly, it is evident that there is a strong need to evaluate the process and progression of knowledge of self while going through identity work and play, and transition from one self to another. Therefore, a modified concept derived from Figure 1 in Chapter 2 was used as a base for this research to answer why and how identity transition occurs through identity work and play. The original model looks at knowledge for both self and others and the later modified model looks at knowledge and learning progression, whereas the focus of the modified concept applied in this thesis is on self only, including conscious and unconscious knowledge on self and its progression.

The overview of the study findings shows that the holistic wellness retreat experience acts as a liminal place that promotes identity play and identity work process as part of identity transition. An application of the above theoretical background described in Chapter 2 with modifications resulted in the four stages of knowing about self as follows:

(1) Unconscious Unknown about self (not aware of various aspects of self) – 'I do not know what I do not know about myself, wellness, and life';

(2) Conscious Unknown about self (knowing what is lacking to become a better version of self, and thus having goals on what should be achieved about self) – 'I know what I do not know about myself, wellness, and life';

(3) Conscious Known (learning new things about self; becoming conscious of skills or steps required to get to a 'different self' – this stage is mostly present during the identity work and transition process and involves being consciously aware of where to from now) – 'I have learned something and now I have the information to work on self, I want to work on self, to create a healthy lifestyle, change something, achieve wellness, change self';

(4) Unconscious Known (identity work has been implemented resulting in identity transition) – 'I know something and I freely do it, it has become a routine, it is part of my life now'.

The findings revealed that identity transition occurs through both identity work and identity play and thus makes a solid theoretical contribution to identity theory. It was also found that identity transition is a dynamic process that involves a number of different variables. In

short, guests at the holistic wellness retreat progressed from stages of unconscious unknowing or conscious unknowing about self and life to conscious knowing and the retreat ultimately acted as a safe liminal place that promoted identity work and influenced the rich transition and change in perceptions of self, wellness, and life.

In this research, the application of the stages of knowledge is focused on learning about self, life, and skills/tools; however, mostly it is about discovering and learning about self while at a wellness retreat, and as one progresses further, and the more identity play and identity work processes are present, the further the transition becomes to a new self.

When applying the above to the findings, firstly, it should be emphasised that at the beginning of the retreat, the participants were either on the first or second stages of knowing about self. For instance, on the one hand, participants' reasons and motives for undertaking the holistic wellness retreat stay as discussed in Chapter 4 showed that these were mostly based on the Unconscious Unknown (UU) stage of knowledge of self that slowly progressed to the Conscious Unknown stage (CU). In other words, the participants realised that they had an issue or a problem such as tiredness, burn out, or stress (all of these terms were expressed by the participants during the first interview). However, they were not consciously aware of the ways in which they could deal with these issues in the most efficient way through the holistic wellness retreat. This finding suggests that people knew they would gain rest and relaxation at the retreat but at this stage, they were not aware of the further benefits of the retreat. As such, they did not know what could be other reasons for undertaking the retreat other than to rest.

On the other hand, as the findings suggest, personal growth was one of the most frequently mentioned expectations prior to the start of the retreat. In the selected quotes below it is clear that people had a solid comprehension of what they were about to work on, thus representing their position at the Conscious Unknown (CU) stage prior to the beginning of the retreat and their willingness to work on identity, i.e., "It is self-transformation I think. I think we don't need to change ourselves, we need to stay ourselves but we need to work on ourselves... I hope we will have some transformational experience. I don't wanna judge anyone because of their feelings or their experiences and I would hope that they would do the same... We want to be better for others but definitely need to start to think of ourselves, not about other people" (Julie, from the interview).

In general, people arrived at the retreat when in transition between the Unconscious Unknown (UU) stage and the Conscious Unknown (CU) stage of knowing self. They identified the areas in which they lacked knowledge of self and they used the wellness retreat as a place to gain the required knowledge to progress to the Conscious Known (CK) stage and perhaps even

to the Unconscious Known (UK) stage. These stages are linked to the concept of identity play whereby people chose to attend the holistic wellness retreat to rest and relax in the first place. The progression to identity work, then, was facilitated by the progression to other stages of knowing about self. Work on self was viewed as a path from the Conscious Unknown (CU) stage to the Conscious Known (CK) stage. For instance, Julie shared her expectations of gaining more meaning in life: “I feel that there is more in our lives and I need to move there from there from this life to some other, where there is more good stuff and life changing stuff... I would like to get motivated, to be more disciplined, to get some new projects, to start doing something life changing, my life changing” (Julie, from the interview)

The retreat guests were adamant that they wanted to use the retreat experience not just for relaxation, but also to look at self and undertake identity work. However, although they already knew what they wanted, they did not have a clear path or strategy to get there, thus providing proof that the retreat guests were predominantly in the Conscious Unknown (CU) stage of identity work prior to the retreat’s commencement. Further examples of the retreat guests’ expectation of progressing from the Conscious Unknown (CU) stage to the Conscious Known (CK) stage are presented in the following examples: “...and maybe have more clarity of what I want to do next” (Rachel, when talking about finding new direction in life): “for me, it’s a chance to discover the missing links of the whole me” (Alex, when talking about finding a missing self); “I don’t wanna judge anyone because of their feelings or their experiences and I would hope that they would do the same. Potentially, like because it’s self-work and in the future, when we can be better, we don’t have to think what other people think of us, so it’s one of our things. We want to be better for others but definitely need to start to think of ourselves, not about other people” (Julie, when talking about the importance on focusing on self in order to transform).

Another example is the shift in the meaning of wellness. After the completion of the holistic wellness retreat programme, the study participants moved beyond the simple statements and characteristics of the wellness definition provided during the first interview, and instead showed an understanding of the concept as a process. The retreat guests shared that they had been through a deep analysis of self and the term ‘wellness’ while at the retreat. The interviewees also stated that they had gained a clear vision of how to achieve the aims they had provided during the first interview. The result was that their knowledge had progressed from the Conscious Unknown (CU) stage to the Conscious Known (CK) stage.

The finding that the retreat facilitated the transition to a more conscious life also reflects the transition from the Conscious Unknown (CU) stage, where participants were aware of what

needed to be changed or learned but did not have the necessary knowledge and skills yet, to the Conscious Known (CK) stage, where after the retreat the participants learned the knowledge required to achieve their goals and implement changes in their lives and thinking patterns, i.e., “It was an attempt to go beyond the ordinary perception of the world. This is the first step in a conscious life and I feel stronger now” (Mary).

It is important to note that all of the study participants progressed from the conscious unknown (CU) stage to the conscious known (CK) stage while at the holistic wellness retreat. For instance, they realised who they did not want to be in regards to the perception of self they had prior to the retreat. They went to the retreat not only to rest and relax, but also with a conscious desire to work on self in order to change their negative self-image and self-identity. Moreover, the sense of liminality experienced at the retreat was evident through their behaviour and answers that showed they were trying different self-roles through both work and rest activities. The liminality developed further as they progressed through the retreat. Using new tools, they explored self and tried different variations of possible future selves. As their knowledge of self progressed, re-construction and identity transition occurred. Therefore, the application and integration of such concepts as liminality, identity work and play, and stages of knowing all provide valuable theoretical inputs.

In summary, participants’ expectations of self were fulfilled as they progressed from one stage of knowing self to another. The guests smoothly progressed from the Conscious Unknown (CU) stage to the Conscious Known (CK) stage, while in some aspects, they were able to achieve a combination of Conscious Known (CK) and Unconscious Known (UK). Lastly, these stages further explain the findings and the actual process of self-perception change and identity transition while at the holistic wellness retreat.

5.4 Research significance and further contributions

Theoretical and academic contributions

Apart from the abovementioned theoretical contributions to the concept of identity transition through identity work and play, as well as knowledge stages, there are a number of other theoretical and research implications of this study that are outlined and discussed below.

First, this research explored wellness tourists' behaviour in a new market niche hitherto unexplored in the domain of the tourism marketing literature. Wellness as a concept has only recently received interest among such academic fields as health science, psychology, tourism and tourism marketing, business management, finance research, and more. Applying a consumer behaviour approach, studying identity transition during the holistic wellness retreat experience provides useful knowledge and understanding. Moreover, findings of this research contribute to the marketing and tourism literature. Steiner and Reisinger (2006) argue that it is important to turn research attention to wellness tourism as a phenomenon; thus, this study meets the need for more research in this area and helps prevent the possibility of wellness tourism sliding off into a health-based notion and thereby missing the potential the holistic concept of wellness tourism offers. Moreover, holistic wellness retreats have a number of benefits that enhance the self and contribute to overall wellness and well-being at both local and international levels. Holistic wellness retreat centres provide a safe and supportive environment for identity transition and, thus, this research builds a strong foundational platform on which there is a great potential for further studies in marketing, tourism, consumer psychology, human sciences, business, management and medical studies.

Second, theoretically, this paper contributes to consumer behaviour by extending the scope of study on liminal places and their effects on the identity transition process. As noted by Ibarra and Obodaru (2016), the liminality construct requires a conceptual update and thus, this is the main contribution of the current research thesis. More specifically, the findings of this research on how perceptions of self change during a retreat experience and what shapes these transitions, make a distinct contribution to current thinking about identity and identity change. By linking the liminality to self-perception theories, this thesis clarifies the role of playful agency (the holistic wellness retreat in this case) as an underlying mechanism stimulating identity change and transformation.

Third, in past research, consumption has been explored and studied as a result of liminal experience. This represents a gap in liminal consumption theory. While there have been studies that have aimed to conceptualize transitional consumption generally, this area remains underexplored in wellness tourism consumption. This study shows that consumption can

promote liminality; that is, a holistic wellness retreat can unfold liminal place for consumers and facilitate their identity work. More specifically, the consumption of the holistic wellness retreat service itself can be a liminal experience in that it can promote and influence the beginning of identity transition.

This study addresses the gap in research on how identity transition is engendered during the holistic wellness retreat experience. The researcher further explored the tourists' self-transformation while they were at the retreat and the mechanisms that underlie this process. Past research has focused on self-transformation and identity transition after a tourism experience. The present study, on the other hand, investigated the process of identity transition during and straight after the completion of a holistic wellness retreat programme.

