Copyright Statement

The digital copy of this thesis is protected by the Copyright Act 1994 (New Zealand).

This thesis may be consulted by you, provided you comply with the provisions of the Act and the following conditions of use:

- Any use you make of these documents or images must be for research or private study purposes only, and you may not make them available to any other person.
- Authors control the copyright of their thesis. You will recognise the author's right to be identified as the author of this thesis, and due acknowledgement will be made to the author where appropriate.
- You will obtain the author's permission before publishing any material from their thesis.

To request permissions please use the Feedback form on our webpage.
http://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/feedback

General copyright and disclaimer

In addition to the above conditions, authors give their consent for the digital copy of their work to be used subject to the conditions specified on the Library Thesis Consent Form and Deposit Licence.

Note: Masters Theses

The digital copy of a masters thesis is as submitted for examination and contains no corrections. The print copy, usually available in the University Library, may contain corrections made by hand, which have been requested by the supervisor.
Spiritual Retreat Tourism in Aotearoa/New Zealand

Kate Daisy Bone

Abstract

This research stems from an interest in spiritual retreat tourism in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The retreat experiences analysed are those of social workshops, not solo retreats. The research questions concern why people go to spiritual retreat sites, what they gain from their experiences and how this relates to literature concerned with tourism and society. This is qualitative ethnographic case study research. The fieldwork was carried out at two case study retreat centres in the North Island of New Zealand, Mana and Aio Wira retreats. Data was collected from interviews with trustees, a manager, workshop facilitators, and retreat-goers at the two sites. These interviews included the use of visuals which have been analysed, alongside other photographic depictions of the retreat centres, through a semiotic approach. This study found four prevailing themes which represent the most important aspects of spiritual retreat tourism for those involved. These themes are: Community, Escape, Landscape, and Spirituality. The key aspects of spiritual retreat tourism at the two case study sites in this research are discussed at length to make up the chapters of this thesis. Spiritual retreat tourism is a holistic form of tourism so keeping in line with this the research data is integrated into discussions. It must be noted that the themes relate to one another encapsulating the whole wellness experience of going on a spiritual retreat.
Dedicated to my mother, Jane Bone.
Acknowledgements

Thank you to the trustees, staff and visitors at Mana and Aio Wira retreat centres. Without you this research would not have been possible.

Thank you to Dr Claudia Bell, my supervisor, who is always studying interesting topics and has a passion for learning which keeps research fresh and exciting. Your positive outlook and feedback provokes creativity and a freedom of expression which brings out the absolute best aspects of sociology.

Thanks go to my mother, Dr Jane Bone, who is always an inspiration. You lead a deeply compassionate life which has always meant you are a wonderful person to have so close to me. We have so much fun together and you have always supported me in my life which is an invaluable gift. You introduced me to my spiritual practice of yoga and it is not hard to see that this thesis topic has derived from many of the perspectives and practices that I have learnt from you and which we now share. Thank you for being you.

Thank you to my partner Matt McClymont who is my soul mate. I love being with you and living our lives together. With you at my side this year writing this thesis has been a pleasure. You always support my dreams and aspirations and I thank you for that. Your kindness and smiles make my day, every day.

I would also like to acknowledge my brother, Alex, and my father Malcolm, as well as my wider family and support networks, for being part of my life.

And not forgetting my supreme study buddy Jean Paul...
# Table of contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of contents</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of tables</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of illustrations</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## 1) INTRODUCTION

- Research gaps                                 | 3    |
- Research questions                            | 4    |
- Definitions and terminology                   | 5    |
  - Wellness/spiritual retreat tourism          | 6    |
  - Spirituality                                | 6    |
- The case studies                              | 8    |
- This thesis                                   | 9    |

## 2) METHODS AND METHODOLOGY INTERTWINED

- Ethnographic research                         | 11   |
- Case study                                    | 13   |
- Interviewing                                  | 14   |
  - Evolution of research                        | 15   |
Pilot interviews 16
The questions 18
When interviews become performative 20

Visual data and semiotics 21
Visuals during the interviews 23
Images Vs. words 23

Data analysis 24

Ethics 27
Interference 27
Being an ‘outsider’ 28
Validity 29

3) MARKETING SPIRITUALITY AND NEW-AGEISM 31

Marketing and spirituality dualisms 32
Conflicting interests 33
The business of spiritual retreat tourism 35
Money reduces authenticity 37
Intention 39

Buying identity 41

Summary 43

4) COMMUNITY 44

Kindred spirits and friendship 45
Non-judgement 46
Sharing 49

Group safety 50

Helping or caring for others 53
Gendered roles of care 54
Group energy 55

Authenticity 60

- Authentic community 63
- Authentic rituals 64

Insiders/outsiders 67

Sense of belonging or home 69

Interconnectedness 73

- Connection with the self 74
- Connection with nature or a higher being 75
- Positivity as a connective element 78

Summary 79

5) ESCAPE 80

Getting away from the ‘outside’ world 81

- Rejecting technology 83
- Embracing peace and quiet 83
- Healthier addictions 86
- Breakaway from interpersonal relationships 87

Home and away 88

- Re-individualization 91

Putting the ‘treat’ in retreat 91

Copping out 92

The gendered self-project 94

The holistic retreat experience 96

- Spiritual practice involvement 97
- Learning as transformation 97
- Wholesome food 98

Summary 101
6) LANDSCAPE

Therapeutic landscapes
Healing/salutogenic environments
The spiritual landscape
  - Spiritual stories
    - Mist
    - Water
    - Beauty
New Zealand’s therapeutic landscape brand
Imagery
Spiritual architecture: sacred geometry
  - The Marae
Art-typical retreat features
Spiritual journeys
Retreat composition
Summary

7) CONCLUSION

Summary of findings
Limitations
Implications
Future research
Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview questions
Appendix 2: Table displaying the loyalty of
visitors to Mana and Aio Wira as specific retreat sites

**Appendix 3: Definitions of spirituality** 157

**List of references** 159

**Fliers** 170
List of tables

1) Data analysis categories.

2) The driveway story.

3) Table displaying the loyalty of visitors to Mana and Aio Wira as specific retreat sites (in appendix).

4) Definitions of spirituality (in appendix).
List of illustrations

1) Anahata Yoga Retreat flier (Anahata flier, 2011).

2) Yoga Alliance advertisement (Clark, 2010, back cover).

3) Ben’s photo of communal area at Mana.

4) *The Octagon Room* featured on Mana’s (2011) website.

5) Communal eating arrangement depicted on Mana’s (2011) website.

6) Outside area depicted on Aio Wira’s (2011) website.


10) The atmosphere at Anahata (Anahata Yoga Retreat flier, spring 2007).

11) Monica’s photo of the greenery at Aio Wira.

12) Ben’s photo of the dome ceiling at Mana.


14) Advertisement emphasizing relaxation (Anahata Yoga Retreat flier, spring 2007).

15) ‘Silent Area’ sign at Aio Wira, researcher’s photo.

16) ‘Centre of Peace’ sign at Aio Wira, researcher’s photo.

17) Bedroom layout at Mana (2011)

18) ‘Coming home’ advertisement (Mana Retreat flier, 2011).

19) Maree’s photo of the kitchen and food at Aio Wira.

20) What Mana offers (Mana Retreat flier, 2011).

21) Mana’s with misty mountains in background, researcher’s photo.

22) “View from Mana” (Mana, 2011).
24) Laura’s photo of statue in garden at Aio Wira.
25) The *Duomo* in Florence, Italy (Fletcher, 2011).
26) *Tara Sanctuary* (Mana, 2011).
29) Chakra (Anahata Yoga Retreat, 2007).
30) Trinity’s photo of arched window in *Tara Sanctuary* at Mana.
31) Eden’s photo of arched window in *Tara Sanctuary* at Mana.
32) Trinity’s picture of *Tara Sanctuary* nestled into the vast, green landscape of the *Coromandel Ranges*.
33) Ben’s picture of *Tara Sanctuary*.
34) The shop at Aio Wira.
35) The shop at Mana.
36) Bells at Aio Wira.
37) Bells at Mana.
38) Lilly pond at Aio Wira.
39) Lilly pond at Mana.
40) Seat in bush at Aio Wira.
41) Seat in bush at Mana.
42) Buddha statue at Aio Wira.
43) Buddha statue at Mana.
44) Carved wooden Maori sculpture at Aio Wira.
45) Carved wooden Maori sculpture at Mana.
46) Lotus flower depicted in stained glass in Aio Wira’s *Sanctuary*.
47) Aum sign and lotus flower depicted in stained glass in *Tara Sanctuary* (Mana, 2011).
48) Flowers placed on the lap of ‘Swami V’ at Aio Wira which Maree, a trustee, told me meant that Linda must have performed a ritual to her late Guru.

49) Flower petals and fern leaves which had been scattered on the floor of Mana were seen thrown on the grass the day following the solstice ritual.


51) Eden’s photo of the labyrinth at Mana.

52) Monica’s photo of bonsai trees at Aio Wira.

53) Monica’s photo of rocks at Aio Wira.

54) Laura’s photo of the native bush at Aio Wira.
Tourism Studies is a rapidly growing genre of scholarship. According to Urry (2003b, p. 157) “The scale of contemporary travelling is immense” and this has opened up areas of research unimaginable in the past. Tourism has been continually growing as an industry for the past six decades and is “one of the largest and fastest growing economic sectors in the world” according to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2011, p.2). As such, there is much interdisciplinary interest in tourism as a phenomenon constantly expanding alongside globalization and capitalism. As a popular and expanding sector, research fields span across many disciplines to deal with issues surrounding the topic, for example: marketing, economics, politics, engineering, development studies, sociology, human geography, psychology, health, and studies of the micro and macro aspects of social life affected by tourism. This non-exhaustive list positions tourism studies as a genre of great significance and interest to contemporary scholars. Positioned within the field of sociology, this research focuses on leisure tourism and, more specifically, travelling to seek the benefits believed to enhance personal well-being.

Well-being tourism is one of the most ancient forms of tourism. It was enjoyed by the Romans and Greeks, guests for spiritual enlightenment of Medieval pilgrims, and the European elite who took part in the medical seaside and spa tourism of the 18th and 19th century (Smith and Kelly, 2006a, p.1). The correlation between wellness and the tourism industry is evident. To enjoy time away from busy lifestyles, consumers find themselves purchasing a holiday break or soul searching adventure to restore or rest their physical and emotional bodies. Indeed this link has even been acknowledged by the United Nations World Tourism Organization UNWTO, 2011, p.2) which claims, albeit in a different sense, that international tourism is the “key to development, prosperity and well-being”.

Smith and Puczko (2009, p.39) argue that traditionally going to the seaside or a spa has been related to healing or resting the “physical body” however there has been very little focus “on the mental, emotional, or spiritual side of health”. A shift from the pilgrimage has occurred in modern societies where people are “more drawn to those health practices which offer them the chance to experience physical, mental and spiritual balance or
integration” (Smith and Puczko, 2009, p.39). Spiritual retreat centers epitomize the quest for this type of contemporary pilgrimage where an integrated approach is central to what they offer.

Many reasons are presented as to why spirituality, as a concept which does not require a link to religion, “appears to have gained strength in recent times” (Smith and Kelly, 2006b, p.16). The rise in interest in secular spirituality may stem from conceptions that religion is often cited as “the root cause of international crises and Western fear” (Smith and Kelly, 2006b, p.16). van Wormer et al. (2007, p.263) draw attention to the resurgence in religious and spiritual interest in modern times. Smith and Puczko (2009, p.47) emphasize the link between spirituality and well-being claiming that this “represents a shift away from orthodox religion towards a kind of transcendent spirituality, where one aims to develop beyond the self and the ego”. The origin of the word ‘spirituality’ “comes from the Latin ‘spiritualitas’, an abstract word, related to the Greek word ‘pneuma’ meaning breath, the essence of life” (Smith and Puczko, 2009, p.47). Existing research has found that spiritual tourists believe in a power beyond themselves and they tend to seek transcendence during their trip (Smith and Puczko, 2009, p.150).

Aotearoa/New Zealand has a spa history. In 1901 the New Zealand government aimed to compare Rotorua with the British spa of Bath. Attitudes towards fostering well-being as a commercial proposition emerged as a result (Ateljevic and Doorne, 2002, p.656). The area was invested in as the Government Gardens and Bath House “reiterated the culture of the European spa” (Towner, 1996 cited in Ateljevic and Doorne, 2002, p.657). While New Zealand has not achieved the spa status of European counterparts, the whole country is conceptualized and imagined internationally as ‘pure’ and ‘green’ which makes it a popular tourist destination according to Tourism New Zealand (TNZ, 2010). Stanford (2006, p.22) describes how, ironically, tourists to New Zealand can “have a direct and often negative impact on the clean, green, pristine environment that they are visiting”. Bell (2008, p.346-347) describes a paradox of eco-tourism that “as soon as a natural ‘untouched’ space is made accessible to tourists, that very naturalness is modified”. Eco-labels such as ‘clean’, ‘pure’, or ‘green’ are tools used for marketing “to promote good environmental

Whether imagined or based on reality, New Zealand as a context for spiritual or healing retreats is important as Gesler (1992) reminds us, “there is a long tradition that healing powers may be found in the physical environment, whether this entails materials such as medicinal plants, the fresh air and pure water of the countryside, or magnificent scenery” (Gesler, 1992, p.736). New Zealand’s tourism campaigns place emphasis on precisely these elements, the notions filtering into everyday discourse about the beneficial values of nature.

Many authors seek to address the extent to which “many destinations are developing their products and services to meet the needs of a new breed of consumer who is interested increasingly in lifestyle-based wellness and overall wellbeing” (Smith et al., 2010). This research explores spiritual retreat tourism in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

**Research gaps**

In 1991 Perkins and Gidlow (1991) invited scholars to address the social science aspects of leisure tourism research in New Zealand, claiming that little had been done in the way of research in this area. Twenty years on, while various aspects of leisure tourism have been studied, it is accepted among many wellness tourism scholars that there are large gaps in the literature relating to many aspects of the field. In particular the ‘retreat’ has been under researched (Kelly, 2010, p.108). Currently a preoccupation with spa tourism dominates the field (Pesonen and Komppula 2010, p.152). However, various publications in recent years demonstrate how wellness tourism is becoming a specialist area of interest. The academic journals *Tourism Recreation Research* (Smith and Kelly, 2006a) and *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management* (Smith et al., 2010) have produced whole issues dedicated to the topic. In 2010, international travel for leisure accounted for 51% of the travel industry (UNWTO, 2011, p.3). This undoubtedly encourages the publication of industry reports such as *Health Tourism in Australia: Supply, Demand and Opportunities* (Voigt et al., 2010) which
was published by the Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre to provide marketing insights into the sector.

Numerous academics, students and stakeholders are interested in the market as well as the social dimensions of the wellness tourism phenomenon. Voigt (2009) argues that wellness tourism is “one of the most promising niche markets within the tourism field” although it remains “an area with few empirical studies” (Voigt, 2009, p.1). An increasing amount of publications addresses this topic’s popularity. Lea (2006; 2008; 2009a; 2009b) conducts research with a focus on subject bodies in place. Her (2008) paper Retreating to Nature: Rethinking ‘therapeutic landscapes’ reflects upon a yoga and massage retreat in Southern Spain with specific interest around the unique opportunities such a retreat experience might offer “for recuperation and the creation of healthy bodies” (Lea, 2008, p.90). Lea (2008, p.96) urges for studies to be conducted about retreats as she claims that such research provides a clearer understanding “of therapeutic imaginations in existence, how these create different possibilities for processes of subject formation, and what might be the place-specific potentials for creating therapeutic landscape experiences” (Lea, 2008, p.96). This research will answer Lea’s (2008) call for more research concerned with the therapeutic landscape of retreat sites. There are many opportunities for research within the realm of wellness tourism as it is largely neglected by researchers of tourism and leisure but also health science more generally (Voigt et al., 2010, cited in Wray et al., 2010, p.158).

**Research questions**

This project aimed to explore the relationship between concepts of spirituality, wellness and the environment, as explained by people involved with spiritual retreat establishments in New Zealand. By addressing these connections I sought to understand why people might partake in spiritual retreat tourism and the benefits they gained from doing so. Initially by using the term ‘environment’ I was referring primarily to the natural, physical setting of retreat centres.

This agenda changed after conducting interviews with participants at spiritual retreat centres and also visiting them during fieldwork. I became aware that the term
‘environment’ is a multi-dimensional concept. Having revised this terminology in this research encapsulates: 1) social and community spheres; 2) the escapist setting which retreat centres offer; 3) the physical, geographical location and; 4) the spiritual environment. The first three of these environmental factors are cited by Gesler (2003 cited in Lea, 2008, p. 90) as those which combine to make a place ‘healing’. The participants of this research found that spirituality also enhanced the healing potential of retreat spaces.

This project intended to understand why people choose to take part in spiritual retreat tourism and as such answer Bushell and Sheldon’s (2009 cited in Pesonen and Komppula, 2010, p.155) call for further exploration into the motivations behind wellness tourism.

Voigt (2009) conducted PhD research about wellness tourism by investigating tourists and their experiences at retreats. Voigt (2009, p.1) studied three different types of wellness retreat visitors. There were beauty spa visitors, lifestyle resort visitors, and spiritual retreat visitors. Her research found that wellness tourists are not one single, homogenous group although six benefit factors were highlighted amongst the large sample of retreat-goers: Transcendence, Physical Health and Appearance, Escape & Relaxation, Important Others and Novelty, Re-establish Self-Esteem, and Indulgence (Voigt, 2009, p.2). Four key themes were indicated in this research as significant reasons for one’s visitation to spiritual retreat locations. They are community, escape, landscape and, spirituality. Some aspects of these themes overlap with the findings of Voigt’s (2009) research.

**Definitions and terminology**

The term ‘tourism’ was coined in the early nineteenth century and refers to “the act of making a tour” (Withey, 1997, p.ix). Tourism can be defined as ‘leisure travel’ and is distinct from conceptions of ‘travel’ which connotes both work and independence (Withey, 1997, p.ix-x). Wellness tourism is a branch of leisure travel and within this category spiritual retreat tourism can be analyzed.
Wellness/spiritual retreat tourism

Throughout this research Mana and Aio Wira are referred to as ‘spiritual retreats’. There are many wellness tourism categorizations such as ‘holistic tourism’, ‘yoga and meditation tourism’, ‘spiritual tourism’, or as a catch-all, ‘wellness tourism’ (Smith and Puczko, 2009, p.83-105). The concept of ‘wellness’ is not homogenous (Kelly, 2010, p.109). ‘Spiritual tourism’, as I have categorized the retreats in this research, has a focus on spiritual transcendence (Smith and Puczko, 2009, p.97). Not all spiritual retreat tourists may be seeking this but it is fair to say that retreats, like those studied here, provide availability for that sort of spiritual focus.

The word ‘retreat’ itself also requires definition. According to Kelly (2010, p.109) the word “retreat conveys a sense of respite, refuge and rest, and this often forms the essence of this type of wellness tourism provision”. The functions of retreat centres vary as spaces for “quiet reflection and rejuvenation, an opportunity to regain good health, and/or it can mean a time for spiritual reassessment and renewal, either alone, in silence or in a group” (Retreats Online, 2007, cited in Kelly, 2010, p.109). Retreat centres offer less luxurious accommodation than some other wellness tourism centres, for example spa resorts, and they tend to offer holistic programs for “personal development” (Kelly, 2010, p.109). Wellness tourism could be defined as “encompassing a positive and holistic understanding of health that incorporates physical, psychological, social and spiritual experiences undertaken by tourists whose primary motive is to maintain or improve their health and wellbeing” (Wray et al., 2010, p. 158, adapted from Voigt, 2009). This definition fits well with the findings of this research.

Spirituality

Many theorists from multiple disciplines have explored religious and/or spiritual links to places (Durie, 1985; Collins-Kreiner, 1999; Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999; MacDonald, 2002; Zapf, 2005; Bone, 2007; Warf & Vincent, 2007; Dewsbury & Cloke, 2009). There are also many studies which have addressed pilgrims and similar religious type tourism (Eade, 1992;
Rinschede, 1992; Jackson & Hudman, 1995; Gesler, 1996; Collins-Kreiner & Kloit, 2000; Fleischer, 2000; Digance, 2003; Badone, 2008; and Shuo et al., 2009 to name a few). However, Williams (2010, p.1633) argues that very little work has addressed spirituality using the therapeutic landscape framework and that case study research using this framework provides one way to address this gap. Williams’ (2010, p.1633) case study research at a retreat in Canada had a spiritual focus which partially addresses the missing spirituality link in research relating health to geography. There is some existing research regarding the relationship between spirituality and tourism in New Zealand. For example, Mansfeld and McIntosh (2009, p.177-178) looked at how spiritual tourism can enhance the wellness of tourism hosts as well as their guests through a study of the Hosting Israeli Travellers network in New Zealand. This is a vastly different form of spiritual tourism to that of spiritual retreats. There appears to be a gap in local research in applying concepts of spirituality and tourism to retreat locations. This project will contribute to understandings of holistic wellbeing and will inform analysis of spiritual tourism in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

It is important to distinguish what is meant by ‘spirituality’ throughout this thesis. Firstly, spirituality is different to religion. According to Williams (2010, p.1634) “religiosity and spirituality are not interchangeable but interconnected”. In contrast, Bone (2007, p.19) claims that “The concept of spirituality can bypass having to make definitive statements about beliefs and dogma” and it is “a concept that remains curiously free” (Bone, 2007, p.19). Religion is not a prerequisite to spirituality: “non-religious individuals can be very spiritual, connected to a higher life purpose separate from religious doctrines” (Zullig, Ward, & Horn, 2006 cited in Williams, 2010, p.1634). Ream (2009, p. 140) describes ‘Secular spirituality’ as “a sense of meaning/spirituality that, rather than being relegated to formal religious ritual, is experienced informally through looking out at landscapes, telling stories or walking the dog”. As a concept, spirituality is “abstract and open to various readings and is distinct and amorphous rather than definite and bounded” (Bone, 2007, p.18). Acknowledging that ‘spirituality’ can be defined in numerous ways, this research will allow those interviewed at spiritual retreat sites to define spirituality by what it means to them.
The case studies

Aio Wira and Mana are two long-standing retreat centres situated in the North Island of Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Aio Wira Centre is situated in the Waitakere Ranges and is comprised of four hectares of native bush. It is in Western Auckland about forty-five minutes from Auckland’s city centre. The retreat centre boundaries are surrounded by the Waitakere stream and bush reserves. The Waitakere Ranges are characterized by their ancient kauri trees and diversity of native bird songs. A large ecological restoration project named Ark in the Park spans the nearby area of Aio Wira. This environment is well known to Aucklanders for its walking tracks, stunning scenery and unique biodiversity.

Aio Wira is Maori for the English interpretation ‘peace wheel’. This symbolizes “moving in the world from the centre of peace within ourselves” (Aio Wira Centre, 2011). On its website the Aio Wira Centre is described as providing a place where “people can come to find that peace, renew their energies, and gain an understanding of themselves, others and their relationship with the world” (Aio Wira Centre, 2011). Aio Wira Centre provides group and individual retreats with about a 20 person capacity at any one time for housing although tents and caravans can be used too. The food at Aio Wira is vegetarian. The centre was founded in 1970 by a group of yoga students.

Mana is situated in the Coromandel Ranges. “Embracing mountain, bush and sea” the retreat centre is situated at the base of a mountain, is surrounded by native bush, and overlooks the Manaia Harbour (Mana, 2011). Mana was established “for the exploration and awakening of consciousness, the unfolding of our creative and healing potential and realisation of our essential Unity” (Mana, 2011). The word ‘mana’ can be translated from the Maori language to mean “prestige, authority, control, power, influence, status, spiritual power, charisma - mana is a supernatural force in a person, place or object” (Moorfield, 2011). The expansive land which makes up Mana’s site is where organic fruit, vegetables, and edible flowers are grown to both feed those experiencing a Mana retreat and others in
the local community. Mana was developed in the 1980s by the trustees and new buildings have been added since in an evolution of what Mana retreat centre is today.

Both Aio Wira and Mana echo the same spiritual position as they provide spaces which are not based on any specific spiritual philosophy. On Aio Wira’s website it is stated that the centre “exists to support all who wish to develop in body, mind and spirit” (Aio Wira Centre, 2011). This is resonated on the Mana website with the line “Mana provides a perfect atmosphere for the enrichment of body, mind and spirit” (Mana, 2011). According to Mark and Lyons (2010, p.1756) “Mind, body, and spirit are terms used in everyday lay language and often associated with ‘new age’ views on health and healing”. The retreats are purpose-built and available for hire for practitioners, groups or individuals for wellness tourism purposes (although at Aio Wira the Sanctuary building can be hired for celebrations and rituals, including weddings). Both centres are governed by a Trust Board and run by a small number of dedicated staff members including ‘woofers’ (people who exchange their labour in return for food and accommodation at a specific site). Many of these aspects are similar to other wellness retreats studied by Kelly (2010).

**This thesis**

This thesis is presented in chapters which correlate to key themes which were identified in the data. The themes are categorized as: conceptions of community which characterize people’s experiences of spiritual retreats, new experiences and the ‘escape’ from everyday life that this tourism provides and, the therapeutic landscape of retreat tourism. It must be noted that references to spirituality and New Age ideologies filtered through to all of the categories and will therefore be discussed throughout the other chapters. Spirituality and New Ageism will be briefly presented at the beginning of the thesis in a critical discussion of some of the issues the two concepts face in modern times.

Following this introduction, chapter two comprises of the research methods and methodology as they are intertwined. The third chapter is where data from the fieldwork begins to be explored as spirituality and New Ageism are discussed with reference to the
critique of marketing such concepts. Chapter four addresses the concept of community as it was described by participants at the retreats. A critical discussion of the search for community authenticity is applied to the topic as it relates to tourism. Chapter five presents the notion of ‘escape’ which visitors enjoyed as a result of removing themselves from their everyday lives to relish in the ‘treat’ of (re)treat tourism. Finally, chapter six presents the theme of landscape where the concept of ‘therapeutic’ landscapes will be discussed as retreat spaces have the reputation of enabling guests to achieve physical, mental, and spiritual healing. Spiritual symbolism will also be largely addressed in this section and the chapter presents many visual representations of spiritual retreat tourism. The conclusion follows as chapter eight where findings are summarized. There is also comment on future research possibilities. There will be no separate literature review as references to academic literature permeate all of the chapters. This enables the social researcher to provide in-depth engagement with literature alongside research data.
Methods and methodology intertwined

This is qualitative ethnographic case study research. In this chapter research methods and methodology have been intertwined. In this chapter the way this research has been carried out is discussed with reference to literature about conducting social research. Qualitative research is a process that lends itself to a holistic approach. As such, combining methods and methodology aims to offer a well-rounded account of the way this research was carried out and why.

Ethnographic research

Ethnography originated from nineteenth-century anthropologists in their interests of observing pre-industrial cultures (Silverman, 2006, p.67). It remains an important methodological approach to social research as ethnography, and also subfields such as auto-ethnography, provides access to “insider meanings” (Anderson, 2006, p.389) and first-hand experience of “less quantifiable characteristics” of case studies (Kelly, 2010, p.110).

In contemporary research ethnography encompasses many interest groups and research fields (Silverman, 2006, p.67). Ethnography is no longer confined to the study of pre-industrial cultures (anthropology) but is also used to study post-modern groups such as those taking part in spiritual retreat tourism (sociology). Silverman (2006, p.74) claims that a crude and sometimes inaccurate way to differentiate sociology from anthropology is to note that “unlike anthropology, sociology’s ‘tribe’ is the people around us”. Sociological ethnography came about around the 1920’s when students of the Chicago School were instructed to “get out onto the streets of their city and use their eyes and ears” (Silverman, 2006, p.74). Goffman (cited in Fielding, 2001, p.148) thought the best way to understand social groups was to “get close”. This mentality is in-line with the Chicago School’s ideas of conducting “‘real’ research which, naturally, had to take place in the ‘real’ world, not the library” (Fielding, 2001, p.148). David and Sutton (2004, p.103) argue that ethnography involves the researcher spending time ‘within’ a culture or group thus leading to field
research. According to Silverman (2006) “‘ethno’ means ‘folk’, while “graph” derives from ‘writing’” so a definition of ethnography is “social scientific writing about particular folks” (Silverman, 2006, p.67). A fuller definition follows:

Participant observation, ethnography and fieldwork are all used interchangeably... they can all mean spending long periods watching people, coupled with talking to them about what they are doing, thinking and saying, designed to see how they understand their world (Delamont, 2004 cited in Silverman, 2006, p.67)

In order to research retreat-goers and the retreat environment I have spent time at retreat locations. I participated in daily routines and gatherings, observed signs and symbols at the locations and interviewed people around me. All this was to better understand the relatively unknown world contained within the perimeters of the retreat.

According to Fielding (2001, p.147) ethnographic research often has a small sample size because the emphasis of such research is on depth, intensity and richness. This is why I have two case study retreats rather than five or ten. In order to offer detailed analysis of the retreats I have narrowed my focus to two settings. As with much ethnographic research, mine is inductive meaning I have built theory “in the course of data collection” (David and Sutton, 2004, p.103).