This study illustrates how people transit from identity play to identity work through applying the theoretical notion of identity work and play borrowed from the organizational behaviour to explain this identity transition process. This research argues that people explore the unknown parts of their identities through the progression from identity play to identity work. This study answers what makes both identity play and identity work effective for the transitional experience. More specifically, this research articulates features of the process of identity play and work by looking at how, where, and why people work and play with possible selves. Therefore, the concept of identity work and play as a mechanism that influences the holistic wellness retreat experience of identity transition is a theoretical insight that contributes to the body of knowledge. Furthermore, the research extends past studies that view tourism activities mainly as 'play' (Urry, 2002) by showing the co-existence of 'play' and 'work' in shaping wellness tourists' identity transition during a holistic wellness retreat experience. The application of identity work and play as a theoretical lens to understand this process contributes to current thinking about identity construction and change. In addition, the researcher theorized how the shift of motivations for engaging in holistic wellness retreat from 'play' to 'work' shapes the process of identity transition. The contribution of the current research is in the finding concerning when and how the transition from the state of identity play to identity work occurs. The overview of transition from identity play to work contributes to theory and enhances the identity transition concept. The thesis adds value by illustrating the process from identity play to identity work and what makes this process effective for identity transition within tourism settings.

The study demonstrated how participants transit from initial motives for relaxation (i.e., 'to rest') to achieve a better self by performing self-work. For example, Rachel and Jessica spent their first days relaxing without active participation in any activities. Subsequently, they were

observed gaining momentum to perform their identity work through their engagement in the retreat programme. The paper further highlights how consumption of programmes and the social aspects of the retreat shaped identity work and play, and created a balance between ‘play’ and ‘work’ that facilitated the process of identity transition.

While past research has identified transformative tourism experiences in the context of long-term travel either before the travel activity focusing on the motivations of travellers or after the tourism experience is completed focusing on the transformations of the long-term travel; whereas this is one of the first studies to identify transformative experiences occurring within a short-duration touristic experience. The past research that focused on the experience before trip shows that. This research focuses on the identity transition experience as a process, as a part of self-transformation during the short-term stay.

Lastly, the thesis advances our understanding of identity transition experiences as part of the self-transformational journey in a holistic wellness retreat context. By doing so, the researcher did not mean to argue that the occurrence of self-transformation is certain, but rather focuses on the process of identity transition that may occur during a wellness retreat journey.

Managerial and practical contributions

Findings from the present research have a number of managerial ramifications. First of all, as holistic wellness retreats act as a facilitator towards identity work and transition, consumer demand in this industry is likely to experience further growth, establishing new and well-developed premises that deliver all of the abovementioned outcomes in a safe and supportive retreat style environment.

This study aimed to develop an integrated ‘industry-academic’ discussion that provides insights not only as a theoretical contribution, but also as a contribution to managerial and business practices. Marketers and policymakers should, therefore, consider the transformational potential of their tourism products. This research delivers new insights on identity transition experiences at a holistic wellness retreat and, thus, helps industry practitioners to better understand their customers and thereby enabling them to develop effective communication strategies and enhanced services to engage their customers and differentiate their services accordingly.

Firstly, managerial implications include the importance of designing programmes to enhance transitions. Factors leading to identity transition should be taken into account by owners to build strategies for consumer engagement and provide greater transformative experiences. Wellness industry leaders should consider the transformational potential of their tourism

offerings. The findings yield valuable insights into the development of the holistic wellness retreat programmes that facilitate transformative experiences. A careful development of programme design at the holistic wellness retreats that include co-production and co-creation with opinion leaders, industry professionals, and retreat guests is proposed as an essential component of successful business operation and growth.

Given the findings provided about motives, changes in self that occur as a result of the retreat experience, some of the examples of strategies how to design such experiences could include building modifications in the retreat programme schedule that proceed along the line of natural progression from rest to work. As noted during the observations, the participants did not initially participate in activities related to self-work or improvements but rather were interested in rest and relaxation. In order to eliminate the potential of future customers feeling overwhelmed and challenged at the beginning of the retreat, the progression could be introduced in smooth steps where participants build their own willingness and commitment to do the self-work. For instance, on Day 2 of the retreat the managers could build a focus on the introductory seminars and workshops on the importance of health preventative practices and/or holistic wellness. On Day 4, then they could schedule activities that promote participation and trial of new self-roles and learning of new skills. This should be made in a moderate and fluid manner so the participants can feel the balance between rest and work. Marketing strategies for holistic wellness retreat centres should focus on how holistic wellness retreats and other relevant parties can successfully facilitate, communicate, deliver, and promote their places as an environment for a safe, effective, and positive liminal experience and transition to a positive holistic sense of well-being and a healthy life.

Moreover, it is vital to build marketing communication strategies to highlight the transformational aspects of the holistic wellness retreats. In order to succeed, retreat management should focus on delivering and communicating that the holistic wellness retreat acts as a safe space for undertaking identity work and that it is a safe experience of self-change at the holistic wellness retreat vacation. Actual examples of the communication campaigns could include:

- a. Collaborations with wellness bloggers who have established trust among consumers and have recognised opinion leadership within the industry. By doing so, the bloggers will increase awareness of the holistic wellness retreats and how these places can change people.
- b. Marketing managers can build communication strategies through social media platforms not only through using the abovementioned wellness and related bloggers, but also show their presence online (on social media and retreats' websites), thus,

building an ongoing communication with communities and potential future guests. Some of these communication campaigns could build a focus around the actual experience of the holistic wellness retreat, showing a brand that delivers all of these practices that lead to identity change and other transformational outcomes (e.g., video reviews from past guests as well as written and video examples from famous role models who attended the retreat who talk about their experiences; this can also include case studies and video testimonials where past retreat guests elaborate on the challenging circumstances they faced and their transformational journeys and overall outcomes of the holistic wellness retreat experience).

Generally, these strategies have a number of major advantages including highlighting the transformational aspects of the holistic wellness retreat; further minimising the confusion around the wellness concept in industry settings; and building awareness of holistic wellness retreats reaching wider audiences and potential customers.

Furthermore, as the findings suggest, the holistic wellness retreat offers guests an opportunity for conscious living. It is argued that guests' new behaviour and view-points brought about by identity transition include a higher degree of conscious consumption behaviour expressed in the development of more sustainable living and better choices about what to buy, from whom, where, and in what quantities. Moreover, people can communicate these new values to their friends and family members and by doing so, have an influential impact on them. Marketing managers of the various industries that promote healthy lifestyle products and services should bear this in mind and deliver the relevant marketing communication campaigns promptly to this group of people who might be influenced by the past holistic wellness retreat guests. This strategy in return could further highlight and support the healthy lifestyle trend beyond the wellness tourism segment.

5.5 Limitations and considerations for future research

Despite the value of the methodological approach undertaken, this research design might also have potential limitations. Firstly, the study comprised interviews with and observations of a small sample of participants from only one holistic wellness retreat. The cultural background of the participants was mainly from Great Britain and European countries, with only one participant living in Canada and one who participated only in observational study being from Brazil, who also lived in Italy. Therefore, the study might or might not be able to fully generalise and apply the findings from the interviews and observations to other cultures and other retreat centres around the world. In the thesis the researcher argues that a moderate generalisation in the interpretivist approach is possible and achievable (Williams, 2000). Nevertheless, to explore identity transition in other holistic wellness retreats and also in other wellness related places and cultural contexts is advantageous.

Furthermore, the study used only a small sample of participants from one holistic wellness retreat centre to examine identity transition; therefore, the findings were not compared with those in other holistic wellness retreat centres yet. This limitation provides an opportunity for future studies to expand the number of participants attending different holistic wellness retreat centres around the world. This would additionally provide a strong platform for the study of cultural differences and the comparison of answers provided by participants. For this reason, further demographical diversity is a bonus for such a research. Thus, despite the international background of the interviewees, further studies in other cultural, demographic, and geographical contexts are suggested. Therefore, it would be beneficial for future studies to compare the results with other retreat centres.

However, despite the above issue, a small sample provided an opportunity for closer study of the chosen participants in their daily behaviour. This qualitative approach, therefore, encouraged and provided an enhanced and naturalistic study of identity transitional outcomes as a result of a holistic wellness retreat experience.

There are other potential methodological limitations of the research. The second limitation of the methodology is the timing of the data collection. Generally, the guests tend to stay at a wellness retreat for a week, according to wellness retreat website booking systems and the observational notes obtained for this study. Nevertheless, there is an opportunity for people to stay for a longer period of time, where they prefer a week long stay at a retreat, as was also demonstrated by the study participants during observations while at the retreat site. Therefore, due to time constraints, and in order to be able to gather the right participants quickly, it was chosen to interview those who were booked for a seven-day programme. The chosen length of

the programme is generally not long enough for people to fully perceive self transformative experiences such as identity transition; hence, it was decided to include follow-up studies as a direction for future research.

The third limitation of the methodology was the interviewees' fluency in the English language since for the majority, English was a second language. As a result, a few of the interviewees sometimes experienced minor difficulties in expressing their feelings or thoughts during the face-to-face interviews. Regardless, different tactics and strategies described in Chapter 3 were employed to minimize these possible confusions, however, this limitation should be acknowledged.

It would also be meaningful to compare the transitional experience of first-time guests to a holistic wellness retreat centre with those who are returning guests. For instance, the cumulative effect of frequent retreat visits could be closely monitored.

Evidence from this study indicates that a holistic wellness retreat provides an environment for tourists to experience positive shifts in their perception of self during their stay. Findings, therefore, suggest that wellness retreats have an ability to transform the lives of participants on varying levels. Future research should conduct further studies (minimum at 1 year at months and 2 years or more intervals) with the same participants in order to determine the long-term effects of a retreat and the level of self-transformation beyond the transitional stage. This approach would provide a more comprehensive picture of the mechanisms of the identity transition process. It would also assist in measuring the degree of identity work performed following a retreat stay and the degree of self-transformation.

Studying returning visitors could be also included in the future research agenda in order to understand their motives for returning to the same holistic wellness retreat, however, the present study does not suggest that transition might not last for a year. In fact it shows that the participants might be seeking further transformations, e.g., Lisa and her career change since her first stay at the holistic wellness retreat, and now she was seeking more internal balance and external (physical body) transformations.

It would also be of great value to conduct a longitudinal study of guests at a holistic wellness retreat in order to test whether there is a long-term transformational effect as a result of identity transition after guests return home and to what degree. For instance, it would be beneficial to conduct a longitudinal study with a series of post-stay interviews (i.e., 1, 3 and 6 months) to study the extent of self-transformation in detail and compare whether self-transformation declines, remains, or if further changes occur. This would provide a more comprehensive picture of the mechanisms of the identity transition process. It would also assist

in measuring the degree of identity work performed following a retreat stay and the degree of self-transformation. For this research, the focus was on the starting point of transformations, specifically how the identity transition occurs during a short-term travel at the holistic wellness retreat and what the mechanisms behind this are. However, a longitudinal study would be beneficial in future research in order to study whether and how long-term transformational outcomes last after the completion of the holistic wellness retreat program.