Ethnographic research with its element of being “in the field” proposes many advantages to my type of research such as offering an opportunity to explore a culture or group’s “way of life” (David and Sutton, 2004, p.103). Anderson (2006, p.378) outlines five key features which make up analytic auto-ethnography:“(1) complete member researcher (CMR) status, (2) analytic reflexivity, (3) narrative visibility of the researcher’s self, (4) dialogue with informants beyond the self, and (5) commitment to theoretical analysis”. These five features were taken into account for this research and a particular commitment to theoretical analysis is noted. David and Sutton (2004, p.103) describe how a well-rounded focus on social life makes ethnography ‘holistic’ rather than ‘mechanistic’. This fits in well with my research as studying spiritual spaces looks to a holistic approach and spaces such as retreats are often aiming to foster holistic well-being.
Case study

Malinowski (cited in Hamel et al., 1991, p.3) is a key figure in the development of case study research as it is known today within the disciplines of anthropology and sociology due to his fieldwork where participant observation emerged. This style of research uses multiple methods to collect data and make observations (Hamel et al., 1991, p.45). Park, (2009, p.118) an ethnographic case study researcher, argues that the multi method approach could “counterbalance the biases or flaws arising from the employment of a single method of design and analysis”. Fieldwork has been described by another wellness retreat researcher, Kelly (2010, p.110), as essential to discovering less obvious factors of interest such as “sense of community” or “ambiance”. These contextual observations can be gained from visitation to specific case study sites (Kelly, 2010, p.110).

Case studies are “in-depth studies of specific ‘units’” which may be “individuals, organizations, events, programmes or communities” (David and Sutton, 2004, p.111). This style of research is strongly linked to ethnography (David and Sutton, 2004, p. 111). Hamel et al. (1991, p.2) describe case study research as an approach which in sociology “strives to highlight the features or attributes of social life”. I chose to use two retreat case studies because the location of the retreat provided a space to analyse as a site of spirituality, therapy, socializing and involvement in activities. The retreat location also provided access to the retreat owners, employees and visitors - the subjects whose perceptions I was interested in. The questions of my research were best answered through the analysis of the retreat sites, including their visitors, as “case studies capture both the unique specialness of each setting and celebrate different perspectives” (Gomm et al., 2000; Stake, 2000; Travers, 2001; all cited in Bone, 2007, p.82).

Bone (2007, p.69) describes the relationship between researcher and participant from her experience conducting case study research and she notes that this relationship in context supports a “reflexive stance”. Bone (2007, p.69) describes how “As researcher I was part of each case study, not outside looking in but looking out from inside my own experience in that setting”. This concept of the researcher as participant drew me to consider keeping a
personal journal while visiting the retreat centres which functioned as a useful note-keeping tool and also contained personal reflections, “mullings, questions, comments, quirky notes, and diary type entries” which enabled researcher reflexivity (de Munck, 1998 cited in Alaszewski, 2006, p.40). The personal journal supplemented my field notes and interview transcripts.

**Interviewing**

I conducted semi-structured interviews with five people at each of the retreats. At Mana I interviewed the retreat manager, a trustee, a workshop facilitator, and two visitors. At Aio Wira the manager did not wish to be included in the research so I interviewed one trustee, one workshop facilitator, who also founded the retreat, and three visitors. The semi-structured interviews allowed me to address key questions and topics which I had thought of prior to interviewing, but allowed me to remain free to adapt my questions and alter the sequence of them as necessary throughout the interview (Fielding and Thomas, 2001, p.124). I had no preferences as to the type of participants involved in the research except I hoped for a spread of managers, trustees, facilitators and visitors. Who I could interview was mostly dependent upon who was at the retreat centre during my time conducting fieldwork and their availability to give me thirty minutes of their time. With regards to their study of wellness tourism in Byron Bay, Australia, Wray et al. (2010, p.159) interviewed knowledgeable people involved in the industry. Quoting Denzin (2002, p.350 cited in Wray et al., 2010, p.159) the researchers argue that it is important to interview those within a field with the knowledge with which is crucial to understanding one’s topic as “a researcher is led to seek out subjects who have experienced the types of experiences the researcher seeks to understand”. Bearing this in mind it was optimal that a spread of trustees, managers, facilitators and guests were interviewed for this research. This open and spontaneous participation meant that I needed to be prepared to adapt my interview questions to the participant who was available at the time. I did prepare three sets of interview questions bearing in mind that I would be interviewing a spread of people in different roles. I prepared interview questions for managers, trustees, and visitors and had
to slightly adapt these for the workshop facilitators (see Appendix 1 for the semi-structured interview questions that I prepared for the interviews).

**Evolution of research**

At two points there was a fear that my research topic would be swayed in other directions from what I initially had in mind as my research objectives. Lynn, the manager of Aio Wira, suggested I interview her two German ‘woofers’. ‘Woofers’ are people who are usually travelling and exchange their labour for food and accommodation at organically managed sites. If I had interviewed woofers my research would have changed considerably. I had to stress that I was only interested in retreat-goers and that while interviewing woofers would be interesting it was superfluous to this study. Bechhofer and Paterson (2000, p.52) argue that many researchers come across various different issues which could sway their research design but that their end-point topic is usually found out of passion and also through negotiating the constraints of their study. Being assertive was essential when communicating with the managers at the retreats, as is most probably the case with many research projects.

At Mana the initial plan to attend a yoga retreat changed quite suddenly. I had arranged to conduct my fieldwork and interviews during a retreat workshop in August and to attend a *Worker Bee* in June to meet with Carol, the manager, and to see Mana. Upon arriving for the *Worker Bee* I was told that the retreat in August had been cancelled. Carol suggested that I interview people that weekend during the *Worker Bee* because, as she pointed out, there were trustees, workshop facilitators and retreat guests all there. I agreed to that and did some speedy organizational work to get all the forms up together. Carol was very helpful and chose four people she thought would be ideal to interview for a good spread of perspectives. They all agreed to participate and arranged times with me for interviews the following day. Carol was also interviewed. I was supported at Mana by being given use of the office to work in and conduct interviews in. Carol also gave me access to the internet and a photocopy machine. Conducting fieldwork while at a *Worker Bee* actually enriched my research and added another dimension. Bechhofer and Paterson (2000, p.54) argue that
“deciding what to study is an interactive process: it needs to be continually refined”. This is a good example of when research plans can be refined to create a more interesting and multi-faceted research design.

A few other changes occurred throughout the course of this research. Initially there were going to be three retreats but when one pulled out I decided to focus on two more deeply rather than finding another retreat centre to be involved. The length of the interviews also changed from being an estimated 30-40 minutes in length to 20-30 minutes. This was suggested by Lynn, the manager at Aio Wira, who pointed out that it might be more practical to shorten the interviews. This was so that participants could, for example, eat their morning tea and then be interviewed rather than missing out on morning tea to do their interview. Research designs always take place under constraints (Bechhofer and Paterson, 2000p.52). It is necessary to negotiate ways of carrying out research, especially when direct contact with other people and organizations is involved.

Pilot interviews

David and Sutton (2004, p.87) argue that “the more informal, unstructured and unstandardized an interview is, the more the interviewer needs to work”. A metaphor of the interviewing process is a drama: “The interviewer is performer, audience and choreographer. When the script is flexible, the qualitative interviewer must be all the more prepared for the role they are to perform” (David and Sutton, 2004, p.87 with reference to Berg, 1998). Pilot studies may help the researcher practice her performance and also “identify potential practical problems in following the research procedure” (van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2001, p.1). David and Sutton (2004, p.89) suggest that piloting interview questions is necessary to avoid faults in questioning which may degrade the quality of the interview. I piloted my interview questions with two members of my family and also an anonymous person who had taken part in much retreat tourism who I will call Cynthia as a pseudonym. After their pilot interviews I asked participants to answer the following questions taken from David and Sutton (2004, p.89):

1) Did you feel the interview was leading or biased in any way?

2) How did you experience the interview?
3) Did you feel that you were able to express your point of view effectively?

4) Did you feel the questions asked addressed the core features of the area as you see it?

5) Any other feedback?

I gained a lot of feedback from the pilot interviews which resulted in me reviewing the interview questions I had originally planned. One pilot interviewee said that my original questions were too closed which made them slightly interrogating. This first pilot interview played out like a questionnaire and lacked space or depth as the closed questions were responded to with short replies which meant there wasn’t a good dialogue between the interviewer and interviewee. It was commented by the pilot interviewee that the participants in this research “may not feel like they are being listened to with these types of questions”. This issue highlighted the necessity of novice researchers to conduct pilot interviews as a type of ‘interview training’ before interacting with “real” participants (Knox and Burkard, 2009, p.14). As a result of this pilot interview the questions were reviewed to be made open-ended and also fewer questions were included to allow for spontaneous discussion and in the hope that any feeling of interrogation could fall away.

The second pilot interviewee commented that some of the questions regarding ‘spirituality’ were too broad and did not relate directly to retreat tourism. Originally I was going to ask “How does spirituality add to your wellbeing?” but this was changed to “In what way do you think that taking part in spiritual practices adds to your wellbeing?” Including ‘spiritual practices’ in the question reflects the nature of spiritual retreat tourism where one need only look at a spiritual retreat itinerary to see the focus on spiritual ‘activity’.

David and Sutton (2004, p.89) claim that interviews are always directive in nature but that there is a risk that questions contain “built-in bias” and this should be the focus of concern in the feedback from pilot interviewees. Cynthia, my final pilot interviewee, reassured me that the questions were not biased in nature since she was “given a lot of scope to answer directly and from the heart”. Cynthia, as a frequent retreat-goer herself, was an ideal pilot interviewee as she was “as similar as possible to the target population” of this research (van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2001, p.2). One critique given during this final pilot interview was
that Cynthia felt she had almost too much information to convey and this was obvious as the anticipated 30 minute interview took just over one hour. This showed me that by opening up the questions, and also allowing for natural, unscripted discourse, there were too many questions. As a result the amount of questions was roughly halved and they were made to be more focussed on my research objectives.

The questions

The finalised interview questions were open-ended asking the interviewee to share with me their perspective on quite general issues such as what the experience of being on a retreat means to them. There were also questions specifically regarding what I see to be a more personal topic – spirituality. I was interested to find out whether the interviewees saw spirituality to be a relevant concept applicable to retreat tourism. Questions were asked such as these that follow:

- What does the word 'spirituality' mean to you?
- Is there anything spiritual about this place or being here for you? If so, what?
- Do you consider yourself to be a ‘spiritual’ person?
- Is the retreat somewhere which supports your spiritual practices? How?

One issue with discussing spirituality is what the concept means. Bone (2007, p.16) argues that the concept of spirituality is abstract and open to various readings. It is “indistinct and amorphous rather than definite and bounded... Spirituality is a concept that resists definition” (Bone, 2007, p.16). ‘Spirituality’ as a multidimensional concept is often elusive to singular definitions so I left it ‘free’ and open to the ideas described to me by the interviewees. This issue of the inability to define ‘spirituality’ is accepted throughout this research. I heard from interviewees what they consider ‘spiritual’ from their own perspectives and I have not tailored their expressions of ‘spirituality’ by defining it too closely myself and thus projecting my ideals onto them. When researching spirituality, Moberg (2002, cited in Bone, 2007, p.76) recommends “recognising complexity, being
particularistic, not imposing a researcher definition, avoiding stereotyping” as well as realising that one word can be pluralistic in meaning.

Fielding and Thomas (2001) argue that questioning techniques “should encourage respondents to communicate their underlying attitudes, beliefs and values, rather than a glib or easy answer” (Fielding and Thomas, 2001, p.126). I encouraged this type of communication during interviews by actively trying to appear unthreatening and friendly rather than intimidating or overly serious. I felt relaxed during the interviews and was conscious about how it is possible to become in-sync when communicating with others. Fielding and Thomas (2001) discuss some issues that can arise during interviews:

1) Interviewees may offer logical responses rather than offering emotional or evaluative responses that may provide a truer insight; 2) People are not used to describing their feelings therefore they may have a lack of awareness and information in their responses; 3) Interviewee may avoid describing features of attitudes or behaviours if they are seen as inconsistent with their preferred self-image; 4) Respondents may focus on being polite or impressing the interviewer thus distorting their response (Fielding and Thomas, 2001, p.126-127).

There are solutions to what Fielding and Thomas (2001, p.127) describe as “obstacles to frank communication”. These include having a relaxed and unself-conscious manner as interviewer to put the interviewee at ease, and personalising discussions “to get to underlying attitudes” which can be done by asking the respondent about their experiences (Fielding and Thomas, 2001, p.127). During the interviews questions were asked about the interviewees' experiences and beliefs. This steered the focus away from generic answers and more towards a personalised set of ideas and values unique to each person. At the beginning of each interview I also said the following to clarify my expectations as researcher: “Thank you for doing this interview with me and please feel at ease when answering my questions. There are no right or wrong answers - I am interested in your ideas and comments above anything else”. One aim of the interview implementation was to nurture a respectful and open dialogue building a trustful relationship between interviewer and interviewee.
**When interviews become performative**

The last point which Fielding and Thomas (2001, p.126-127) describe as participants “impressing the interviewer” was seen as potentially problematic throughout this research. The interviewees may have wanted to provide me, as interviewer, information they predicted I would like to hear (Fielding and Thomas, 2001, p.27). I hoped to encourage a genuine discourse between myself as interviewer and the participant as interviewee to avoid false responses. Lewis (2008) provided an example where this might play out in research of people affiliated with particular philosophies or identity ideals. Lewis (2008, p.538) conducted nine interviews and observed students over three months at an urban *Vinyasa* yoga studio in America and suggests her participants may have been performing the identity of the “good yogi” during interviews. Performing a “good yogi” refers to interviewees who may act-out to reinforce stereotypically ‘yogic’ characteristics or identity features in a way that is contrived and false (Lewis, 2008, p.538). This concept was relevant to the retreat-goers in this research as they may have wished to portray characteristics which they believed to be stereotypical ideals within the retreat community. Discussing spirituality with those involved in spiritual retreat tourism included a level of cultural capital which participants may have wished to exaggerate in order to make themselves appear more refined or part of their desired retreat community. This was an issue of reliability (David and Sutton, 2004, p.14).

It proved hard to tell if the ‘good retreater’ was being performed or not during the interviews. One way of potentially reducing any performance-driven interview answers would have been to hold the interview outside of a retreat workshop and on neutral premises. This may have enabled participants to be more reflexive about their experiences rather than presenting their responses in the environment of which they were commenting. This would have provided different dimensions to analyse in the research but it would have interfered with the ethnographic nature of this research and also would have skewed other dimensions. There is definite value in interviewing people about a place while they are in the particular environment at the time of their interview. Also, it would still be hard to know if any ‘good retreater’ performance was taking place. In reflection, most of the time the
communication during the interviews appeared genuine and ‘real’ but I am aware that this concept may have been at work.

**Visual data and semiotics**

This research included the use of visual data both during the interviews and throughout field notes. Ball and Smith (1992, p. 6) argue that there are many advantages to using visuals in field notes including the metaphor that “the camera has a better “memory” than the human eye”. However, while visuals have often been included in ethnographic field notes they are usually neglected in reports and instead descriptive language is used to “do the work of eyes” (Ball and Smith, 1992, p.6). Sociology has been less likely as a discipline to use visual data than anthropology which has traditionally included images. However, when photographs have been used as data the images have been “underanalyzed, generally serving as little more than illustrative devices” (Ball and Smith, 1992, p.12). In this research images have used throughout the chapters as illustrations of the retreat sites. Photos have also been presented as depictions of signs and symbols to be analysed and given weight to as important and unique representations of ideologies associated with retreats and spirituality. Images can be viewed as representations of the tourist gaze (Urry, 1990, cited in Roesch, 2009, p.129). While tourists “visually experience and consume objects”, the objects available “determine what the tourists can gaze upon” (Roesch, 2009, p.129). In this way images can be useful in discussions about the carefully constructed and composed scenes of retreat tourism. The analysis of signs and symbols has been conducted using a semiotic approach which is subjective in nature.

Manning (1987, p.25) describes semiotics as “primarily a mode of analysis that seeks to understand how signs perform or convey meaning in context”. Chandler (1994, np) argues that humans, above all, are “Homo significans - meaning-makers”. Manning (1987, p. 25) also argues that knowing how to address signs as a component of language is “essential to displaying cultural competence”. Since signs “indicate groups and social relations” they were essential in understanding the retreat settings and all that they encompassed as “Social signs point to group identity, to membership, and to social roles” (Manning, 1987,
p.27). I expected to see reoccurring themes signed at the retreat sites such as: spiritual symbols (religious or New Age), nature zones (such as viewpoints focussing on aspects of the natural environment and areas for sitting and reflection within these zones), symbols of unique New Zealand-ness (flags, written Maori language or Maori art), and rustic-ness (gravel roads, long drive-ways, wood, naturalist features) to name a few. As fieldwork was carried out I found that indeed signs and symbols found around the retreats depicted certain characteristics of what one could call somewhat stereotypical features of spiritual retreat tourism sites.

Ball and Smith (1992) critique the type of semiotic analysis which made up part of my research. They argue:

> It is important that the coder make no attempt to interpret the data in any wider way, such as by trying to recover the communicator’s intent in publishing this picture showing a man thusly composed, because that would result in the coder speculating about latent meanings (Ball and Smith, 1992, p.27).

This argument, although valid, was not followed through the analyses of data in this research. It is true that reading into symbolic representations, beyond what is obvious, may be speculative and is also highly subjective. To claim that some research is purely objective goes against the concept of semiotics which can assist us to become more aware of “reality as a construction and of the roles played by ourselves and others in constructing it” (Chandler, 1994). To unmask the concept of a ‘reality’ and instead focus on the world’s constructed and creative nature is to truly understand semiotics and all this theory has to offer. Chandler (1994) argues that:

> Meaning is not 'transmitted' to us - we actively create it according to a complex interplay of codes or conventions of which we are normally unaware. Becoming aware of such codes is both inherently fascinating and intellectually empowering... we need to learn that even the most 'realistic' signs are not what they appear to be... we may perform the valuable semiotic function of 'denaturalizing' signs... The study of signs is the study of the construction and maintenance of reality. To decline such a study is to leave to others the control of the world of meanings which we inhabit (Chandler, 1994, np).
I embraced the theory of semiotic analysis throughout this thesis and visuals featured both in the interview process and throughout the write-up.

**Visuals during the interviews**

During interviews I gave my digital camera to the interviewees asking them to take three pictures of/around the retreat location with the aim of capturing the most important features of being on the retreat as they defined it. These images were then analysed by the interviewee as I asked them why they chose to take those particular three photos and whether they felt any of the representations linked back to their ideas about spirituality. I have also analyzed some of these images in the chapters as they are visual representations of values held by people at the retreats. Initially I planned to present participants with visual images which I had taken of spiritual retreats and ask them to comment. I faced problems with this because I did not know which images I would choose and also whether their comments would reflect what I really wanted to know when referring back to my research objectives. I concluded that what retreat-goers believed to be significant was at the forefront of this research, *not* what I depicted and thought was important.

**Images Vs. words**

The tendency of qualitative researchers to avoid or downplay visual images may be due to the academic convention to prioritize words (Silverman, 2006, p.241-242). When I asked the interviewees to take photos, to represent what they saw as the most important features of the retreat they were at, many of them resisted this and rather chose to describe their ‘images’. They felt that their ideas could not be represented adequately through photography. This was an unanticipated response as I thought that the ‘a picture speaks a thousand words’ rule might apply. Upon closer inspection I realised that it was the static nature of photography which put them off as well as the limitation of not being able to include other people in images as was a condition of ethics approval. Many described dynamics that played out between people and their verbal accounts of these proved to be as effective as the photographs taken by others. Silverman (2006, p.242) argues, about our technologically advanced world, “Perhaps our learned appetite for ‘action’ blinds us to the possibility of a slower, more reflexive viewing”. People in the West are used to a constant
visual stimulation, enabled by technological advancement and privilege in our society, but people can still open their eyes to reflexivity and meaning. The images people captured either visually or verbally were chosen very deliberately by the interviewees who showed a level of awareness and reflexivity.

**Data analysis**

Thematic categorizations were formed as part of my data analysis. The table I worked from for categorizing content follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Colour code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>References to kindred spirits and friendship, group energy and group safety, sense of belonging or home and helping or caring for others.</td>
<td>Pink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escape</td>
<td>References to getting away from the 'outside' world, time to oneself or doing something for oneself (a treat). New experiences/learning from the unique situation of the setting encompassing food, the workshop, peace, relaxation and tranquility.</td>
<td>Purple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landscape</td>
<td>References to the natural (geographical) environment and human-made features including retreat buildings, facilities and symbolism.</td>
<td>Green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality</td>
<td>References to ideas about spirituality, New Ageism, energy fields, atmosphere, connectedness, vibes, healing and therapies.</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Data analysis categories.

Ball and Smith (1992, p.23 with reference to Holsti, 1969) discuss how to devise a set of categories in research arguing that there are “certain general criteria to be satisfied by all
categories for a sound content analysis to be produced”. The two criteria are, 1) the categories must reflect and be relevant to the research goals and, 2) the categories should be “mutually exclusive and exhaustive of the content under consideration” (Ball and Smith, 1992, p.23). I categorized main themes ensuring they were relevant to my research goals and also made the categories comprehensive so there was no overlapping between categories which could cause much confusion. After conducting the interviews and transcribing them the four themes emerged from the data very effortlessly. The categories are exhaustive of nearly all of the content from all of the interviews meaning that most of the data could be used clearly and effectively to answer the research questions. Also, all of the themes were present in every interview which reinforced their relevance as key features of spiritual retreat tourism. It was slightly more challenging to ensure that each thematic categorization was “mutually exclusive and exhaustive of the content under consideration” (Ball and Smith, 1992, p.23) but it was possible with some thought and flexibility along the way. At one point I noticed that concepts surrounding ‘food’ at the retreats had been flagged using both purple and green ‘post-its’ which meant that the categories required clarification. This was easily amended.

The visual data was also coded and analysed looking for key or reoccurring themes across my sample of participants. According to Silverman (2006, p.245) there are various types of visual data strategies of which mine falls under the heading ‘quasi-experimental data’ which is characterised by introducing a new variable (such as photographs/cameras) into a setting. Questions considering who, what, how, when, where, and why are typically contemplated in addressing the data. I looked at similarities between the photos and also what the participant told me their reasons were for taking their chosen photographs. For example, I asked myself are there likenesses between the photographs of objects, views, scenes or even the verbal descriptions of the ‘images’? The same themes as shown in the table above applied to the visual section of the interview. In retrospect this is not surprising as it shows a continuation of ideas extending from participants’ words to participants’ images. It would have been confusing if the interviewees had described their ideas about spiritual retreat tourism in one way and then depicted it in another.
Ball and Smith (1992, p.31) argue that “symbolists and structuralists endeavour to arrive at a fuller appreciation of the visual representation by relating it to other social and cultural arrangements”. I found that many symbols were present at both of the retreat sites. This reinforced the social and cultural ideals and engagements of the people who make up the retreat community during their visit. In this thesis emphasis has been placed upon symbolism which was seen to represent spirituality and which was seen at both of the multi-faith case study locations. Turner (1967, cited in Ball and Smith, 1992, p.32) offers a distinction between three levels which meanings operate at:

1) The “exegetical” meaning of a symbol, which derives from indigenous informants; 2) the “operational” meaning, which the anthropologist establishes from observation of the symbol in use; and 3) the “positional” or contextual meaning of a symbol, which derives its relation to other symbols as part of a pattern or system (Turner, 1967, p. 50-52 cited in Ball and Smith, 1992, p.32).

These levels depict how symbolism can originate from both individual and social intentions and analysis. Ball and Smith (1992, p.32) assert that the polysemy of symbols can cause complications as “everything is meaningful but nothing is meant”. There are multiple subjective ‘readings’ of signs and symbols which makes semiotic analysis personal rather than general or objective. Bone (2007, p.82-83) claims that “Teasing out layers of meaning without making superficial judgements about symbols, sites, visions, prophets or anything else that might be considered sacred or holy, is not a simple task”. The positional/contextual readings of various symbolisms added the most credibility to my understandings. These interpretations directed attentions towards more in-depth accounts, steering away from shallow and unconnected judgements. My insider perspective as ethnographer at specific retreat locations, where the symbols were meaningful, provided a more holistic look at the way symbols are significant to individuals and groups.
**Ethics**

**Interference**

This research had the potential to be disruptive to the retreats if research was not carried out ethically, with the consideration of those who were both directly and indirectly involved. I aimed not to disturb participants and non-participants in this research which is why I tried to be present at the retreats without being overbearing or intrusive in others’ lived experiences. Bone (2007, p.80) claims that “Qualitative research, albeit undertaken with the best intentions, is always an intrusion into the personal world of others”. From my initial phone call to Lynn, the manager of Aio Wira, I felt like I was being perceived as a threat to the retreat visitors. I wrote in my journal:

*I’m worried as although Lynn is helpful and keen, she said she felt interviewing people on a retreat may be ‘inappropriate’ – especially at the meditation retreat that is running a few weekends away. I worry that this will be the fear for retreat managers and that my research may not be possible because nobody will let me talk to their guests.*

However, after emailing Lynn the information she asked me for, I was invited along to a yoga retreat to do my interviewing. We arranged a time to meet and I made a note to ensure Lynn that I wouldn’t pester her visitors and if they wanted an interview that would be their choice completely. I reflected that maybe in the future I would change the word ‘interview’, which possibly has negative connotations of work interviews and nervous pressure, to something less pressurizing and more personal such as ‘structured conversation’.

The Buddhist term *ahimsa* meaning no harm was adopted by Bone (2007, p.81) in her research as an “ethical imperative”. This concept of non-violence or non-harm should arguably be applied to all research and was specifically applicable to mine. The concept fits very well with this research as the notion of *ahimsa* is no doubt a known and respected idea applied at the retreats. Values and beliefs such as *ahimsa* are commonly held among communities of Buddhists, yogis, and people and places which aim to foster well-being as is the role of the ‘retreat’. I applied this concept when conducting my fieldwork and practiced respect and *ahimsa* to all other beings at the retreat sites and after data had been collected.
As Bone (2007, p.81) notes, this may include the exclusion of some information deemed unethical to place in the public sphere. Various forms of refinement have been carried out to (hopefully) ensure the presentation of a non-harmful thesis for all involved.

**Being an ‘outsider’**

During my day of fieldwork at Aio Wira I experienced a feeling of being an outsider. This was the same feeling of being an intruder which I had felt during the initial phone call to Lynn, the manager. I thought this had been resolved after I made myself known to her by visiting and discussing my research. However, things that I had also previously arranged with Lynn had changed so that on the day I had to do some improvisation with how I would introduce myself and where the interviews could be held. The following is taken from my journal and was written while I was conducting my fieldwork at Aio Wira:

> Previously we (Lynn and I) had arranged that I could introduce myself to the group just before morning tea so then people could come up to me in the break and make a time for an interview with me if they were keen. This morning when I arrived Lynn said I couldn’t do this and “would just have to wait until morning tea and introduce myself”. I feel quite alone and very unwelcome here. I also asked where about Lynn thought the best place was to have the interviews and she said “well, if anyone wants to talk to you!”

This exert depicts how one might feel as researcher if they arrive to conduct fieldwork and feel intrusive or unwelcome. Lynn had the role of ‘gate-keeper’ at Aio Wira as somebody who provides, both directly and indirectly, “access to key resources needed to do research” which in this case was the retreat site and participants (Campbell et al., 2006, p.98). This meant her co-operation was crucial to the undertaking of my research at Aio Wira. I certainly considered leaving and finding a new centre to include in the research but I just had to reflect on how much the participants at Mana enjoyed having their interviews with me to realise that it could still be the same at Aio Wira. In fact, there were a few people at Mana who appeared genuinely upset that they were not being directly involved in the research after I had already conducted all my interviews.

The ‘gate-keepers’ of research sites facilitate “opportunities to interact with others in the chosen research site” (Kearns, 2000 cited in Campbell et al., 2006, p.101). Once access to
participants has been granted the researcher/participant relationship is important. It worked out very well in the end at Aio Wira as when the guests came out for their morning tea I found them incredibly friendly and interested in my research. I wrote:

_The guests instantly made me feel welcome and at ease. “It is the people that create the vibe”... my participants at Mana certainly had that right._

Lynn also introduced me to a trustee and a workshop facilitator asking them if they would have interviews with me. The day was a complete success and Lynn seemed much more at ease with me when it was time to leave and all my interviews had been conducted. Mullings (1999, p.340) describes the ‘insider/outsider’ debate when conducting research. At Aio Wira, when I arrived to conduct fieldwork, I felt very much the ‘outsider’. As the day went on this changed exemplifying how “The ‘insider/outsider’ binary in reality is a boundary that is not only highly unstable but also one that ignores the dynamism of positionalities in time and through space” (Mullings, 1999, p.340). My position as researcher was stable but the way I felt at the fieldwork site, and in relation to others, changed. This was heavily influenced by the people at Aio Wira.

It is very understandable that a retreat manager would be fearful that having a researcher at a retreat, which people had paid a lot of money to take part in, could be off-putting to guests. Also, Lynn was very busy throughout the entire day as she was involved in all the food preparation and other up-keep duties. I got the impression in the afternoon that there was a sense of relief all round that we had both made it through the day very smoothly and successfully.

**Validity**

David and Sutton (2004, p.28) discuss validity claiming that this term refers to “the closeness of fit between data and reality”. Validity can be split into two sub-groups: internal and external validity. Internal validity concerns the reliability between the data and the reality of the individual’s beliefs or life (David and Sutton, 2004, p.28). External validity refers more to the generalizability of research findings to the broader social group at large, “Does your data really show the reality of the wider population from which your sample was selected?” (David and Sutton, 2004, p.28). As is common with inductive research, such as mine, broad
claims were not at the forefront of this research’s agenda and all conclusions are in many ways limited to the individuals who contributed to the findings (David and Sutton, 2004, p.28). The key themes identified in the analysis may depict a generalizability of findings in this research. Because all participants described similar themes in their interviews I could conclude that I have found some commonly occurring themes which may apply to some other spiritual retreat-goers. However, such claims always pose problems as sample, sample size and reliability of data could heavily influence the results of research findings (David and Sutton, 2004, p.28). Validity was not too problematic for this research as I favoured individual perspectives and insights over broad generalizations. Sometimes key ideas were shared amongst the sample and were discussed together as part of the same theme. I was not seeking to make something applicable to everyone as a sweeping piece of research and took what participants told me with good faith. I have not applied the perspectives of participants in this research to others outside of this study.