Moreover, future research could focus on identity work both during and after the holistic wellness retreat experience. Such research could include a focus not only on personal identity but also on social identity to determine whether retreat guests are capable of finding and negotiating an optimal balance between personal and social identities during and after the retreat.

Future studies could also extend this research by further focusing on guests' expectations of a holistic wellness retreat regarding self and whether these expectations are met during the retreat. Findings could be examined in regards to how these expectations facilitate identity work while in the holistic wellness retreat environment.

As a component of the present research was to study personal identities, it would be also advantageous to study the identity work process with the focus on social identity to determine whether guests are capable of finding a balance between personal and social identities during and after the holistic wellness retreat. Moreover, it would be significant to incorporate into the study the concepts of quality of life, subjective well-being, and identity transition outcomes to assess the effects of the transformative experience for both personal and social identities.

Given its focus on a single holistic wellness retreat and a sample with predominantly European and Western participants, the findings, even though they may apply to other holistic wellness retreats, they might not apply to other wellness tourism or cultural settings (i.e. spiritual tourism and Asian participants). Nevertheless, it was not the focus of the current study to explore other cultures and other wellness types of tourism, however, future research should explore identity transition in more depth in other contexts.

Moreover, future research could focus on exploring how the identity transition processes could evolve into further meaningful changes in one's identity, behaviour, way of living; i.e., whether and how identity change as a result of the holistic wellness retreat experience affects sustainable consumption practices.

Finally, another future research idea is to include interviews with managers of the holistic wellness retreats in order to provide further insights on wellness tourism segment, holistic wellness retreats as well as transitional power of these places and thus, boost managerial implications further.

5.6 Conclusions

The researcher talked about the process behind self-transformation, specifically how the transitional process occurs, what it begins with and what affects and shapes this transition in holistic wellness retreat settings.

Based on the collected and analysed data, this study concludes that holistic wellness retreats can enable guests to undergo identity transition; however, this subject has not been thoroughly and properly investigated yet, despite the rapid growth of the wellness tourism market niche. The study participants of this thesis shared that they felt different during and after the retreat programme, both mentally and physically, and that they had developed an enhanced sense of well-being.

When analysing the interview transcripts it became clear that participants felt the holistic wellness retreat had stimulated a physical and mental transitional shift beyond their 'normal' lives. It was also apparent that the participants recognized that they were going to the retreat not just to relax and rejuvenate, to gain stress relief and to be taken care of, but also to fulfil their personal expectations of self they had established prior to the retreat programme, thus, highlighting that they were consciously going to the retreat not just to rest but also to work on self (Conscious Unknown stage of the Johari Window).

On the other hand, the visitors at the holistic wellness retreat received more than they were originally expecting; for instance, they discovered that there were some aspects of themselves and their lives that they were not previously aware of (Unconscious Unknown stage). The retreat centre and the retreat programme acted as a safe environment where guests acknowledged and experienced a liminal place – while at the retreat they realised that they were no longer who they were prior to their arrival at the retreat, nor did they fully transition to become their new selves; instead, they were on a journey in between their different identities. However, at the end of the one-week retreat programme, an identity shift was experienced, which supports the argument that a holistic wellness retreat stay promotes and shapes the transition from one self to another.

Further research is required to really understand consumption's full impact upon liminal identity (Tonner, 2016). Thus, the empirical material presented in this doctoral thesis aids in understanding how a holistic wellness retreat as a type of service consumption within the wellness tourism sector affects, shapes, and influence people's transitional experiences and identity work.

Engaging in wellness tourism and specifically visiting a holistic wellness retreat is a type of service consumption that this research shows acts to unfold new stages of knowledge of self

and environment, leading people to identity change. The retreat guests gather new knowledge on self and life, and then automatically progress through knowledge stages with the help of the social environment, activities, and programmes of the retreat. While at the retreat, they realize that they are no longer their old selves but nor are they fully their new desired selves. The state of 'in between-ness' is experienced on all wellness levels: body, mind, and soul.

In general, much of the past research has argued that a disruptive event shifts a person into a state of liminality where transformation might happen. This often occurs when a person enters a new environment and realise they are no longer their old self, and neither are they completely transformed versions of self (Preston-Whyte, 2004). This research also firmly holds that such tourism places as holistic wellness retreat centres can act as liminal places that promote identity transition and this experience can be positive throughout.

Sometimes people willingly and consciously go to places that they believe will give them an opportunity to transit from their old self to a liminal place where they can safely study and explore what and who they want to be. However, the conscious choice of being in a liminal place is not limited to entering a physical place or environment; this research proves that being involved in various activities can facilitate a safe and positive experience of liminality. For instance, the findings of this research show that practising meditation is a common way people choose in order to put themselves into a liminal place. Meditation is a mental and, some argue, a spiritual practice, whereby an individual gains new knowledge of self and life, and realises the limitless nature of the soul while also fully experiencing the physical experience of a human life. Being in this space between two dimensions is a powerful and transformative practice experienced by the participants of this study that shifted their perception of self and reality.

It requires work and self-determination to enter and experience a liminal state. Holistic wellness retreats provide a safe and supportive environment to do so without being influenced by disruptive life experiences. It also requires intention and desire to enter the liminal state, and the activities, rituals, and overall programme design of a holistic wellness retreat, together with social support from other participants, make it easier to attain this state and the results more effective. A holistic wellness retreat provides people with an opportunity to experience a liminal place and reflect, accept, and expand self, transiting to a more conscious and healthy life.

The current research was not intended to examine the long-term outcomes of transformative experience, but was concerned more with the process of how holistic wellness retreat experiences illuminate the guest's identity transition. The researcher approached the notion of identity as a process. This thesis aimed to extend knowledge on self-transformation and deepen our understanding of the mechanism behind the identity transition process during the

wellness tourism experience. The thesis demonstrates that a holistic wellness retreat can enable guests to undergo identity transition and demonstrates the process of this transition in detail and shows that it can be a first step towards self-transformation.

The epilogue

Consumption of the holistic wellness retreat service is a conscious choice consumers make in order to experience positive liminality, identity play and work, and new self-role trials, rituals creation, and identity transition. Wellness tourism goes beyond just a healthy lifestyle trend; it can be a journey to experience a place that people perceive as offering a ‘promise’ – a place where they can go to in order to stop, relax, recharge, and smoothly transit to self-work towards a better and healthier self and life. Furthermore, the main value of a holistic wellness retreat is not only that it provides a fun experience whereby guests can relax, unwind, and rejuvenate – a safe environment where people can recharge and reflect on or improve their current physical and mental state – but also that acts as a liminal place that promotes and facilitates the transition to a better self. This long-term advantage was found to be the main contributing factor to retreat consumers becoming loyal wellness retreat tourists keen to experience different holistic wellness retreats in other locations.

In order to address the confusion concerning the wellness tourism concept, this research adds more meaningful insights on what the holistic wellness retreat offers to people. A holistic wellness retreat is not a “fashionable” concept that will fade away within a few years. It has been in the market for centuries, transiting and transforming to something more holistic and balanced – in the same way that people transit and transform to more holistic and balanced selves.

The research focus in such fields as marketing, consumer psychology and tourism disciplines, has been to find solutions to problems. More efficient results, however, could be achieved if the focus was shifted. The proposition of this study, therefore, is that researchers need to step away from fixing problems when talking about consumers’ wellness and wellbeing and instead focus on the good that is on offer. Practically, this would mean promoting some service businesses not as a fix to a problem but rather as offering improvements to people’s lives with the results leading to self-acceptance.

The holistic wellness retreat is a place that has a strong potential to deliver life-changing experiences. The biggest advantage of the holistic wellness retreat is that it shifts people’s attention away from their negativity and problems and encourages them to look at life from a different and positive perspective, where the focus is on improvement, balance, and wellbeing. However, this positive perception could and should be applied to other industries as well.

What we seek we find. If we seek problems, we find more of them. If we seek ways to fix ourselves, we will be unhappier with ourselves during the process. If we step on the path of self-acceptance, a healthy and positive identity transition occurs – an identity transition that is not based on self rejection and a desire to fix the broken bits of self, but one that instead aims at re-

discovery, and choosing the best for self in terms of physical, mental, social, and environmental health.

Lastly, the following metaphor is applied. The transition from rest to work on self and identity transition can be explained by the allegory of a 'dirty window'. Before the commencement of the retreat, the 'window' – self-perception – is dirty. The holistic wellness retreat offers the tools to clean the window so that visitors can 'see' or find their true selves. Thus, by learning how to see through this window one starts to accept self. And that is how the holistic wellness life-long journey begins.

Reflections on my personal experience of listening, observing and experiencing the phenomenon of transitional power of the holistic wellness retreat.

Researchers need to consider the ways in which tourism researchers are active in the construction of interpretations of the experience into text. Reflexivity is one of the ways in which these issues can be explored. Reflexivity is the conscious use of the self as a resource for making sense of others (Galani-Moutafi, 2000). Reflexivity in my research was practiced via internal reflection on the research process.

Prospective reflexivity is the effects of the researcher on the study (before I commenced my data collection). This way, I realised how my own opinions and experiences that I have brought to the research can be a positive thing (i.e. in shaping the direction of study).

Retrospective reflexivity is the effects of the study on the researcher (after the study was completed). Understanding these effects is important part of the qualitative research process, i.e., reflexivity at the end of my thesis. Their experience had an effect on me when I also started to reflect on how these holistic wellness retreat experiences make me feel, how my opinion about the plant-based diet was evolving and changing, how I started to integrate self-work even though I was there not for these purposes, how I was finding myself sometimes lost in terms of whether I am doing enough with my own life, and whether I am conscious person towards myself and others. These effects and my reactions lasted during and long after the experience and in fact they still do.

Closing the thesis with the personal reflective thoughts, I firstly would like to share that being on the doctoral journey has given me various opportunities to reflect on myself both personally and intellectually. Comparing my Master's and PhD theses and then further reflecting on the way of thinking I had at the beginning of the doctoral programme and now – I see 2 different people. I myself went through the transitional process as a researcher during this 'study time'. I have expanded my research interests and have gained valuable transferable skills. I have

learned working with complex big documents, improved analytical and critical thinking skills, enhanced qualitative research methods skills and am intrigued to learn more. I have learned the research process in detail and started practicing writing academic journal articles and I hope to publish in international marketing and tourism journals.

I have learned that for any researcher it is vital to stay being open for a change; since the area of research is always developing, changing, we need to adjust, reflect and change accordingly - in other words, we need to always be flexible in our thinking. I have learned to enjoy the 'ride' and be resilient.

Finally, reflecting on my journey as researcher, I would like to also share my thoughts on how the holistic wellness retreat experience changed me too. I have become determined to a daily yoga and meditation practice, changed my diet and most importantly, I have found the balance of work and play in my research and life generally. I can now confirm the importance of self-education of health preventative practices as I have started learning more about self and self-acceptance.

By going through transitional experiences while at the holistic wellness retreat has impacted my transition as a researcher as well. I have learned that the process is more important than the 'destination' or an end goal, both in life and in research. This is also relevant to identity transition process being more important than the final self-transformation.

*The journey's end is only the beginning of another journey:
the rediscovery of both home and ourselves,
our perceptions of which have been subtly or dramatically transformed by our absence.
(Chaline, 2002, p. 285)*

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Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics Approval

8 June 2018

Ken Hyde

Faculty of Business Economics and Law

Dear Ken

Re Ethics Application: **18/199 Self transformation during a holistic wellness retreat experience.**

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 8 June 2021.

Standard Conditions of Approval

1. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using form EA2, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics>.
2. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using form EA3, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics>.
3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form: <http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics>.
4. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
5. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

AUTEC grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval for access for your research from another institution or organisation then you are responsible for obtaining it. If the research is undertaken outside New Zealand, you need to meet all locality legal and ethical obligations and requirements. You are reminded that it is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard.

For any enquiries, please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz

Yours sincerely,



Kate O'Connor

Executive Manager

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: mlyulich@gmail.com; Crystal Yap

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Interview Guide – Retreat Guest (first interview)

Project title: Self transformation during a holistic wellness retreat experience

Project Supervisors: Dr Ken Hyde and Dr Crystal Yap

Researcher: Margarita Lyulicheva

My name is Margarita and I am a PhD student, researching self-transformational experience during a holistic wellness retreat stay. The purpose of this interview is to find whether and how a holistic wellness retreat is a transformational experience.

Opening:

1. How did you come to join this holistic wellness retreat?
 - a. Where and how did you find out about this place?
2. What do you think of this retreat?
3. Is this your first time participating in a holistic wellness retreat or are you a returning guest?
 - a. If you attended a holistic wellness retreat previously, was it here at the same retreat, or were you in a different location/country?
 - b. What was your past experience like?
4. The interview will take around 15 minutes. Are you available to respond to questions now?

Body:

1. What is the reason for your wellness retreat vacation?
 - a. Tell me about your decision to do this specific retreat programme.
2. What are you looking for during this retreat experience?
3. Please describe what wellness is to you?
 - a. What comes to your mind when you think of wellness?
 - b. Please give me three words that come to your mind and that are associated with wellness.
4. Imagine wellness/the wellness retreat as a person, who would it be?
 - a. Describe this person in more details, i.e. appearance and personality, what does he/she do?
5. What is a holistic wellness retreat (experience) to you?
6. Picture drawing or picture selection:
 - Draw yourself – how do you perceive yourself at the moment?
 - Could you please draw a picture of your current state of well-being?
 - If you are not comfortable with drawing, please choose a picture that closely represents your current state of well-being.
7. Can you please explain/elaborate on your drawing or picture selection?
8. What do you do to balance yourself when life gets a bit hectic?
9. What is your favourite leisure activity?
10. How does it make you feel that there will be other guests at the retreat?
11. Now that you have your programme schedule, what activity (activities) are you most looking forward to?
12. What do you expect from yourself during the retreat?
13. Who is your role model? Describe your role model please:
 - a. What does he/she do?
 - b. What is he/she like?
 - c. Do you believe you are similar to your role model?

(Engage and make sure the conversation is flowing): Could you say some more about it please? What do you mean by that? Tell me more about this please. Describe this...

Closing:

I appreciate the time you took for this interview with me. Are there any questions that you have for me?

I should have all the information I need. Would it be alright to do a short follow-up interview with you after the completion of this retreat?

Thanks again. I am looking forward to chatting with you again soon. Enjoy your retreat stay.

Interview Guide – Retreat Guest (second, follow up interview)

Project title: Self transformation during a holistic wellness retreat experience

Project Supervisors: Dr Ken Hyde and Dr Crystal Yap

Researcher: Margarita Lyulicheva

Opening:

1. Please tell me the story of your experience at the holistic wellness retreat.
2. This follow-up interview will take around 15 minutes. Are you available to respond to some questions at this time?

Body:

1. What was the most memorable experience for you during the retreat?
 - a. Tell me more about this (why etc depending on the responses).
2. Are you planning on coming back to this retreat? Why?
3. Are you planning on visiting other wellness retreats around the world?
 - a. Where will you go?
4. What is wellness to you now?
 - a. What comes to your mind when you think of wellness?
5. What is the wellness retreat to you now?
6. What have you gained from this experience?
7. Picture drawing or picture selection:
 - Draw yourself – how do you perceive yourself now?
 - Could you please draw a picture of your current state of well-being?
 - If you are not comfortable with drawing, please choose a picture that closely represents your current state of well-being at the moment.
8. Can you please explain/elaborate on your drawing or picture selection?
9. What was your favourite activity (activities) during the retreat experience?
10. What are your ‘take away practices’ that you will incorporate into your daily life to make sure you are well and balanced when life gets a bit hectic?
11. How did you find the overall environment around this retreat place?
12. How did you find the social aspect of the retreat?
 - a. Did you enjoy being part of the social activities and workshops?
13. What were guests mostly happy about during this experience?
 - a. Is that the way you feel too?
14. How do you perceive yourself now?
 - a. How do you feel about yourself now?
15. In what way did this retreat change you?
 - a. Was it a physical or/and mental transformation for you? Or both? How?
16. What do you think is your biggest transformation during the retreat?
17. What was the most transformative moment for you during the retreat programme?
18. Did you achieve what you expected from yourself during the retreat?
19. In what ways did the holistic wellness retreat experience affect you?
20. What do you think transformed you the most during the retreat?
 - a. Was it a programme or people? Or anything else?
21. In the first interview, I asked you about your role model. Do you believe you are more similar to your role model now?
 - a. In what ways?
22. How did you find the staff at the retreat?

- a. Were the retreat staff helpful and supportive of you?
- 23. What did you think about the meals at the retreat?
- 24. How did you find the accommodation at the retreat premises?
- 25. How did you find the various facilities at the retreat?

(Engage and make sure the conversation is flowing): Could you say some more about it please? What do you mean by that? Tell me more about this please. Describe this...

Closing:

I appreciate the time you took for this interview with me. Are there any questions that you have for me?
I should have all the information I need. Thanks again.

Appendix C: Picture Selection

State of wellbeing



1



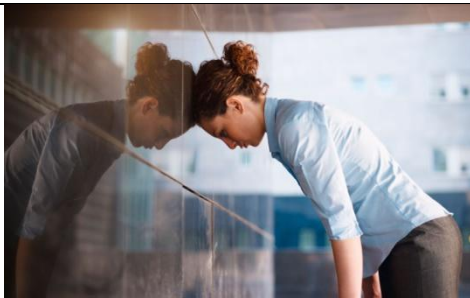
3



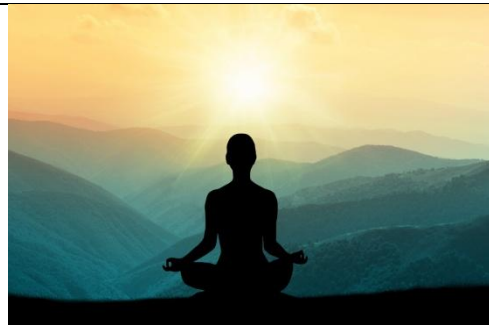
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Appendix D: Observational study guide

Date/time	Physical environment i.e. number of people (retreat guests and study participants) or environment, weather, etc.	Social environment i.e. communication during workshops and activities between guests excluding any communication with staff, social dynamics, frequency and length of interaction, tone of voice	Participants i.e. their roles in the setting; meaning of what was observed from participants' perspective	Bodily aspects i.e. gesture, and non-verbal language and behaviour during retreat activities; interactions with objects & people; specific words and phrases	Researcher subjectivity i.e. reflexive ethnography: thoughts, ideas, questions, concerns; any impact I may have had on the situation observed

The key points about how I will deal with people who are part of the retreat but not part of the research:

- How will non-participants privacy be respected? How will I edit them out of the process?
 - o The privacy of non-participants will be respected and these individuals will not be observed at anytime during the retreat. There will be a list of names of those who wished to withdraw from the research.
- How will I collect observations when non-participants are around?
 - o Sometimes, it can occur that observations will take place when all of the guests of the retreat are around in the same room/activity (e.g. dining or welcome chat). During these times, the observations will not be recorded. Everyone who wished to withdraw from the study will be informed about this.
- What will I do if non-participants don't want me to observe even if participants are involved?
 - o If this case occurs, I will observe only the individuals who are part of the study, excluding any observations of those who are not involved. If at any time, a participant began to talk to non-participant during the observational data collection, the observation will be put on hold until the non-participant is no longer in contact with a participant.
- Are there specific times where I can observe the participants away from non-participants?
 - o There will be times during the retreat when I could observe participants away from non-participants. For example, during such activities as daily walks, art workshops as they have done at the same room but each person focuses only on her/his own work without contact with others, there will be times when participants socialise with each other during the retreat (e.g. free time after dinner).
- How will I deal with confidentiality issues for participants?
 - o All the participants will be given a consent form to sign. Names of the participants will be changed. Any other confidential information will not be shared.
- How will guests at the retreat know there is a researcher present, observing them? How do they opt out of this? Or do they opt in? Does everyone get a participant information sheet?
 - o Everyone will receive a participant information sheet during a welcome chat. Then I will talk about the research and the observations. Then the guests can decide whether they wish to be included in the study or opt out. Those who wish to participate, will return the signed form to me and verbally state their desire to be a participant. Those, who wish to be excluded will say so during the welcome chat or early the next day.