This project contributes to understandings of holistic wellbeing and informs tourism from a spiritual perspective in New Zealand. This research is relevant to others interested in the wellness tourism industry and spiritual retreat tourism more specifically. The discussion of themes, which reflected the views of participants, brings into focus areas of curiosity which extend beyond the realms of retreat tourism and are central to studies concerning: community, post-modern society, spirituality, New Ageism, well-being, and therapeutic landscapes. The perspectives shared by those involved in this research comment on social life and concepts of spirituality.
Marketing spirituality and New Ageism

Spiritual retreat tourism provides a holistic package for customers. The elements associated with retreat tourism are carefully positioned to allude to notions of spirituality. This ‘package deal’ is gently positioned so as to advertise an experiential product without appearing too commercialized or standardized. The spiritual retreat experience does come as a consumable bundle of ideals and is marketed and promised as such to visitors. Kelly (2010, p.111) describes “the most common product offering at retreat centres” as “a one-week prescheduled program of a particular theme (general wellbeing, nutrition, specific personal development courses, for example)”. This bundle is typically priced to be inclusive of accommodation, food, and classes (Kelly, 2010, p.111). Spiritual retreats package health, wellness, spiritual practices and services as well as, often organic, healthy food options (Wray et al., 2010, p.162). The destination in wellness tourism provides a place where customers can expect to: “engage in self-analysis without the stresses and distractions of home”, be a part of a “supportive, like-minded ‘community’”, and enjoy “the age old preoccupation with rest, relaxation and escapism” (Smith and Kelly, 2006a, p.4). On top of this, the tourist may be seen to gain cultural capital from their ‘investment’ as those left at home see their friend/family member engaged in an enigmatic cultural practice.

The fundamentals of retreat tourism being promised to consumers are translucent in advertisements. However, although this is a product being purchased, the business elements are minimized or hidden in the same advertisements behind a spiritual façade in order to sanction the sacredness of the retreat event. As transparently noted by Carol, the manager of Mana retreat, there is no denying that “the whole business is about spirituality”. According to Voigt et al. (2010, p.12) their wellness tourism industry report was short on data referring to spiritual retreat tourism as “Spiritual retreat and lifestyle resort markets are generally neglected and not included in industry data”. This may be because spirituality must in some ways resist classification within the realms of business to maintain a ‘pure’ smokescreen. The very development of such a report identifies the wellness tourism sector’s prominence in today’s society.
As spirituality has become a ‘buzzword’ in the West it seems it has also become an area of study for many different groups in society. In more recent years there has been a “proliferation of articles on spirituality and its relevance for business” (Badrinarayanan and Madhavaram, 2008, 421). Some areas of research have included: how organizations exploit spirituality to assist organizational goals (Gross, 2010); and the role of workplace spirituality in selling organizations (Badrinarayanan and Madhavaram, 2008, 421). Kelly (2010, p.111) describes how collectively the retreat tourism sector is growing and “the multiple small providers contribute to an overall market, locality and economy”. The issues with marketing spirituality will be discussed in this chapter as will the concept of ‘New Ageism’ which permeates through Western societies. It needs to be explicitly acknowledged that the ‘industry’ of spirituality is contentious.

**Marketing and spirituality dualisms**

According to Einstein (2008, p. 247) “the line between the secular and the sacred is increasingly blurred” where since the 1950s spaces such as Disneyland, shopping malls, and fast food chains can be conceptualized as “cathedrals of consumption” (Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010, p.15). While Einstein’s (2008) main focus is on the Christian religion, her arguments may be applied to spirituality more broadly as it is increasingly becoming a commodity item purchased in stores, at community classes, online, and at retreats. Both of the retreat centres in this research had an area designated as a shop selling spiritual merchandise for the retreat visitors.

Kale (2004, p.92) points to three reasons why spirituality, religion, and globalization “should be topics of vital interest to macromarketers”. First, religion (as it is linked to spirituality) influences the “what, how, when, and where of trade flows”; second, spirituality, religion and globalization are related to the “wellness and quality of life” for many people in the world today and; finally, fulfilling spiritual needs equates to “demand for goods and services worth billions of dollars” (Kale, 2004, p.92). Einstein (2008, p.248) discusses the “faith brand concept” as spirituality and religion are promoted like products. From a marketing perspective spirituality is seen as a ‘business’ where spiritual rituals, practices and philosophies are ‘imported’ or ‘exported’ to and from the Western world as ‘goods and
services’ for the spiritual seeker conceptualized as the ‘customer’ (Kale, 2004, p.97). Kale (2004, p.96) describes the link between spirituality and globalization as a “metaphor of voyage”:

Through the ages and across civilizations, the overarching metaphor for spirituality is that of a journey or a voyage. A journey or voyage entails leaving one land to go to another. Likewise, globalization involves a foray into distant lands, literally, virtually, or symbolically (Kale, 2004, p.96).

Kale (2004, p.97) goes as far as to claim that the “relationship between spirituality and economic life has been ineffaceable through the ages” claiming that prayers and rituals concerned with “good hunts and safe return” and “plentiful rains and good harvests” prove this link. This is contestable as such rituals and practices can be attributed more to survival than economic prosperity. Wolfe (cited in Short, 2010, p.45) discusses the link between land and survival which illustrates the non-economic values of land and all it offers for those living off it, “land is life—or, at least, land is necessary for life (and) thus contests for land can be— indeed, often are—contests for life”. The claim of a permanent economic relationship to spirituality across all cultures is problematic in that such a claim may be a projection of Western capitalist values onto ancient ‘Other’ cultures.

**Conflicting interests**

Some indigenous cultures, such as the Aboriginal peoples of Australia, actively resist economic ‘development’ in order to protect spiritual and well-being traditions and values as they hold “evolved spiritual beliefs, ceremonial traditions, sacred designations and worldviews based on their own lands” (Pilgrim et al., cited in Short, 2010, p.61). Cloher (2004, p.47) claims that “Maori appreciation of land because of its permanence has been interpreted as evidence of ‘deep ecology’ which imputes to land intrinsic worth, independent of its status as property or asset, namely values put on it by human beings”. Indigenous cultures are often seen to value land as inherently valuable rather than an exploitable commodity. O’Faircheallaigh (2008, p.27) argues that Aboriginal Australians place spiritual significance on some places, sites, areas or landscapes. At times, spiritual
beliefs conflict with economic interests, for example mining, as “exploration or mining can physically destroy or damage either physical or spiritual sites” (O’Faircheallaigh, 2008, p.29). Short (2010, p.61) claims that dispossession of Aboriginal land is shaped by “commercial interest groups—the usual culprits and beneficiaries being mining corporations and the pastoral industry—to ensure indigenous groups cannot resist ‘development’”. Economic prosperity is clearly overridden by traditional beliefs and values held by the Aboriginal peoples of Australia. Many groups resist economic gain for their right to live a self-determined life (Short, 2010, p.63). Short, (2010, p.46) who argues through an analytical lens of genocide, claims that some indigenous people “contend that genocide is a continuing process in an Australia that has failed to decolonize and continues to assimilate”. This claim poses a rebuttal to Kale’s (2004) argument. Kale’s (2004) perspective of spirituality reinforces colonizing attitudes and assimilation of economic values thus underlining an ultimately misinterpreted assessment of (indigenous) views of spirituality. There is no intrinsic link between spirituality and conceptions of business. Indigenous cultures show that spirituality has often forced a resistance to capital gain as spiritual conceptions of the land conflict with mining and other such interests.

It can be argued that the relationship between spirituality and money is one which has evolved over time whereby Westerners have sought spirituality and entrepreneurs have developed it into a commodity. For example, Voigt et al. (2010, p.31) demonstrate the instrumental view that marketers hold of indigenous cultures and traditions with regard to the wellness tourism sector. They describe the Aboriginal people’s cultural, often spiritual, traditions in Australia as a ‘niche’ market: “Indigenous plants and produce with healthy properties (such as tea tree oil) and an emphasis on distinctive cultural traditions can also help create a competitive advantage”. When juxtaposing Voigt et al.’s (2010) Australian marketing report alongside articles such as Short’s (2010), the irony of the relationship between the wellness tourism market and the wellness of indigenous peoples, whose traditions are used for the benefit of multiple marketing schemes, is exposed. Marketing tactics are used “to compete for a voice amid the cultural clutter” (Einstein, 2008, p.247). It is important to note that there is a motive for marketers to claim a type of economic drive at the heart of all cultural groups although this may be seen more critically as an excuse for imperialism.
The business of spiritual retreat tourism

It is not only indigenous peoples who resist combining spirituality with money matters. One couple interviewed at Aio Wira, John and Mary, described the relationship between spiritual retreats and money as one that reduces the spirituality and community of such places. Our conversation follows:

John: There are spiritual spaces but they’re more likely to be a permanent place where a permanent group is there all the time or convenes there and it’s a sacred space set aside. Rather than a space like this where there are different groups coming in week after week which can really change the atmosphere of the place...

Kate (researcher): …So do you think that a place, like Aio Wira, could be like a spiritual hub?

Mary: It can’t be now. It was once. It was a yoga centre a long time ago, that’s what was built here.

John: And people lived here and it was run with a resident community… but once it has to become a money making place with groups coming through it no longer is a spiritual place. It can be used for that but I mean there are plenty of other spiritual places in New Zealand

Mary: Mountains...

John: Well no, I was thinking more like yoga groups, Buddhist groups, but they’re mostly off the map because they’re closed circle and they just have their own few people.

The fact that Aio Wira was involved in ‘money making’ was seen to diminish a sense of authentic community and spirituality for John and Mary. The constant turn-over of guests at the retreats were cited by John as a weakening facet of authentic community. Moe and Wilkie (1997, cited in Bruhn, 2005, p.15) argue that in modern society “community is a rootless collection of interests rather than people rooted in place”. This argument supports John and Mary’s claim that the fluidity of visitors to the retreats changes the ‘rootedness’ of community. The concept of compulsory giving of money in communities, like the retreat community, may be conceptualized as a form of exploitation (Mason, 2000, p.28-31). This may be described less abruptly perhaps as inappropriate commercialization.
John and Mary were certain that Aio Wira and other such establishments suffered from their involvement with money. This perspective was not shared among all the retreat-goers in this research. Cindy, who attends singing retreats and Worker Bees at Mana, described the retreat as:

Just a very comfortable place, full of integrity, without being stuffy! You know there are so many retreat centres that are just too New Agey and too airy fairy and too old hippie and it just doesn’t feel real. Whereas the spiritual core of this place is beautifully earth bound and very real, very rooted in everyday life so I really resonate with all of that.

Money and business matters were not seen by Cindy to affect the genuine nature of Mana retreat but her quote does indicate that not all retreat centres can be grouped together equally. This may be why Kelly (2010, p.114) suggests that retreats might benefit from addressing the ‘business’ aspect of retreat tourism as a way to increase “responsible development of the sector”. This could legitimize the business side of retreat tourism.

Kelly’s (2010, p.114) recommendations include the collaboration of the retreat sector to “position, brand and quality regulate itself” and the formalized establishment of “a code of ethics for wellness tourism”. Kelly (2010, p.114) suggests that “training and education for retreat operators in quality management for their venues, courses and therapies, customer care, marketing and business operations management” would benefit the sector as a whole. Such ideas can be met with disapproval from those who critique the association of New Age or spiritual practices with business. Redden (2002, p.35) describes how for some critics, when money is exchanged for services, “this commerciality is reason enough to deny the validity of New Age ideas”. Kelly (2010, p.111) found that through her interviews with retreat operators, most agreed that retreat operation “formed a financially viable lifestyle... even if higher salaries might have been the norm in prior employment they had held”. Maureen O’Hara (1988, 146–7 cited in Redden, 2002, p.35) “uses the word ‘scam’ to differentiate New Age therapies from professional psychology, suggesting that the New Age fuses epistemological and financial fraud”. This type of discourse explains why people often resist being labeled as New Age and do not identify with the term because of its negative connotations (Smith and Puczko, 2009, p.149). This relates to the concept of authenticity whereby money is seen to obstruct genuine exchanges between people.
Money reduces authenticity

The retreat ‘community’ may be examined through the lens of ‘authenticity’ which is a predominant issue in tourism research and debate (Urry, 2003a, p.10). MacCannell (1973, p.589) argues that the search for authenticity is “everywhere manifest in our society” although his interest lies within the field of tourism research. John and Mary were commenting on the authenticity of community, spirituality, and sacredness of sites when they said that Aio Wira had diminished spiritual value because of the centres commercialization. As Aio Wira can be viewed as a tourist setting, the experience of the tourist may be one of ‘staged authenticity’ (MacCannell, 1973, p.595). Rather than the tourist seeking out inauthenticity it rather occurs as a result of the social relations of tourism (Urry, 2003a, p. 11). John and Mary identified Aio Wira as a money-making site with a fluid movement of paying guests which they believed had diminished Aio Wira’s sacred value. The fact that relationships, teachings and hospitality at Aio Wira were seen to have a monetary and un-individualistic element to them made the experience somewhat ‘staged’ for the couple. This was largely unperceived by guests and advertisements for spiritual retreats depict an individual and authentic experience in their product. The following flier illustrates how the experience of retreat tourism may be defined in terms of personal ‘investment’ rather than pure consumption:
Spiritual retreat tourism creates a product which is generally perceived in other ways by guests. No other people interviewed in this research mentioned monetary transactions. At Mana the issue of money was sidestepped as there was a Worker Bee weekend where people ‘donated’ their time and skill sets as labour in return for food and a weekend at the centre. This exchange benefitted both the centre and the visitors as could be seen by the
gratefulness of Carol, the manager, and also the willingness of the visitors to work hard and enjoy the weekend.

The money paid by visitors to take part in a retreat can be framed in other ways so as to disguise the purchase as one of ‘investment’ rather than frivolous spending, which is associated with capitalist societies. For example, on the main page of the Mana (2011) website it is stated: “MANA is a Sanctuary nestled in the bush covered hills of the Coromandel Ranges. It is a registered charitable trust that has been established for the exploration and awakening of consciousness, the unfolding of our creative and healing potential and realisation of our essential Unity”. At no point is money mentioned and in fact the word ‘charitable’ deflects notions of profitability. Spiritual retreat advertisements deliberately reject commercialization and frame the retreat experience in a particular way. Wray et al. (2010, p.165) argue that while retreats can be seen as commercial operations commodifying spirituality and other practices, because of the grass-roots origins of the centres an authenticity predominates. This could be said of Aio Wira and Mana as centres built on principles relating to the ethical consideration of their visitors and as places which have arisen out of years of dedication on the part of trustees and others. This intention ideologically discussed by participants in this research.