Appendix E: Observation Protocol

Project title: Self transformation during a holistic wellness retreat

Project Supervisors: **Dr Ken Hyde and Dr Crystal Yap**

Researcher: **Margarita Lyulicheva**

This research project involves observation of participants engaging in retreat programme activities. Observation may be intrusive on people's privacy, thus an observation protocol has been put in place to ensure that the observation is sufficiently focused so as to minimise this intrusion and to adequately provide the data required to achieve the research's aims. Observation will take place at the holistic wellness retreat in Spain (Alicante). The Owner of the retreat asked for complete privacy that their name is not shared with anyone.

How will people be recruited?

Initial contact with participants will be through the wellness retreat. The researcher will contact potential participants through the welcome chats and introduce what the study is about and benefits the retreat and guests will receive. Potential participants can get in touch with me to let me know if they require consent forms. Next, the researcher will physically meet with the interested participants and organise time for the interview that suits the participants. Moreover, during a welcome chat, the researcher will stand up and ask for verbal permission for observation to take place which will only include note-taking and will not include photo or video capture.

How will people be informed about the observation?

Participants will be provided with a copy of the Participant Information Sheet.

How will people consent to the observation?

The wellness retreat manager will receive an access form to sign before observation begins (copy attached). Participants will receive the message and request to confirm if they consent to the researcher observing the programme. Participants can give their consent then. The researcher will seek participant consent once again before the start of the programme otherwise observation will not take place. The researcher will also be carrying Participant Information Sheets which informs participants that acceptance of the researcher's study is indicative of their consent to participate in the investigation.

What will be observed, what data will be collected and how will the data be collected?

Based on the type of qualitative study being conducted, methodological sequences may develop, adapt and change throughout the progress of a study depending on the researcher's continuous iterative interaction and interpretation of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Unstructured observation will be carried out after data is collected and analysed from initial interviews which will inform the observation schedule. However, an indicative observation guide is included which includes the data that will be observed and collected. Data observation should also answer the study's research questions of how and in what ways transformational practices occur during a holistic wellness retreat experience. Data observed includes people (how they behave, interact, dress, move), their surroundings (how the environment looks like, how it is used), and dialogues during the programme. The researcher will collect the data by taking handwritten field notes during events or shortly after to ensure details are not lost to memory and then transcribe them.

How any deception involved will be managed?

There is no intention for this study to involve any deception. The researcher will explain the purpose of the study at the welcome chat and will ask for guests' informed consent, so no concealment or covert observation are involved in this study.

The data collection instrument

Data collection instruments include a pen and a notebook. Later all the notes will be transcribed. Pictures and videos will not be taken during observation.

Appendix F: Participant Information Sheet

Date Information Sheet Produced:

27 April 2018

Project Title

Self transformation during a holistic wellness retreat experience

An Invitation

My name is Margarita Lyulicheva and I am a PhD student in the Department of Marketing at AUT University in Auckland, New Zealand. I am conducting research on transformational experiences during a holistic wellness retreat stay. I would like to invite you to participate in this research. The collected data will be used for the stated purpose only. Participation in this research is voluntary and all information collected will be kept confidential. You may withdraw your participation any time before the completion of the research project without any disadvantage.

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this study is to explore whether the perception of self and wellness changes due to the retreat stay, what transformation people experience during a holistic wellness retreat and how the retreat experience shapes self-transformation. I am conducting this study for my PhD requirement, as well as an opportunity to present the findings of this study at conferences and publish articles in academic journals.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

You were initially identified as you are an English-speaking adult (18 and above) and are a guest of a holistic wellness retreat. You attended a presentation I gave at the beginning of the retreat during a welcome chat about this research, and indicated you were interested in participating. I would like to ask for your voluntary expression of interest to participate in the study.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

You can agree to participate in this research by verbally stating your willingness or by emailing me: mlyulich@aut.ac.nz. Once you verbally agree or send me an email with your interest, I will give you a Consent Form for your review and completion prior to the interview. Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You are able to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

What will happen in this research?

Following your acceptance to take part in this study, I will verbally confirm your participation on the day (option to send a confirmation via email will be included if participant requires); I will also answer any queries you may have and include a Consent Form for you to sign. An interview would take place at your time of convenience at the holistic wellness retreat, on the day of your acceptance to participate in the study. This is to make sure that the first interview is recorded as soon as possible before/at the beginning of the retreat. The interviews will take 30 minutes. This will be audio recorded and I will also be writing notes. Questions will relate to your experiences and self transformation during an holistic wellness retreat. You will be asked to provide identifying information which will remain confidential, and only pseudonyms will be used in the final reporting. A second follow up interview will be conducted after the completion of the retreat programme and will only take 20 minutes of your time. The follow up interview will cover similar questions as the initial interview but will also include questions on changes in your experiences and an opportunity to follow up on questions previously missed.

After transcription of the interview, you will receive a copy of the transcript for you to check to ensure you are satisfied with the information provided as well as an opportunity to add further details if you wish to do so. You will also have the choice of receiving a summary of the findings at the end of the research which you can indicate on the consent form.

Also, the observations will be conducted as a part of the study. Observations of only those individuals who wished to participate in the study will be carried out. The observations will not interfere with the retreat and will not affect the retreat programme or privacy of the participants. The observations will include physical environment components, such as number of retreat guests (participants of the study) during the retreat workshops, weather, and overall environment; social environment including only

communication between the guests excluding any sort of communication with staff; participants and their roles in the settings; and various bodily aspects of the participants. Some boundaries to the observations will also be included – for example, the time for the observations will be limited to only those where participants are together or separately but always without direct interaction with staff members. Observations will be held only in public places and no observations will be recorded in private places, such as person's accommodation or if he/she requires personal time. Non-participants will not be included in any of the observations. In case if such a situation occurs that a non-participant enters the area where observations are taking place, the observation protocol will be put on pause until non-participant exits the area. What are the discomforts and risks?

There may be very minor discomforts involved in answering questions as you will be asked about your thoughts and perceptions, however this is extremely unlikely. To minimise this possibility of discomfort, I assure you that questions are non-invasive as we are not seeking a level of detail that may identify you or create any discomfort.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

Participation is voluntary and if for any reason you feel uncomfortable, you are able to decline answering certain questions or even withdraw from the research project at any time prior to the study's completion without any consequences. You will have the opportunity of choosing a suitable time for participation to take place.

What are the benefits?

This research has several benefits for you as the participant, the wider community, and the researcher. As a token of appreciation for participating in this study, you will also receive a \$20 gift voucher or cash (in Euro). For the wider community, this study will provide both academics and practitioners with beneficial information regarding how holistic wellness retreat provides a self-transformational experience for people. This research will also allow me as the primary researcher, to fulfil the requirement for the award of PhD from AUT University in New Zealand.

How will my privacy be protected?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your identity will remain confidential and will not be disclosed to anyone. To ensure that privacy and confidentiality are respected, your name will be changed to pseudonyms and contact information will not be disclosed in final reporting. Any data that the researcher extracts from the interview is for academic use only and all reports or published findings will not, under any circumstance, contain names or identifying characteristics. The name of the wellness retreat will also be changed. All data will be stored on a password protected memory stick and consent forms will be stored in a password protected cabinet with the project supervisors after the project is completed. Data and consent forms will be deleted after a period of six years. Contact details of the researcher and supervisors are provided in case of any concerns or complaints that need to be lodged. Given the type of research, the small sample size, and the fact I will be making observations during the retreat, there is a small chance that other attendees at the retreat will know that you are participating in this research. Consequently, I can only offer you a limited confidentiality at this time. You will have access and can review transcripts of the interviews if you wish.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

There are no costs to you other than your time to participate in the study. The interview will take 30 minutes, a follow up interview will take no longer than 20 minutes and an interview transcript review which should not take longer than 30 minutes.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

You have one day from the date the invitation is sent to think about this invitation. It would be appreciated if you can respond within that timeframe. You have the choice of selecting the most appropriate time from date options sent by the researcher for the interview to take place.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

By completing a Consent Form or by responding to the invitation email, you may tick the box showing your interest in receiving feedback on the research's results. A result synopsis will be emailed to you once the study is complete (which is different from the draft interview transcript you will receive to review and confirm).

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 the Project Supervisors – Ken Hyde, ken.hyde@aut.ac.nz and Crystal Yap, crystal.yap@aut.ac.nz

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of ATEC, Kate O'Connor, *ethics@aut.ac.nz*, +64 9 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher contact details:

Primary Researcher: Margarita Lyulicheva – mlyulich@aut.ac.nz

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 8.06.18, ATEC Reference number 18/199

Appendix G: Consent Form

Project title: Self-transformation during a holistic wellness retreat experience

Project Supervisors: **Dr Ken Hyde and Dr Crystal Yap**

Researcher: **Margarita Lyulicheva**

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 27 April 2018.
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I understand that the researcher will observe me and my surroundings and will take notes during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ☐ I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☐ I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.
- ☐ I agree to take part in this research.
- ☐ I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant's signature:

.....

Participant's name:

.....

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....

.....

.....

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 8.06.18 AUTEK Reference number 18/199

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form

Appendix H: Confidentiality Agreement

Project title: Self-transformation during the holistic wellness retreat experience

Project Supervisor: **Dr Ken Hyde and Dr Crystal Yap**

Researcher: **Margarita Lyulicheva**

- ☐ I understand that all the material I will be asked to transcribe is confidential.
- ☐ I understand that the contents of the tapes or recordings can only be discussed with the researchers.
- ☐ I will not keep any copies of the transcripts nor allow third parties access to them.

Transcriber's signature:

.....

Transcriber's name:

.....

Transcriber's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....
.....
.....
.....

Date:

Projects Supervisors' Contact Details (if appropriate):

Dr. Ken Hyde, ken.hyde@aut.ac.nz, +64 9-921-9999 ext. 5605

Dr. Crystal Yap, crystal.yap@aut.ac.nz, +64 9 921 9999 ext 5800

.....
.....

***Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 8.06.18, AUTEC
Reference number 18/199***

Note: The Transcriber should retain a copy of this form

Appendix I: Example of the Interview Transcript

Lisa Interview One.mp3

- Margarita: Hello Lisa, the purpose of this interview is to find out when and how a wellness retreat can be a transformational experience for some people and this interview will take around 15 minutes. Shall we start?
- Lisa: Yes.
- Margarita: How did you come to join this holistic wellness retreat and where did you find about this place?
- Lisa: Okay, I have been here before; this is my fourth or fifth time - I think it is my fourth time here. I found it because I went online and I looked for wellbeing, not a yoga retreat but wellbeing because I wanted something more holistic, so not just yoga but something that had some workshops, some meditation and visualisation, yoga and good food and stuff. I went on, I Googled, and this came up.
- Margarita: I think you've enjoyed it a lot since it's your fourth time.
- Lisa: Yes.
- Margarita: This place was your first time?
- Lisa: At a retreat?
- Margarita: Any retreat.
- Lisa: No, so I did retreats in Ireland where I'm from and this was my first retreat outside of Ireland. I had done three retreats in Ireland first and then this.
- Margarita: Interesting and were they similar to this sort of thing?
- Lisa: Well, the difference would be first of all the weather, much better in Spain. Also, in Ireland, the retreats that they had were quite religious so one of the retreats that I went to was Hare Krishna. I went for the retreat experience but I found the religion too much, so there was too much of the religion in the retreat. I liked it but I didn't really like that part of it. The other two retreats I went to were shorter and only on at certain times, so they weren't open all year round, so I looked for something that was open all year round and in the sun.
- Margarita: The weather was the decision.
- Lisa: Yes.
- Margarita: What is your main reason to do the retreat this year?
- Lisa: Okay, this year what I'm looking for is I want to completely relax my mind, to make less decisions and to just be taken care of in terms of the food and the exercise and everything is organised and also that I can just get back in and contact a connection with myself and to get away from my work and some issues at home. That's the main reason I'm here.
- Margarita: Thank you for this answer. Could you please describe what wellness is to you? What comes to your mind when you think of the term wellness?

Lisa: When I think of wellness, I think of it in terms of mind, body, spirit and gut. I think of it as I am eating well and that I am thinking less, I am connected with my spirit and with my sense of being, so mind and body. In terms of the body, that I feel relaxed and the tension is leaving my back and my shoulders and I just feel more grounded and overall, that I just feel well. So, that's wellbeing.

Margarita: This is a tricky question; if you imagine balance is a person, what comes to your mind? You can think for a minute if you want to.

Lisa: If I was to personify wellness, it would be a person. Will I describe how the person appears?

Margarita: Exactly.

Lisa: Okay, so they would be very light and standing, would have very good posture but not too straight but just that they're able to hold themselves more comfortably and more upright. They are smiling and they have a sense of relaxation and calmness about them. They are looking balanced and content. Their body, their skin is glowing and they just look well.

Margarita: Thank you. Now, I have this list of pictures that I would like you to have a look at. These are different states of wellbeing. I would like you to spend a moment looking at these pictures and then choose only one picture that closely represents your current state of wellbeing.

Lisa: Because I just arrived, my current state of wellbeing would be five.

Margarita: Five – tired.

Lisa: Tired, drained, against the wall, needing that kind of grounding and support from someone so just feeling completely worn out and fed up, just needing a break.

Margarita: Thank you. What do you usually do in your daily life to balance yourself when life gets a bit hectic?

Lisa: When my self-care is good, what I am doing is I am eating well, so I am making sure that I have all of my meals and they're balanced and that I am not eating badly or drinking too much alcohol or doing any of that. When I'm really looking after myself, I will journal. I will do morning affirmations and rather than meditation, I do a 15 affirmation in the morning and then the same company do an evening affirmation. I will start in the morning and I will do the 15 minute affirmations in the morning and I will repeat all of the affirmations for balancing mind, body and spirit then I will sit in my car before I go into work and I will set my intentions for my day and then I will leave any anxiety and any of my personal stuff in the car. I will get out of the car, close the door and leave it all behind. Then, I will go in and my intention is I am going to bring kindness to my interactions with people and that I may not be able to help somebody but my intention is not to hurt them. This is when I'm feeling very balanced and my wellbeing is good and my self-care is good, that I have left the house and I have brought something nice to eat that's healthy. Then, I will go about my day and will take my regular little breaks.

Then, I return home and then I will have a meal or share a meal with my husband and we will ask each other about our day and we won't put the TV on. If he has something going on, he'll talk about it with me or if I have something going on or if something happens during the day, we'll have a little chat and I'll talk it through and get into bed at a reasonable time. Then, I do my evening affirmations before I go to bed and then that sets me for my sleep. That's when I'm doing good, that's a good day when I'm looking after my self-care.

Margarita: This sounds really meaningful and deep.

Lisa: Yeah, so that's when it's really working. There are certain months of the year when I'm doing that. Just before I came over here, I was not doing that.

Margarita: Was it because of the stress?

Lisa: Yes, because of stress and because of time commitments and demands, so demands and then stress.

Margarita: What is your favourite leisure activity? Maybe it's more than one.

Lisa: Hiking, so going up the Dublin mountains regardless of the weather. If it's cold or raining, we have different gear we wear. We set off, we do the same hike and if we're feeling energetic, we will do the more incline, we go right up and then if we're feeling a little bit tired, we will do the gentle, so there's a point where we get to and we go, are we up for this or not? It depends what way we're feeling, so hiking would be my main one.

Another one, there's probably two particular friends, that I would say are my soul friends. I have my friends that I go out for drinks with and I have my soul friends, so they are two people in my life that I connect with on a very deep level; one is Brian, someone I work with and another one is Ruth. I mentored Ruth, she was a trainee teacher four or five years ago and we became friends. She's now moved on in her career, so speaking to them, I find that really good. I can toss around ideas and I can talk about decisions that I'm going to make in a safe environment, in a safe place to talk it through and then when I leave, I know what I'm going to do, so those two.

Margarita: Thank you, so talking about socialising, what do you think about that fact that there will be other people at the retreat?

Lisa: I find that a positive aspect of it, the fact I'm going to meet other people. The only part of the socialisation part that I find tricky is today because I just arrived, so it takes me a few days to get to ground myself and to be in the retreat. When I arrive, I'm quite conscious that other people have been here a few days and they're quite relaxed and so it takes me a couple of days. As the days go on, I will get more social. At the start, I don't know people and even though I've been here before, it's still new because the people are different. That takes me a little bit of time but after that, I'm fine.

Margarita: From the programme schedule, what would be your favourite activity?

Lisa: Workshops, I love the workshops and then the beginners or all-level yoga. They would be my two favourites. It's the balance between the body in the yoga and then the workshop is for my heart and my intuition and going deep and connecting with myself, so I do that in the workshop because we don't share information. I write things down and it just comes out when I'm in the right zone.

Margarita: In the flow.

Lisa: Yes, in the flow, exactly.

Margarita: A personal question; what do you expect from yourself during this retreat? You don't have to answer that.

Lisa: No, no problem. What I expect from myself is that I'm have more self-compassion and I know that when I come to retreats that I will have more self-compassion and I slow down. I expect that it will take me a little while, maybe a day, to get to that slower pace but I expect that I will slow down and I expect that I will do more self-care. Maybe my self-care will triple while I'm here in comparison to home, so that's my expectation. That's one of the reasons why I come, because everybody is here for self-care and so I get into that mindset of I'm here to care for myself, to give back and to fill my cup.

Margarita: Thank you and the last question okay; who would be your role model? Could you describe this person in just in a few words.

Lisa: I have a few role models, so if it's a famous person, one of role models would be Brene Brown and why she is one of my role models is that she has a very honest and very authentic approach to very sensitive subjects. She helps people to deal with things like shame, regret and no matter what has happened in your life, how to bounce back, how to be able to come back afterwards. I admire her because regardless she has a PhD and everything, she sees herself the same as everybody, no better, no worse. For me, that's my belief, is that I'm not better than anybody and I'm not worse than anybody. Everybody's on the same journey, so she's my role model because she shows me that everybody is the same and everybody experiences the same human emotions but everybody can come back and rise again. That's why she's one of my role models.

Another role model would be Brian, who is one of my soul friends and why Brian would be a role model is because he can go very deep but I don't mean this in a sexist way but for a man, he can go very deep. He is very intuitive and very grounded and he has his core beliefs so he's like a really beautiful tree. He has his core beliefs but he has flexibility, so he's open to listen to your opinion and he's willing to learn from you and possibly change and it's reciprocated. I would listen to him and I might have a belief but I listen, and I go actually, I never thought about it like that. That's what we would do with each other. He's a role model because I think he has excellent, excellent listening skills as well.

Margarita: Do you think you are similar to your role models?

Lisa: I believe that I would like to be like them but those two role models are more for me aspiration, as in I feel that we are equal humans but there is aspects of them that they have really got to the next level and I would like to get there to.

Margarita: Thank you, so these are all the questions from me now. Do you have any questions for me at this stage.

Lisa: No, I'm curious as to what this is all about. It's different people's perspective on wellbeing.

Margarita: Yes, exactly and how it changes and shifts after the wellness retreat or wellness vacation and how you could experience inner transformation as well, not necessarily but you might. I would like to talk to you after you finish your retreat.

Lisa: At the end and see how I feel then, perfect.

Margarita: Thank you.

Lisa Interview Two.mp3

- Margarita: Hello, welcome to the second interview, the follow-up interview.
- Lisa: Thank you.
- Margarita: Could you please tell me a short story about your experience at the retreat, how it was?
- Lisa: On this trip, I came for relaxation and I came to connect with myself and to forget about my work and forget about my issues at home and I absolutely did that. I nearly had to remind myself to think of things when I was speaking to my husband because it completely went out of my mind. I got refocused completely on my wellbeing and getting back to myself and feeling positive, so I've done that.
- Margarita: That's amazing, so you achieved your goal.
- Lisa: Absolutely.
- Margarita: What was the most memorable experience for you during this programme, during this retreat?
- Lisa: Definitely meeting people, the people I've met. I always enjoy the activities but the people I've met but also, it reminded me of the fact that the big career change, so I was doing the same career for 17 years and I made a career change 12 months ago. It was because of here, so I made that decision to change my career and what I was going to change it to here two years ago and when I was back on the retreat this time, I've made some new decisions about new things I'm going to do and how I'm going to approach the new career. It gives me the space that I need to feel what the next right move is, so meeting people and getting the space to find my next right step on my journey. That's been the best and most memorable part.
- Margarita: Are you planning on going back to this place again?
- Lisa: Yes, I'm going to come back next year and something tells me that next year might be my last time to come here.
- Margarita: Why is that?
- Lisa: The reason is because one of the key things that I love is the workshops and so I've come here four or five times now and the workshops haven't changed. I've gotten a little something from them but because the workshops are so important to me, I'd like to try somewhere else. What I'll do is I will message in advance and say to them, I'm a returning guest and for the last number of years, the workshops have been the same, here are my dates and I'm hoping that the workshops will be different. If it's different and if they will do that, I would gladly come back then I will find somewhere new.
- Margarita: If you imagine the possibility that you could go anywhere for the retreat in other countries where would you go?
- Lisa: I would love to go to one in Italy and definitely Portugal. I would love to go to one in Portugal. I heard that there's a few and the only reason I didn't go is because I like to go on my own and they don't pick you up at the airport and bring you to the retreat, you have to find your own way. When I go to a place for the first time, I like to be collected and brought.
- Margarita: It's easier.

Lisa: It's easier, I don't have to worry about it and I can relax and get into the mental space straight away.

Margarita: Thank you. What is wellness to you right now?

Lisa: One of the key things for wellness right now is a sense of balance, clarity and rejuvenation. I feel that, with the clarity, that I have been able to think, not even think but feel my way through a few things that I was worried about, my first day, before I came over here, things that I was worried about. It's helped me get things into perspective, so wellness, mind, body, spirit, all of that balance, I feel grounded, clarity and I feel I have that now.

Margarita: Is there anything else that you've gained from this experience?

Lisa: Probably, I turn to my expectations of managing expectations.

Margarita: Do you mean expectations from yourself?

Lisa: From the retreat. In terms of expectation, what I've enjoyed has been the social side and meeting people and so on but the actual workshops and so on, my expectation is that they would have definitely change and they didn't change so that's one thing. That's a key thing.

Margarita: Did you enjoy your time?

Lisa: I still really enjoyed it, yeah. It's just that I would love them to change so I could continue to come back.

Margarita: Fair enough, yeah. Remember, I asked you about pictures?

Lisa: Yes.

Margarita: Could you please have a look again and chose one picture that represents your statement of mind now?

Lisa: Number two.

Margarita: How would you describe that?

Lisa: Just feeling the tension is gone, more relaxed, looking towards the light, feeling positive, feeling energised, fit and balanced, grounded and just feeling ready to go back and ready to rock.

Margarita: Thank you. What are your takeaway practises that you would incorporate in your daily life from this retreat?

Lisa: I need to start meditation and yoga. I'm doing affirmations at the moment but I will start doing meditation and I'm going to join yoga when I go back.

Margarita: [inaudible]

Lisa: Yes because what I said to myself, I also want to join Tai Chi. That was something I was interested and after doing the Qigong, I want to do Tai Chi. I know it's for me, I know the movement and flow is for me, not the teacher from here but another teacher at home. When we went down to the beach and I saw them doing Tai Chi, it made me realise that I want that

in my life, Tai Chi definitely but meditation on my own, so doing it on my own, my own practise and joining yoga. I would like to do those, I will do those when I go back.

Margarita: About the social aspect, did you enjoy being part of the social activities and workshops with other people?

Lisa: Yes, absolutely, I did. The first day, it just takes a little bit of time to get used to different people and all of that then after that, I loved it. I loved that side of it and the atmosphere and the energy is all about openness and acceptance. That was easy.

Margarita: How do you perceive yourself now? How do you feel about yourself?

Lisa: I feel more compassionate, so I have more self-compassion. I feel like I am grateful for my life and being here has reminded me of how far I've come and what I've achieved and the difficulties that I've overcome, so definitely that self-compassion, self-love is coming back and my self-care is starting to come back. I've gotten more focused on that, looking after myself.

Margarita: Thank you. In what way did this retreat change you, if it did change you? Was it maybe a physical transformation? Maybe you felt something different in your body or maybe it's a mental transformation?

Lisa: Physical - I noticed this a little bit the last time but I've noticed it so much this time that I know I have to change now, is how rigid and inflexible my body is and how I'm looking around the room at other people, how they can move and what they can do with their legs and arms and back and so on. It's nearly like I've made a decision after this trip that that's not acceptable. I'm not old enough for how rigid my body is, so that's why I'm going to do the yoga, the meditation, the Tai Chi. This morning, when I was doing the workshop and this is my last day and I'm going home and I made a decision that when I come back here next year, I will come back here as a different person physically. I will be able to participate in intermediate yoga and I will be able to move my arms and my body and my legs and my back how others are able. I won't be as flexible because I do have a spinal problem but I will be much more flexible than I am now.

Then just mentally, I definitely have gotten back that compassion and that is really important because I had lost that. I wasn't compassionate with myself, I still had very high standards and not dropping despite the challenges I was going through. I think that that's very important, so it's reminded me, it's changed my perspective towards that.

Margarita: Thank you very much for sharing this. Did you achieve what you expected from yourself during this retreat?

Lisa: Yes, I wanted to relax, unwind, forget about work, do all of those things and I absolutely did.

Margarita: Amazing. Goal achieved. And the last question, remember the at the first interview, I asked you about your role model or role models, you mentioned two people. Do you think you have become similar to your role models? Or do you still think the same, it's just an inspiration for you?

Lisa: Well I suppose with Brene Brown and I do feel that I do achieve that kind of saneness, you know, no matter what I achieve in life that I will always feel saneness for others and connection so I don't feel like we are as different, the similarities, I would like to have her as a role model because I like to continuously aspire to something and but maybe we're not as different and with Brian he's an exceptionally good listener, I feel I always need to improve on

that and when I'm more relaxed with myself I can be a better listener, more grounded and so on which I feel Brian is, so maybe the gap is not as big as I thought, they're still role models but the gap might be smaller than I thought.

Margarita: Thank you, so these are all the questions from me. Do you have anything else to add to any of the questions or any thoughts to share or maybe have any questions to me?

Lisa: No, I think that's everything.

Margarita: Thank you, if you're interested to find out the findings from this project I will be very happy to send them to you.

Lisa: Yeah, I would really love that.

Margarita: Great then I will grab your email address afterwards.

Appendix J: Example of Observational notes

Date/time	Physical environment (i.e. number of study participants) environment, weather, etc.)	Social environment (i.e. communication; social dynamics, frequency and length of interaction, tone of voice)	Participants (i.e. their roles in the setting; meaning of what was observed from participants' perspective)	Bodily aspects (i.e. gesture, non-verbal language and behaviour; interactions with objects & people; Specific words and phrases)	Researcher subjectivity (i.e. reflexive ethnography: thoughts, ideas, questions, concerns; any impact I may have had on the situation observed)
8/06/18					
7 – 9 am	<p>Morning walk to the village. There are many people but only 6 participants; they all are getting ready to go for the walk. The weather is sunny and comfortably warm. The overall environment seems quiet and peaceful. People are standing outside but under the shade while waiting for the instructors.</p> <p>After the walk they are going away to their rooms to have shower or change clothes and be ready for breakfast. The weather is getting hotter.</p>	<p>There is a small talk around these 6 people; they share where they are from and how many days they are going to be at this retreat. Everyone seems friendly and is smiling to each other. They all seem to be interested to learn about one another. The interaction is mutual among all the participants, everyone speaks for around 2-4 minutes and then another person responds.</p> <p>They are smiling but are not very talkative. They only comment to each other that the walk was really lovely and the scenery is magnificent. The tone of voice of many of them sounds tired but happy. 2 ladies commented that they are looking forward to the breakfast and they wonder what it will be like (Lisa and Rachel)</p>	<p>They are very excited but also a bit closed, they want to go to the walk but they are not sure what to expect. They try to stick together for the morning walk. They discuss that they do not know where the walk will be, they do not know the location and even though there will be 2 walk guides with them from the retreat, they still show that they want to continue chatting and walk together during the activity.</p> <p>They are tired but happy, dream about shower and heading to the breakfast.</p>	<p>Everyone is smiling, but the bodily position of 4 out of 6 participants is closed, they have their arms crossed in front of the chest (Alex, Andrew, Jessica, Rachel) 2 people are drinking tea (Mary, Irena) while others are just standing holding their water bottles or having their bottles nearby on the tables outside the terrace.</p> <p>Irena commented that she loved the scenery up the hill because there is a good view onto the whole area of the village. All of them are returning their empty bottles of water back to the kitchen. One woman keeps silence but seems happy (Jessica). Another lady (Rachel) is constantly rubbing her face with the towel commenting that it is very hot for her. But she is smiling too. Both men are not talkative, breathing heavily after the</p>	<p>The morning conversation even though looks very friendly and welcoming, looks a bit distant and people seem to be 'closed'. I think it is because they have just arrived (mostly last night or late afternoon the day before) and they do not know what to expect, it is their first day, first morning at the retreat. They look at other people who have been at the retreat for the few days already and are very interested to talk to them.</p> <p>I think they are not very talking because they have been talking a lot with other guests and staff during the walk. Also, it was a physical activity and they seem a bit tired.</p>

				walk. They smile when they see the breakfast has been served	
9.30-10 am	Breakfast lasts for only 30 minutes today. 3 out of 8 observation participants chose juice, the rest chose food.	The social environment was not observed. Those who had juice took their juice jars and went to the gardens to seat quietly and have 'me-time' (Irena, Julie, Andrew) Those who had food, sat around the tables with non-participants and participants together.	They seem to be at the present moment enjoying their juice or food. They really enjoy the sunshine. Lisa is constantly looking onto the sunshine at the sky, Mary is sitting next to the pool with non-participants.	Those who juice prefer to be out of social settings, Julie commented that she would like to take her juice and go to the garden and read a book. Others then decided to follow the same idea (Irena and Andrew as well as non-participants)	I wonder if all breakfast will not be social events during the stay at the retreat. Is there something to do with the fact that staff tells everyone when they arrive, that breakfast and lunch are your times but you are more than welcome to eat with others and enjoy each other's company, while dinners are always social at the retreat. Will see what the dinner setting is like and whether there is more socialising there.
11 am	Meeting with the retreat team, staff and other retreat guests.	Everyone was invited to sit around the round table inside simply decorated room with some blankets (not sure what for, it is very hot today). May be just for the interior design purposes or welcoming touches. There was a water cooler in the corner with plastic cups. Everyone filled their cups with cold water before choosing a seat in the circle.	The staff members were distributing the booklets, timetable for the programme activities for the following week(s), explaining every single part of it in lots of details. Participants didn't have many questions but rather nodding and smiling. Lisa was the most interested out of all, she kept asking questions, comments, etc. At the end she mentioned that she is a returning guests, she was here last year and that it was amazing. Jessica seemed interested in this comment and followed Lisa after the meeting for the chat afterwards during lunch	People look lost, stressed and have lots of questions about the retreat programme and the property. But they also are smiling and there is excitement in their eyes. Irena and Andrew are sitting close to each other and look a bit lost. Jessica was talking to Rachel a lot about something before the meeting commenced and before they entered the room. Alex is the only one that looks a bit bored. (It is his first time in this retreat though). Mary and Julie discuss yoga. Rachel and non participants are talking about the programme schedule and wondering where they can get the juice menu for the week. Lisa is talking to me about the beautiful scenery	People are all focused and look interested. I was observing only the participants there ignoring other guests and staff behaviour, responds, etc. Alex looks bored maybe because it is not his first time doing the retreat (but first time in this retreat in Spain), he said he has been to different ones before (he said it during the first interview