**Intention**

*Is there anything spiritual about Mana? The land, the energy of the buildings, the attention that has been placed on the buildings and land, the people that it attracts who create that vibration which altogether becomes a spiritual experience.* – Cindy, retreat-goer at Mana.

Retreat facility value and authenticity is shaped by intention, according to spiritual retreat tourists. Trinity, a Mana trustee, animatedly described how the site of the Sanctuary “uplifts the spirit” as a result of the sacredness of the site which was created intentionally so. Monica at Aio Wira described how the intention placed on the construction of retreat spaces adds to the visitor’s experience:

Spiritual practices seem to be a lot about awareness which I think helps you to develop yourself more. That doesn’t need to specifically be in a place like
this but because the surroundings are also built with awareness you just can’t go past it. It’s just there in your face.

The intention/awareness placed on the construction of Aio Wira and Mana was seen to reflect spiritual practices and values. Mindfulness is continually referred to in yogic philosophy and other philosophies. For example in Patanjali’s yoga sutra 1.2 it is stated: “the way to realize consciousness is through a passive suspending, calming, and ceasing of mind waves, which is possible only through insight, wisdom, intelligence, and knowledge” (Patanjali’s yoga sutras compiled and reworded by Maehle, 2006, p.145). This exemplifies how concepts such as awareness are prevalent in the Eastern philosophies which are very popular at spiritual retreats. Trinity described how “spiritual practices especially have the ability to just remind us of the possibilities of what it is to live an awake, conscious life”. People saw that such consciousness encompassed the entirety of Mana retreat, passed on from retreat manager Carol and trustee Trinity to the guests and workshop facilitators at Mana.

Carol described how “this place was built very carefully based on energies”. Trinity also went into detail about the creation of Tara Sanctuary saying, “the whole place, where it’s built, was worked on deeply to get exactly the right place and it’s built in sacred proportions”. These efforts were felt by Eden, who ran workshops based on a fusion of yoga, pilates and qi gong. Eden described “the environment, the nature and the buildings – everything is built with so much intention, positivity, so people feel good just being here”. Cindy, who partakes in gospel singing workshops and Worker Bees at Mana, referred to the objective of the trustees and “how they’ve set the intention and it’s almost like the intention has been woven into the fiber of the buildings – it’s woven into everything”. Eden also felt that such philosophies add to the positivity which can be felt in certain places. She said, “If the nature around us is untouched or has always been cared for and respected and the buildings have always been done in a way that respects it, then we are doing the right thing. And whatever the spirit is, it has a good flow, it has a positive feeling about it”. The intentions with which spiritual retreats are created and maintained by the people who build and operate them are crucial to the perceived spiritual aspect of them.
Buying identity

Part of the product, which retreat-goers purchase through their exchanges at spiritual retreats, is a ‘spiritual identity’. Bourdieu (1986) describes “symbolic profits” which he claims are “those derived from association with a rare, prestigious group” (Bourdieu, 1986, p.52). One of these ‘profits’ may be to describe oneself as a spiritual person. Carol, the manager of Mana, said that using the term spirituality to describe oneself poses issues as she felt that people are often “uncomfortable with that word and there are a lot of people that make (her) uncomfortable with how spiritual they are! (laughs)”.

When asked ‘Do you consider yourself to be a spiritual person?’ the five retreat visitors all associated themselves with or wanted to associate themselves with a ‘spiritual’ identity. Two people paused to think and then answered a definite ‘yes’. After a long pause one woman replied “yeah I guess you can’t not be! Yeah I’m a spiritual person”. One woman was not sure if she could claim the ‘spiritual’ identity title but said “I think I am but I couldn’t explain why I know I am or why I think I am but I’d like to be one!” Another person answered with a definite ‘yes’ and then felt obliged to justify why he thought so by saying “I mean I’ve pursued that on and off all my life” going on to cite various workshops and retreats which he had been involved with. Attributing spirituality to one’s identity is a form of spiritual capital.

Spiritual capital is linked to cultural capital as it is attained through cultivation and investment by the investor (Bourdieu, 1986, p.48). The following advertisement found on the back cover of an English yoga magazine portrays how spiritual capital can be sold:
Illustration 2. Yoga Alliance advertisement (Clark, 2010, back cover).

This Guru image along with the text “True Perfection” and “Setting Standards for Yoga in the U.K.” reinforce the concept that the spiritual capital surrounding yoga (and other such spiritually rooted practices) is synchronized not only to tradition and spirituality but also to contemporary conceptions of rationality and business. Einstein (2008, p.247) argues that “with the marketing of spirituality comes the idea that religion, like any other good, is a product for which consumers can shop”. This advertisement seeks to sell a ‘standardized’ product to Westerners using the contrasting image of an authentic Guru to do so. This juxtaposition suggests a post-modern fusion of ‘spirituality’. The unmaterialistic yogi pictured above, without possessions or even clothes, is depicted as the essence of spirituality to the contrastingly wealthy Westerners who can afford to pay for yoga classes or spiritual retreat vacations.
As one seeks the ‘perfection’ of the Guru, the spiritual object becomes increasingly distant. The same dichotomy is highlighted by Smith and Kelly (2006a, p.2) with regards to spiritual retreat tourism whereby tourists must be “materially affluent” to purchase their spiritual journey although this is “a state rarely encouraged by many spiritual gurus!” Morgan et al. (2003, p. 286) argue that people’s choice of holiday destination plays a role as “a significant lifestyle indicator for today’s aspirational consumers, and the places where they choose to spend their increasingly squeezed vacation time and hard-earned income have to be emotionally appealing with high conversational and celebrity value”. As Lea (2009a, p.88) points out, the option to work on the self is a luxury. Spiritual retreat tourism reflects consumer’s spiritual capital. Authentic spiritual capital is ultimately unattainable to the typical retreat-goer (middle aged, financially comfortable, educated, female consumer) because of the contradictions between purchasing spirituality in the West (Voigt et al., 2010, p.14 ) and being a possession-less (male) Guru in India. However, this is debatable as some believe that all people have spirituality and that using such terminology is “just semantics” (as said by Carol, the manager of Mana). The trend of personal investment, where members of society work on the project of the self, can be seen to attribute spiritual capital to individuals or groups at spiritual retreat centres.

**Summary**

Spirituality has been associated with money, business and all things ‘un-spiritual’. This exposes the concept for critique. Not all businesses do an injustice to ‘spirituality’ by associating it with monetary transactions. Kelly (2010, p.115) argues that retreats offer a “unique product” which differs from others within the wellness tourism sector because of “the focus on the psychological and personal development of the tourist as part of a holistic approach”. Sites such as Mana and Aio Wira are also both set up as Trusts to avoid some of the negative implications of profiting from those seeking spiritual experiences. Ultimately the purchase of a spiritual experience may be seen as buying a ‘spiritual’ identity.
Community

Community is an element of spiritual retreat tourism. From the outset of this research project I assumed that retreat spaces would either already have a ‘community vibe’ or attract people looking for the closeness associated with ‘community’. A component of community is social support which underlines the importance of ‘belonging’ for members (Obst and Tham, 2009, p.344). This chapter stems from the theme of community which became evident in all the interviews in this research. Within the community category, four other sub-themes were identified. These are classified as references to: kindred spirits and friendship, group energy and group safety, a sense of belonging or home, and helping or caring for others. Community authenticity is also discussed.

Community refers in definition to “the condition of sharing or having certain attitudes and interests in common” (Oxford University Press, 2011). Delanty (2003, p.47) notes that “community is not rigid but fluid and open to change”. This is reflected in the wide array of definitions of community within the field of sociology as well as the application of community concepts to various aspects of social life.

Radicchi et al. (2004, p. 2658) comment on the plurality of the notion of community saying it “is general and, depending on the context, can be synonymous with module, class, group, cluster, etc.” Bell and Newby (1974, p. xliii) claim that out of hundreds of community studies “there has never developed a theory of community, nor even a satisfactory definition of what community is”. Bell and Newby (1974, p. xliv) describe how because the notion of community is emotive in nature, definitions have been clouded by a mixture of empirical descriptions of what community actually is and normative prescriptions of what community should be.

The type of community referred to in this chapter relates to the cluster of people who all share the space of spiritual retreats and also often share other attributes such as similar interests. While it is acknowledged that “there is no single agreed upon definition of community”, the description I will be adopting for clarification purposes is that “community implies that there are relationships between a group of people, usually in a certain locale,
that go beyond casual acknowledgement” (Bruhn, 2005, p.11). While many definitions of community are contentious, there are three mutually accepted characteristics (locale, common ties, and social interaction) which are encapsulated in the definition above (Bruhn, 2005, p.249-250). Communities serve important functions such as being “vehicles for the recovery and expression of moral recognition and the building of personal identities” (Delanty, 2003, p.71).

This chapter will present and discuss the findings found at both Mana and Aio Wira regarding community and associated conceptions of sociality which were described by participants. According to Larsen et al. (2007, p.245) the meanings of tourism “multiply and move into other aspects of mobility and social life: through business tourism, migration, family life, and friendship”. Kelly (2010, p.108) describes how time-space compression has led to “exciting opportunities for new means of globalised work and travel, but also has, in many instances, led to increased alienation of individuals, loss of community structures and reduced family and kinship networks”. The social aspect of spiritual retreat tourism is attractive to tourists. Much research has “overlooked how much tourism is concerned with (re)producing social relations” (Larsen et al., 2007, p.245). This research will not ignore this important aspect of spiritual retreat tourism.

**Kindred spirits and friendship**

The original vision of Mana, as described by trustee Trinity, was to create a “spiritual community”. This had been achieved as nearly all of those interviewed described a sense of friendship found at the retreats. Terminology like ‘kindred spirits’ or ‘complimentary world view’ were used to describe the basis of relationships formed within the retreat community. The social factor of the two spiritual retreat centres defined an important aspect of them: the role community plays for one’s spiritual retreat experience. Only one interviewee questioned what I mean by ‘retreat’ and whether this included social interactions or specifically excluded them: “do you mean workshops or do you mean retreats where they just come on their own personal retreat? Because they are quite different”. This assertion is insightful as had I studied retreats where people went for a weekend of solitude, my
findings would have been very different. I focused this research on communal retreats/workshops with many different people attending them, shared bedrooms, and communal meals. Kelly (2010, p.111) claims that retreat environments can attract people “who feel the need for a sense of support/community and interaction as part of their experience”. Conradson (2005) describes how interpersonal relationships enhance therapeutic landscapes and the landscape of the self. The manager of Mana, Carol, described this, “Mana brings out something that you need to look at and that can happen on a silent, solo retreat, but most often it happens in the interactions and you having a mirror to yourself”. The importance of social life to communal spiritual retreat tourism was evident in this research.

According to Bruhn (2005, p.9-10) relationships offer “a variety of direct and indirect benefits including caring, trust, sympathy, affirmation, tangible and informational help, and social support” which results in happiness, improved health and better relationships of all kinds. The retreats served as sites of friendship and all the qualities listed above. Two other important values associated with retreat friendships are non-judgement and sharing.

**Non-judgement**

*Sometimes when you’re out in the world you feel this spiritual calling in yourself and you think there’s nobody else around that has the same feeling as you. You come to a place like this and 97% of the people are here because of that. They’re called inwardly to be the best they can be and to wake up and live more conscious lives and yes I think a lot of people really receive that here.*—Trinity a trustee at Mana.

It was emphasized by many retreat-goers that they were ‘in it together’ while at the retreat. The retreaters felt they were supported by other like-minded and non-judgemental people while doing their workshop and this was perceived as a stark contrast to their experiences in broader society where they described feelings of stigmatization. Laura said that while attending a yoga retreat at Aio Wira she is “meeting other people and they’re not like ‘oh, she’s going to another yoga class again, oh!’” Laura is contrasting the acceptance she receives while at Aio Wira and the critical judgement she experiences in her everyday life from others who mock her interest in yoga. Mary also commented on the social critique of meditation and other such practices by saying they are hidden from public view often by the
people involved, “there’s a heck of a lot going on that the public doesn’t see because it’s not mainstream. You know how people can easily be critical, and put people into boxes and things like that, so people who attend meditation groups often do it quite quietly”. Workshop facilitator Linda, at Aio Wira, said that she did not use the name of her yoga teacher ‘Swami V’ when talking to me during her interview because she felt that “most people can’t handle that – it’s a bit much”.

The retreat space as a place of collective identity can offer a freedom which visitors may feel is suppressed in their everyday lives. It has been found in a study concerned with self-harming women that support groups can offer belonging and a sense of non-judgement which encourages participants to “express themselves openly” thus contributing to “the development of self-acceptance” (Corcoran et al., 2007, p.40). Tourists at spiritual retreats feel that their involvement in a workshop group provides them with feelings of support and acceptance.

Ben anecdotally described to me his first time visiting Mana 15 years ago which portrays the social relationships which are fostered in the retreat environment:

We had a sharing circle to close up and we were asked to comment on other people in the group and the positives we had seen. It was an amazing experience because you could watch people sort of grow, just whoever was being complimented, and that was quite a unique experience because in our hub at home you don’t get compliments in that number, in that intensity. It’s a bit like talking to flowers (smiles) it is said ‘talk to flowers and they will grow’, ‘play music for flowers’, ‘talk to your cows’, ‘play music to your cows’ it’s like that sort of harmony.

This account reinforces the positive aspects of friendship and community experienced by guests during spiritual retreats. Brent (2004, p.221) describes how this sort of community “possesses a gravitational pull, a magnetic existence that creates real effects – at its best, social relationships of mutual care and responsibility”. The harmony of the retreat environment relies heavily on the people present where friendships can be “closer than casual relationships because the group shares some common goals, values, and, perhaps a way of life that reinforce each other, creates positive feelings, and results in some degree of mutual commitment and responsibility” (Bruhn, 2005, p.11). One impromptu conversation
illustrated how discussions which would not normally occur in everyday life, took place during a retreat. Maree, a trustee, was being interviewed when a discussion of the opening ceremony of Aio Wira arose. Linda, a workshop facilitator and co-founder of Aio Wira, joined in the discussion about how her Guru was not at the ceremony because “of course he was long dead by then”. Linda then added “so if he was there I never noticed it” which opened up the following discussion:

Linda: ... My guru of course was long dead by then so if he was there I never noticed it

Maree: (laughs) In spirit, looking over your shoulder!

Linda: He might have been, waste of time I never noticed

Maree: Sometimes you feel them around

Linda: He’s been around today he’s been a busy boy today

Maree: Has he?

Linda: Yes

Maree: You can feel him around?

Linda: Yeah. Mind you probably 'cause I’ve pinched his seat coz I was sitting where he normally sits

Maree: Oh (laughs).

Spirits of the dead were casually chatted about and this did not appear to be a conversation out of the ordinary for those involved. It is also notable that at least one person is buried on Aio Wira’s site. The presence of spirits and death at Aio Wira was discussed in a way that reflected spiritual discourse. The above conversation is markedly unusual for an everyday, casual discussion, in front of someone relatively unknown to the setting (myself as researcher). The openness of discussions about spirituality and the terminology and phrases used by interviewees at the retreats outline the type of non-judgemental friendship that could be found on-site. It has been found in a study by Koh et al. (2010, cited in Pesonen and Komppula, 2010, p.152) that people involved in spa tourism cite “meeting other health-conscious people in a spa setting” as one of the most attractive aspects of their visitation. For spiritual retreaters “meeting other spiritually conscious people” was important. Fellow
Spiritual companionship, spiritual connectedness, like-mindedness, having the same goal in mind, camaraderie, having a complimentary world view, connecting on a higher level and, coming from the same web. These conceptions of friendship connections aided in the sharing qualities of the retreats.

**Sharing**

While the notion of sharing similar attitudes, interests, values, and knowledge was prevalent at the retreats, the group did not live together permanently and nor did they share possessions and responsibilities. The groups were catered for by the retreat hosts and had their own space in a shared room to keep their possessions. This is unlike some other communities of New Zealand, such as **Centrepoint**, an intentional community that operated from 1977 until 2000 and at its peak housed about 300 people (Gibson et al., 2010, p.1). **Centrepoint** offered "encounter groups" where non-community members could visit the commune for ‘retreats’ as well as live-in membership (Hume, 2009). It was set up as “a therapeutic community and aimed at personal growth and transformed relationships” which echoes some of the positive elements which retreat centres offer (Gibson et al., 2010, p.1). However, boundaries at **Centrepoint** and other such communities can be blurred, unlike those at structured retreat centres like Mana and Aio Wira.

Closed communities like **Centrepoint and Riverside Community** create dependent members by sharing all resources, including finances (Gibson et al., 2010, p.212). This is seen to work “against the exercise of individual autonomy” (Gibson et al., 2010, p.212; Rain, 1991, p.8). This was not practiced at either Mana or Aio Wira where visitors were autonomous, individual, and self-sufficient. Unlike some communities which create financially dependent members, spiritual retreat **tourists** are contrastingly characterized by their financial autonomy and membership of the exclusive group of the population who have an expendable income for such ventures (Voigt et al., 2010, p.14).

There are various types and levels of community, each with various boundaries regarding sharing and philosophies which drive such practices. An ethic of ‘sharing is caring’ was applicable to both Mana and Aio Wira on some levels. Sharing was an attribute valued by the people both running and visiting the retreat sites. ‘Karma Yoga’ was written on the yoga
retreat schedule at Aio Wira and this included cleaning dishes and “whatever Lynn needs for assistance”. Karma Yoga referred to the guest’s involvement in cleaning responsibilities which was mentioned by Laura when I asked “If someone was to ask you your reasons for going on a retreat what would you say?”

*Everyone chips in and everything is in-sync I guess because everyone is of the same understanding, or maybe because it’s just women (laughs)!* You know the whole weekend you don’t have to have a roster, everyone is just doing the dishes at some stage – if you haven’t done the dishes at some stage you just get up and help and it flows, it feels good.

* Although Laura said there were only women on the retreat, there was one male on the retreat of a total of around 25 people.

Sharing is an important aspect of the retreats’ values. At the Mana *Worker Bee* each person choose what work they would like to be engaged in for the day out of a list of about 12 options all written on a whiteboard. The expectation was that everybody at the *Worker Bee* would be contributing to the team as a whole in order to have a successful and fair weekend. The work roles went from childcare and food preparation to under-floor insulation and digging. It is important to note that the very nature of the *Worker Bee* reflects the interest of owners, employees and visitors to Mana in taking shared responsibility for the site. This depicts a sense of community. At a retreat, as oppose to a *Worker Bee*, the guests would be catered for rather than sharing the domestic work load. However, the lay out of the kitchen enables guests to wash their own dishes before placing them on the tray to be sterilized. The same was the expectation at Aio Wira. This differentiates the retreats from other service sectors. The retreat centres were interactive with shared roles which their visitors were included in. The concept of sharing appeared to be aligned with the values of the retreat visitors and facilitators, managers, and trustees alike.

**Group safety**

Retreats could be conceptualized as comforting zones of 'instant' friendship where one is accepted for all their emotional, spiritual, physical, and cognitive needs. Tourist spaces are often safe environments away from danger and disturbances, the tourist may be
conceptualized as protected by a ‘bubble’ from unsafe elements (Judd, 1999, cited in Roesch, 2009, p.61). Retreat operators in a study by Kelly (2010, p.111) described the importance of “creating a ‘community’ atmosphere, a ‘peaceful haven to just be’ and other descriptors that suggested to visitors a sense of safety about letting go of their everyday worries”. Nourishing food, warm buildings, group bonding, and a common goal to replenish, heal, build, nurture, share, connect, experience and learn all contribute to the shared sentiment of the spiritual retreat experience. Durkheim (1961, cited in Fisher and Chon, 1989, p.3) claims that each society, or in this case community, feels the need to “reaffirm the collective ideas and sentiments that make up its identity”. This requires the gathering of people “being closely united to one another” to reaffirm together their “common sentiments” (Durkheim, 1961, p. 474-475 cited in Fisher and Chon, 1989, p.3). This was described by various interviewees as they assimilated with the group identity at the retreats.

Monica, a retreat-goer at Aio Wira, noted that one healing or therapeutic aspect of retreat spaces is that “there are going to be people who are like-minded, who you can share your experiences with, and who you might feel safe with”. According to Cohen (1996, cited in Smith and Puczko, 2009, p.48) some people search out a ‘spiritual centre’ vital to tourism when they feel “socially alienated”. Safety is built-in to the vision at Mana. Trinity, a trustee, described her desire in the creation of Mana retreat to provide a “safe container”. To illustrate how this is then manifested in a retreat experience for the visitors, Ben described his awe of a very visually impaired woman at a retreat specifically focused on aiding people with eyesight problems:

One of the more spectacular things about the week was a Chinese lady from Hawkes Bay who came in with thick glasses, and I mean thick! She took them off on the second day at (the workshop facilitator’s) request and didn’t put them on for the rest of the week… it was quite unique that she felt safe enough to wander around with all these other people… I thought that was very brave of her.

As has been illustrated in this example, the ‘safe container’ vision of Mana has been achieved for Ben. Felton and Shinn (1992 cited in Obst and Tham, 2009, p.344) discuss how “the availability of both instrumental and emotional social support to members from other
members is a key aspect of well-functioning and caring communities”. The terminology used by the interviewees reinforced this sense of supportive containment and safety when they referred to the retreat in comparison to the ‘outside’ world.

One workshop facilitator at Mana described her role as one which aims to give people something that they “come out” of the retreat with. Another at Aio Wira echoed this notion by continuously referring to her role as an assistant in helping people cope with their everyday lives. Spiritual retreats can act as safe and private spaces where people can make the changes and gain the ‘coping skills’ necessary to take back into the ‘real’ world. These participants symbolically liken the retreat to a womb as it contains and nourishes them in preparation for (re)entry into the divergent, unsafe world. Kelly (2010, p.113) found that some retreat operators she interviewed described that their visitors preferred to “shut themselves away from the world, to look inwards and be in an environment created by the centre that was nurturing”. Manager of Mana, Carol, saw the retreat differently: “A lot of other retreat centres are very contained and held and you feel like you’re in a womb. Mana’s very different to that as you can tell. It’s very open to the world as opposed to contained and secluded away from parts of the world”. This was the view of some others interviewed by Kelly (2010, p.113). The concept of the ‘safe container’ need not be excluding of the world beyond the retreat but it may act as a space to help learning and change occur within a safe setting which can then be taken into everyday life. Sarason (1974 cited in Bruhn, 2005, p.15) asserts that “what makes a community important and meaningful is an individual’s feelings that he or she is valued, and that his or her safety and protection is provided for, and that there is access to resources outside the community”. This was provided for the retreat-goers in this research.

Smith and Kelly (2006a, p.3) argue that many authors describe the increasing need for individuals to seek out community in modern society and this is often sought through involvement in retreat tourism. Tourists are attracted to retreat centres in search of community which is “nowadays another name for paradise lost... and so we feverishly seek the roads that may bring us there” (Bauman, 2001, p.3). The necessity for some retreat-goers to attend a retreat in order to feel a sense of community suggests that broader society has failed to provide this for them. Bauman (2001, p.3) claims that ‘community’
stands for “the kind of world which is not, regrettably, available to us – but which we would dearly wish to inhabit and which we hope to repossess”. John, a retreat-goer at Aio Wira described why there might be a specific need for community in the modern world:

Particularly now in this era, in these two or three years, there has been a tremendous amount of upheaval and disruption in the world. There are a lot of people in the world who are very confused or concerned about where we’re going and you know the political, the financial situation, and plus the earthquakes and things. In this sense just communing with people and being supported and supportive is a very important aspect of now.

Retreat centres may be ‘safe zones’ antidotal to the alienation and disruption that is felt by the population on a global scale. They respond to a modern need for community values.

**Helping or caring for others**

The act of caring for and helping others was described as both part of the initial and ongoing vision at Mana. Trinity commented on her role at Mana, “legally we’re called trustees but we see it as a kind of guardianship of being caring for the land and everything about it and the people here”. This ethic of care was reiterated by trustees, managers, and workshop facilitators and it was felt by the retreat visitors. Linda, a yoga workshop facilitator at Aio Wira, placed a lot of emphasis on her helping role at the yoga retreat:

For myself as a yoga practitioner then my objective is to help ordinary everyday people to come to terms with life as it is and deal with the everyday contingencies in life without stressing themselves and where they are sick or stressed to help them heal themselves.

Linda felt that retreat spaces can be healing depending on who is assisting the retreaters - that was her primary concern. The differentiation Linda made between herself with the title of ‘yoga practitioner’ and the students or participants as ‘ordinary everyday people’ suggests an authoritative hierarchy at the yoga retreat.

Eden at Mana described the effort involved in being a teacher at a retreat workshop, “it is a lot of giving. I am usually exhausted by the end of it. I’m also usually finding myself in a state of almost ecstasy (laugh)”. It is documented that “‘the very personal nature’ of wellness services means that staff may be more emotionally and spiritually involved than staff from
other industries” (Voigt et al., 2010, p.27). Eden described herself as ‘giving’ and Linda used the term ‘sharing’ to describe their tasks as facilitators of spiritual retreat workshops. Such interpersonal and caring roles can lead to high burnout and high staff turnover rates (Voigt et al., 2010, p.27). Facilitating spiritual retreat workshops may not be as detrimental to the facilitator’s health because of the sporadic nature of the workshops. The retreat managers would be more susceptible to these ill-effects. However, Carol at Mana cited the opposite stating: “I love the saying that if you love what you do you never do a day’s work in your life”.

Both of the retreat facilitators described their hope that the intense retreat environment would go on to have long-term benefits for their student’s “everyday lives”. This emphasis on an ethic of care is not applicable to all retreat centres or workshops. As John at Aio Wira pointed out:

You could go to a yoga retreat that was totally unspiritual and uncaring. There have been some comments today about people who have gone to yoga groups and they have actually hurt people because the teachers are not in-tune with the essence of what it is or even the physicality of what it is.

The integrity and skills of those involved in the holistic retreat experience are detrimental to the retreat visitor’s experience. The relationship between retreat facilitator and visitor should be one centred on care and the hierarchy between teacher and student should embody this.

**Gendered roles of care**

At the Mana Worker Bee weekend a marked division of labour was observed. There were various jobs which needed to be done and each team had a ‘head’ in charge of organizing their team. Nearly all food preparation and childcare was carried out by women. Also, a patriarchal hierarchy was present whereby the teams were mostly led by a male figure, even though there were slightly more women overall. One woman in the working parties I was in resisted being ‘put in the kitchen’. Osborne et al. (2008) describe how women’s participation in community groups often reinforces gendered divisions of labour which can affect their mental health (Molyneux, 2002 cited in Osborne, 2008, p.215). There were also
portrayals of hegemonic masculinity when the ‘heads’ of each group relayed to everyone what they had achieved. Often, the male dominated groups described dominance over nature, for example, cutting down trees. At one stage a group of men cutting down a tree did so in the wrong way so that it landed on the roof of a nearly building. One woman said ‘I told them to cut it from the other way!’ It is important to note that while being at a retreat site and part of the retreat community, there are still many of the same dynamics that can be found beyond the premises in wider society.

**Group energy**

A feature of the social nature of the retreats is ‘group energy’ which was described as “the energy force” and as Maree at Aio Wira claimed “you can feel it, you can feel it as soon as you walk into a room with people about, you can feel that energy”. The ‘group’, as an essential aspect of community, is an important feature of social retreats. The concept of ‘group energy’ was often discussed when participants were asked to take their three photographs depicting the three most important factors of the retreat excluding other people as a requirement of gaining ethics approval. John claimed that if the pictures could not include other people there would be no point in taking them as “it’s the people that create the space”. John described, “all the people chatting away having a cup of tea”, and, “the camaraderie in the hot tub last night, just sitting there in the pouring rain... talking about spiritual things”, as the most important depictions of the retreat for him. Others gave similar answers. Community concepts have largely been used in academic literature with regard to healthcare (Sanders II, 1997; Goodman et al., 1998; Roussos and Fawcett, 2000). A lot of research supports a strong relationship between one’s psychological sense of community and well-being(Obst and Tham, 2009, p.343). There is a gap in the literature regarding the psychological sense of community and thus ‘group energy’ people feel when engaged in a community setting (Obst and Tham, 2009, p. 343).

The importance of the people at the retreat was described in many interviews including by Ben who claimed that “the spirit’s here with the people”. Cindy, who attends singing retreats at Mana, described “the picture of faces in ecstasy with their mouths open singing...
there are moments when everyone’s singing I often look around and there’s just ecstasy there”. This notion of ecstasy, which describes a particular energy, was also pronounced by Eden who claimed that while facilitating a workshop she usually found herself in a “state of almost ecstasy”. John claimed that different groups possess different energies:

You could have one group where nothing happens or people are agro and you could have another group where it really flows. Actually, we’ve found here that after lunch today our energy was all a bit scattered and by the end of the session, just five minutes ago, it was more pulled together.

Both John and Ben, from Aio Wira and Mana retrospectively, described the group energy at the retreats as “harmonious” which added to their experiences and group dynamics. McMillan and Chavis (1986 cited in Obst and Tham, 2009, p.342-343) propose that a psychological sense of community consists of four causal dimensions which are “membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection”. If the ‘group energy’ is positive, one may embody a sense of community which can enhance their well-being. Ben described how this might play out through his choice of photographs depicting the retreat:

Illustration 3. Ben’s photo of communal area at Mana.
When asked why he choose the above picture Ben said that the dining area reminds him of Mana and “the empty tables remind me of the hospitality and the camaraderie here because anybody sort of sits next to anybody and you have a conversation about whatever’s going on in that point in time”. The significance of empty chairs symbolizing friendship is reinforced on the Mana website. The following image is depicted:

Illustration 4. The Octagon Room featured on Mana’s (2011) website.

In this picture the cushions are unattended, waiting for the guest’s arrival, for the guests to occupy the space all sitting on a cushion in the circle.