				and wondering what is going to be served for lunch.	
1-3.30 pm	<p>Lunch time is at 1 pm straight after the activity where everyone from the retreat participated. Everyone standing at the hall where the lunch is about to be served.</p>	<p>People look hungry. They discuss and comment that they really want to eat and they wonder whether it will fill them up with the vegan food they serve at the retreat which is also sugar and salt free. But everyone seems excited and smiling. They look energised after the meeting. Some people had a chance to get to know each other better. However, it seems like the most communication is occurring between room mates who live in the same room. They discuss whether one or another needs shower after lunch and what their plans are after the siesta.</p>	<p>They are happy but curious about their first vegan meal. Those who had juice in the morning commented that it was very filling and that they have just started to feel hungry now or around 15 min ago. Lisa is commenting to everyone around her that the "food is actually very tasty and quite filling too". She sounds supportive and encouraging.</p>	<p>Almost everyone made themselves a cup of tea, two ladies took some water with lemon and ginger (Mary and Irena). Julie decided to carry out the juicing detox so she is not going to eat. She commented she will go to her room to have juice and then nap during siesta time. Those who are going to eat meal for lunch discussing whether they should sit around one big table. Everyone is smiling about this idea. One lady refused and said she will go to eat by the pool (Jessica). However, she is smiling too. Later she complained about the strong headache</p>	<p>I started to wonder why one lady refused to not eat with everyone else. Later she commented about the headache which made it clear why she might want to stay and eat by the pool. Another woman commented she will sit in her room to have juice. I think she prefers to be alone so she doesn't have a chance to see all the food and she won't be able to see how everyone is eating while she is drinking her juice. May be she will start feel a rising temptation to eat something too then. Or maybe she needs time alone to reflect, catch sleep after the flight, etc.</p>
	<p>Siesta from 2 to 3.30 pm every day as per schedule (sometimes a bit longer). It is very hot and the sun is very strong today.</p>	<p>There are no social interactions. Some commented they will go to their rooms to read book or watch TV. Some just left quietly. Two women Lisa and Jessica who seem to go well together are discussing that they will go to the pool area to sit under the shade and have some tea. They discuss somewhat personal topics, such as what they are going to do in the evening and how are things going with a</p>	<p>It is a time to relax for the participants. Some commented earlier that the day is full with events and activities and there will be more after siesta too, so they need time to relax and have a break. Some people commented that they are going to skip the afternoon activities and just have rest until dinner instead. These activities are optional so there is no pressure for the guests.</p>	<p>Everyone is carrying or having a glass of water or a herbal tea next to them. One woman is observing and choosing a book from the retreat library (Julie). She is looking for yoga books. Another person is watching TV at the reception but seems sleepy (Alex) Later he told me he is trying to hide from direct sun especially during its peak hours. He is wearing long sleeve shirt. Others carry books or magazines</p>	<p>Those who left quietly I assume will also go to their rooms and do the same – read, sleep. The weather is very hot. It is also very bright both outside and inside the common area. I sat inside my room for almost the whole hour, which might be affected my observations as I didn't see others for the whole time. From my point of view there are only two ladies (Lisa and Jessica) who are sitting next to the pool and I think it stayed the same for</p>

		person, whose name they both repeated several times before heading off to the pool. The rest are staring at the phone or relaxing.		in their hands, they all wear sunglasses so it is impossible to reflect on their mood and see their eyes.	the whole time. Others were inside or under the shade, everyone alone or with roommates.
6.30-7.30 pm	After siesta there are a few activities (meditation and life makeover workshop where everyone is talking and sharing thoughts) that I was not able to observe. From 6.30 there is a dinner which is supposed to be a social gathering. I sat with everyone and had meal with them.	The conversation was mostly about the food that has been served to them for the dinner. They take turns but say the same thing in different words "it is yum", "it is delicious", "I enjoy it". Some people asked each other what they enjoyed the most during the day, which activities they did or did not. The answers were that the meditation and the walk were very nice (Rachel, Julie, Mary, Alex)	They comment that the food looks really amazing and there is such a big variety of choices for dinner (9 plates of different meals, all buffet style – different meals every day but the same style). They comment that it looks very colourful and delicious. Lisa is saying she has just realised that she has actually missed these foods so much. She looks honest and hungry too.	Everyone seems to be very focused on the food they have been served. People look onto their plates more than onto each other. One lady didn't participate in any activities because she said she was very tired from her long flight to Spain, she has jetlag and headache so she didn't participate in the activities (Jessica)	Everyone sits together with non-participants and staff. So I observed only those participants I could hear and those who were talking to other participants. The food is tasty and it is hard to say it is vegan or salt free because they add various spices and oils. It's various and filling. People are really becoming more interested in each other, they look into each others' eyes and listen to each other carefully even though there is a small talk
9-10 pm	3 ladies were sitting in the common area enjoying their tea at the end of the day (Mary, Irena and Rachel). The common area is empty apart from these 3 women and one reception lady. There is a quiet music at the background. The sun is going down and many people said they went to watch the sunset. I believe not all together though	They take turn in the discussion and their conversations are about the activities they did today. They all commented about the meditation class that it was very good. For 2 ladies it was first meditation of that kind they have ever done (Irena and Mary). For another woman (Rachel) it was already known (she has heard about it before); she commented she enjoyed it too. Then the discussion followed to food topic. They started to comment on vegan dinner that it was surprisingly tasty.	They seem to have a nice discussion, they smile and laugh. They all shared what diet they have at home. None of them is vegan or vegetarian. So vegan diet at the retreat is a new experience for them.	They have constant eye contact with each other, listen to each other carefully and respond respectfully. It seems they feel very relaxed and happy	I asked if I could join them, they didn't mind so I made myself a cup of tea and had a chat with them, observing their behaviour. I wrote down these notes after I got back to my room.

Appendix K: Holistic Wellness Retreat Invitation Letter

Holistic Wellness Retreat study participation invitation letter

Dear (*insert name here*)

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study I am conducting as part of my Doctoral degree in the Department of Marketing at Auckland University of Technology under the supervision of Dr Ken Hyde and Dr Crystal Yap. I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you decide to take part.

Wellness industry continues to rapidly growth positively affecting the growth of wellness tourism sector. However, there is still a vast amount of confusion between consumers on what wellness retreat and holistic wellness retreat actually is. Many people assume that wellness retreat is simply a spa destination while others think that wellness retreat offers yoga classes and nutritional cafe on site. As my observations and experiences show many people still do not know about the whole concept of wellness and wellness wheel that includes different elements and such places as your wellness retreat aims to provide all of these services under one roof. My research is based on this issue and I aim to explore people's expectations from wellness retreats and I want to find out how they form a cultural meaning (shared meaning) for these wellness retreats. I aim to investigate the options how such places as holistic wellness retreats can become more popular and stay leaders within the sector becoming new fashion among consumers attracting new clientele. In order to do so, I need to talk and interview operators of the wellness retreat and its consumers/guests. I will interview them on their expectations, experiences and meanings they hold for the place and its services.

In case if you agree to help me with my research, I will come to your retreat during the period of (*insert dates here*) to interview customers and operators of the retreat in order to explore expectations and cultural meanings of customers of your retreat. I will need to spend a maximum of 4 working days on your site to collect all the required information. All collected data will be confidential with all names changed.

Participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve an interview of approximately (*Insert Time*) in length to take place in a mutually agreed upon location. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences by advising the researcher. With your permission, the interview will be tape-recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the interview has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points that you wish. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study, however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used. Data collected during this study will be retained for (*Insert Time Period*) in locked office in my supervisor's lab. Only researchers associated with this project will have access. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

In your acceptance of cooperation with me there will be a number of benefits that might interest you. For example, you will receive valuable insights from my research that you could use to further enhance your business and get deep insights on your customers' expectations and meanings they held for wellness retreat. You will get this information at the end of my project at no costs. I am also happy to assist you with marketing and consumer behaviour related topics if you are interested during the period of our cooperation.

Please note that all the information related to the wellness retreat will be strictly confidential with all the names changed if required. The study will be published under my name within the Auckland University of Technology and will not be distributed further.

As a successful and valuable wellness retreat in wellness tourism industry, your participation in my research will help me to reach customers and gather answers to my doctoral research questions that will benefit not only my study but also your business.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me by e-mail at mlyulich@aut.ac.nz or lyulicheva.margarita@hotmail.com. You can also contact my supervisors, Ken Hyde, ken.hyde@aut.ac.nz and Crystal Yap, crystal.yap@aut.ac.nz

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Ethics Committee at Auckland University of Technology. However, the final decision about participation is yours.

I hope that the results of my study will be of benefit to those wellness retreats directly involved in the study, other and related organizations not directly involved in the study, as well as to the broader research community and wellness industry.

I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Sincerely,

Margarita Lyulicheva

PhD Candidate || Marketing Department, AUT University, Auckland, New Zealand

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'M. Lyulicheva', written over a faint circular stamp or watermark.

Appendix L: Confidentiality Agreement with the holistic wellness retreat

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Consumer's Consumption of Wellness Retreats Research

As a conductor of this research I understand that I may have access to confidential information about study sites and participants. By signing this statement, I am indicating my understanding of my responsibilities to maintain confidentiality and agree to the following:

_ I understand that names and any other identifying information about study sites and participants are completely confidential.

_ I agree not to divulge, publish, or otherwise make known to unauthorized persons or to the public any information obtained in the course of this research project that could identify the persons who participated in the study.

_ I understand that all information about study sites or participants obtained or accessed by me in the course of my work is confidential. I agree not to divulge or otherwise make known to unauthorized persons any of this information, unless specifically authorized to do so by approved protocol.

_ I understand that I am not to read information about study sites or participants, or any other confidential documents, nor ask questions of study participants for my own personal information but only to the extent and for the purpose of performing this research project.

_ I agree to notify the site supervisor should I become aware of an actual breach of confidentiality or a situation which could potentially result in a breach, whether this be on my part or on the part of another person.

Name: _____ Margarita Lyulicheva _____

Date: _____ 1st of May 2018 _____

Signature: _____