The importance of sociality and ‘group energy’ was also described by the manager of Mana when she too was asked what she would take her three important photos of: “the first photo would be of a group, any group of people, and it could be almost any size but the point of the photo would be people engaged in relating”.

Mana’s website particularly emphasizes the vacant space that is available for groups to bring their ‘energy’ to. Bell and Lyall (2002, p.4) describe how there is often a lack of people depicted in tourist brochures and when people do feature they are usually tourists
themselves “inviting the potential traveler to put themselves in the picture”. The websites of Mana and Aio Wira project this:

Illustration 5. Communal eating arrangement depicted on Mana’s (2011) website.
This photo of retreat tourists invites the potential spiritual retreat tourist to join the line to serve themself their own vegetarian meal to then eat with the group.

This image of Aio Wira projects a sense of sociality to the environment as people chat and relax outside on a sunny day.

The way Mana and Aio Wira display sociality in their advertising contrasts dramatically to solitary spiritual retreats. On solitary retreats, such as those offered at the *Karma Choeling Buddhist Monastery* (New Zealand Karma Kagyu Trust, 1998), nobody is pictured. This leaves the space blank and unoccupied for the tourist to enter into their solitary state:


In the hut image the windows are open which suggests someone is there but they are hidden from view.

There are no images depicting congregations of people but rather the locale is portrayed as one of personal space, reflection and solidarity. Even the contrast between the highly saturated, warm earthy-toned images of Mana and Aio Wira compared to the black and white photos of the *Karma Choeling Buddhist Monastery* show the opposites in what could be read as social warmth versus the coldness of social isolation.

According to Ryan and Cave (2005, p.143) “Images possess particular powers” and humans “impute values and feelings to images”. With an array of retreats advertised online the tourist consumer can pick whichever responds to their desires. Tourism advertising images act as prompts for the attribution or denial of ideals to place.

**Authenticity**

I wondered if when people asked ‘what’s your thesis about?’ and I answered ‘spiritual retreat tourism’ whether this would pose any issues for the people at the retreats. I speculated whether naming the visitors ‘tourists’ would be opposed by my interviewees because they may have resented such a title if they considered their experiences ‘beyond touristic’. Tourism by definition refers to “the commercial organization and operation of holidays and visits to places of interest” (Oxford University Press, 2011). Tourism implies two things which may have been resented by the visitors to spiritual retreats. The first is the concept of ‘commercialization’ which denotes capitalist ideas of industry, profit and exploitation. The second is the idea that tourism implies that the tourist is a visitor and therefore is attributed ‘outsider’ status. This threatens the core of authenticity. The label of ‘tourist’ has been resisted by retreat operators as often they do not consider their clientele part of the “tawdry and undesirable” group called ‘tourists’, also, retreats do not often collaborate with external tourism agencies as they lack identification with the tourism sector (Kelly, 2010, p.112). MacCannell (1976, p.94) claims that the term “tourist” is “increasingly used as a derisive label for someone who seems content with his obviously inauthentic experiences”. One retreat operator in Kelly’s (2010, p.112) study said that their
business attracted “niche visitors” rather than ‘tourists’ which suggests an undesirability associated with the tourist label.

The retreat experience is interesting because it does not necessarily refer back to any traditionally authentic experience. Rather, spiritual retreat tourism epitomizes a postmodern fusion whereby many differing traditional and contemporary spiritual practices from around the globe are appropriated for the tourists. The retreat location is also secluded from broader society so that the representation of authenticity does not rely upon interaction with the ‘everyday life’ of the indigenous people of the setting (MacCannell, 1976, p.96).

The authentic relationship to be fostered in spiritual retreat tourism is with the self. The retreat ideology is embedded with notions of individual wellbeing enhancement and getting away from everyday life and this is driven by the expectations of the tourist to have their needs met in a way which they consider ‘authentic’. Vegetarian food, sleeping in humble quarters and engaging in spiritual practices all make up the mythology of what an authentic spiritual retreat encompasses and this is what is advertised to potential tourists:
Aio Wira can offer you:
- A different world only 30 mins from Auckland city
- Peaceful quiet environment
- Sauna and spa
- Tasty vegetarian meals
- Massages and seaweed body wraps
- Swimming in the river or nearby beach
- Tranquil bush walks
- Friendly atmosphere

Phone us or check our website at www.aiowira.org.nz for our schedule of retreats and workshops in:

- Yoga
- Tai Chi
- Clay work
- Dancing
- Personal Growth
- Vegetarian Cooking
- Fasting
- Massage
- Art
- Healing
- Meditation
- Life skills

or to reserve Aio Wira for your own workshop, celebration, ritual, reunion or individual retreat.

Redden (2002, p.34) claims that in such advertisements “The workshops on offer are commodities, and the card itself may be classified as a tool of promotional discourse”. The concept of “tourism reflexivity” refers to the “tourism potential” in every space around the world, which includes spiritual retreats (Urry, 2001, p.2). Nobody objected to being referred to as a ‘tourist’. The way the retreat could be conceptualized as a space of belonging or home I would have thought could lead people to claim a closer bond to the retreat than being conceptualized as ‘a tourist to a site’. The transparency of the relationship between the retreat and the retreat visitor as one encompassing payment and large numbers of people (both associated more broadly with tourism) may have meant the interviewees did not challenge a tourist title in the hope of a more personalized one. Or it may have been that my conceptions of the retreat visitors as tourists was accepted while the retreat visitors themselves were, in their own minds, “forgiving about these matters” (MacCannell, 1973, p.595).

**Authentic community**

The search for authenticity refers to the desire of the tourist to move beyond the “pseudo-event” described by Boorstin (1961 cited in MacCannell, 1973, p. 599). MacCannell (1973, p.590) argues that ‘un-modern’ cultures need not “worry about the authenticity of their rituals”. This is unlike modern society where “Under modern conditions, the place of the individual in society is preserved, in part, by newly institutionalized concerns for the authenticity of his social experience (MacCannell, 1973, p.590). The spiritual retreat experience may be conceptualized as one which aims to re-create an idealized and authentic community with rituals to mimic those which are described as ‘sacralized’ in indigenous cultures (MacCannell, 1973, p. 589). Ritual practices at Mana may be analyzed through this scope whereby ‘sharing circles’ which included discussion, creativity and meditation, whilst the group is holding hands in a circle, could be seen to add a sacred dimension to people’s lives. To others outside of the retreat, such a practice may be seen as a ritual of New Ageism. According to Heelas (1996, p.16 cited in Redden, 2002, p.37) when one is engaged in New Age ideological practices the self is “sacralized, seen at once as radically connected with the cosmos and the object of a necessary redemption in which the individual must restore ‘authentic’ personal capacities which have supposedly been
occluded or lost under the vicissitudes of modernity”. Delanty (2003, p.49) notes that communities within modernity can take a “post-traditional form”. Rituals encompassed within spiritual retreat tourism may be seen as events where individuals are given the possibility to (re)connect to themselves, others, and a divine or universal power elsewhere.

**Authentic rituals**

Various rituals took place at Mana which solidified the group as a community. The Solstice/Matariki (in Maori) celebration ritual rejoiced star constellations, the change of seasons and New Year. The ritual ensued on the last night of the *Worker Bee* and showed the inclusive nature of Mana while it also highlighted issues surrounding authenticity. The following account of the evening is taken from my field-note journal:

> The octagon room had been set-up ready for the Solstice ritual to take place after dinner. When it was announced it was time to enter the room we all lined up ready to go in. Children stood at the entrance to the room holding bowls of water with flower petals in them which each of us dipped our hands into to be cleansed. The door was decorated with large green branches from native New Zealand trees as we walked through it symbolically entering into another world. The room was dark except for candles and the blazing fire which provided warmth. Soft, rhythmic drumming sounds came from behind the door – the drummer invisible. As was the ritual each morning, we all sat in a sharing circle already composed with meditation cushions. At the centre of the circle was a labyrinth made of leaves laid on a black sheet so as not to ruin the white carpet. A karakia (Maori prayer) was said by a young Maori man. A story, much appreciated by the children in the audience, about the dark and the light, was read by a woman who had practiced its delivery throughout the day. We were then asked to each think about something which we would like to take with us into our lives from that moment onwards and also something to leave behind. To symbolically represent this we each walked the labyrinth placing a leaf at the centre before turning around and coming back out and returning to our place in the circle watching the others. Poems were read, songs were sung and at the end the lights were turned on and we were taught an African dance by a Scandinavian employee. This provided much humor and relief from the sacredness and the quiet which had been summoned throughout the 45 minute long ceremony.
Many aspects of this experience may be seen as the symbolic creation of an ‘authentic’ and ‘sacred’ encounter within the spiritual community (MacCannell, 1973, p.590). The dipping of hands in purifying water symbolized the water’s mystical powers (Kukral, 1989 cited in Gesler, 1992, p.737). The drumming was reminiscent of indigenous tribal gatherings which added an aura of sacredness to the setting. The *karakia* acknowledged New Zealand’s indigenous peoples. Finally, the African song and dance, taught to the group by a Swedish employee who had worked in Africa, added lightness and laughter at the end of the evening. Because of the appropriation of ‘Other’ cultures, one can see how the exotic ‘Other’ was being enacted throughout the ritual. The African dance shows how spiritual enactments associated with ‘Otherness’ infiltrated the ‘pseudo-event’. According to Smith and Kelly (2006b, p.15) “Holistic tourists are arguably less interested in objective or even constructed authenticity, focused as they are on a sense of self rather than ‘Other’”. The ritual may not have served any ‘authenticity’ purpose but rather provided a chance to bring people together in the communal ceremony. MacCannell (1992, p.255) claims that rituals serve two functions. The first function is bringing individuals together connecting them to community, the second function is “bridging the gaps separating social differences” (MacCannell, 1992, p.255). The following advertisement of a spiritual retreat in the South Island of New Zealand demonstrates how the inclusive nature of retreat tourism is advertised as a major draw-card for tourists:

![Illustration 10. The atmosphere at Anahata (Anahata Yoga Retreat flier, spring 2007).](image-url)
The ritual at Mana brought a wide variety of people together who all held hands, joined the same circle and celebrated social differences. This can be seen as extremely important for “communities that are characterized by extremes of human difference” (MacCannell, 1992, p.255). Many Western societies may be categorized in this way as a result of globalization.

This ritual was typically New Age which Redden (2002, p.34) describes as “a range of belief options which rarely demand the exclusive loyalty of participants”. The ritual allowed for tourists to sample different cultural, and possibly religious, rituals throughout the evening. According to Cohen (cited in Smith and Puczko, 2009, p.149) the ‘experimental tourist’ is one who seeks “spiritual centres in different, alternative directions; often sampling and constructing ‘authentic’ life or rituals in an attempt to find themselves”. The solstice ceremony can be seen as one such event where people both connected to each other through sharing a common experience but also turned ‘inwards’ to reflect on their lives.

The ritual had an authenticity of its own associated with the realness of the people involved. The group was inclusive of retreat trustees, the manager, employees, wooers, and all the Worker Bees including children and myself as researcher. The distinction between “false fronts and intimate reality” may be made (MacCannell, 1973, p.592). The sincerity of commitment at Mana was easily accessible due to the nature of the Worker Bee weekend. The Worker Bee is voluntary in nature and included morning sharing circles as well as the Solstice/Matariki ritual which truly depict voluntary community solidarity. ‘Symbolic community’ and ‘liminality’ are discussed by Delanty (2003, p.44, with reference to Turner, 1969) who claims that ‘liminality’ may be described as ‘between’ moments such as rituals which are connected with “those moments of symbolic renewal when a society or group asserts its collective identity”. I wrote in my journal about one instance where the inclusive aspect of Mana and also ‘liminality’ was exemplified:

In one instance, a three-year-old child became aware of the sharing circle where we had our eyes closed. I opened my eyes and could see her looking at her father who had his eyes closed and she mimicked him. She stood facing him with her eyes shut, opening them every ten seconds or so to see if his eyes were still closed too. At three she was as included in the sharing circle ritual as anyone else.
The community and all its rituals welcomed and included people irrespective of age, gender or nationality. An observation which runs concurrent with tourism notions is the ability of people from around the globe to be together elsewhere. In the modern world “time-space compression” is occurring due to technological advancements resulting in the “death of distance” (Cairncross, 1997, cited in Urry, 2001, p.1). The retreats reflected international communities including people from Sweden, England, Israel, Germany, Australia and Ireland to name a few. The majority of these people lived in New Zealand permanently which aligns with industry data that wellness tourists tend to be domestic rather than international tourists (Voigt et al., 2010, p.12). However, the demographic was vastly different to what would be expected at the local townships of each centre. As Urry (2001) reminds the tourist researcher: while the retreat community at Mana was wholly inclusive, and the Worker Bee did not involve any monetary cost, “not all members of the world community are equal participants within global tourism” (Urry, 2001, p.2). Spiritual retreat tourists make up a small percentage of the global and national population with a disposable income to spend on such ventures therefore, albeit unintentionally, many members of the world community are excluded from involvement in spiritual retreat tourism.

**Insiders/outsiders**

*This place is the nearest thing you get to universal love and it creates a sense of hope. If you can create that here, you can create that in the world outside.*
- An afterthought from Ben at Mana.

It is important to note that when there is a community with members on the inside, there must also be non-members on the outside and therefore communities always have an inside/outside dichotomy. Brent describes this by saying: “just as any community is never complete inside so it cannot encompass all things. There is always something outside of it – other communities, the state, crime, heroin, developers, global capitalism…” (Brent, 2004, p.219). This poses issues for the ideology of inclusive ‘community’ which is impossible when communities are symbolically “shaped by the construction of boundaries” (Delanty, 2003, p.48). While Mana and Aio Wira did have symbolic boundaries, such as being up long driveways in rural locations, there are also other boundary considerations such as the social
and economic hierarchy of the world. There are wellness tourist typologies which indicate some of the influencing factors of spiritual retreat tourism community membership.

According to a marketing report by Voigt et al. (2010, p.14), which comprises of data from Australia, the majority of wellness tourists are female, from affluent households, younger than other tourists Kate, does this mean they are predominantly in their twenties?? Ewas this brought out in your research at the retreats?, with “a higher socio-economic status than the overall domestic tourist population”, and more likely to take short and frequent breaks. The term ‘wellness tourist’ includes people who visit beauty spas, lifestyle resorts and spiritual retreats. It has been found that these three categories “differ significantly in regard to all demographic and travel behavior characteristics” (Voigt et al., 2010, p.15). When compared with other wellness tourists, spiritual retreats specifically attract: the highest proportion of males and residents aged 55 and over, baby boomers, those who have obtained higher levels of education, people who are more likely to be in part-time employment or retired although a great majority still active in the workforce, those who travel alone, those who travel domestically for their wellness experience (Voigt et al., 2010, p.15). Although this report is made up of research from Australia, similar outcomes could be expected in New Zealand. Smith and Kelly (2006a, p.3) note that many authors in the field have identified that the main market for wellness tourism is “‘baby boomers’ (aged late 30s to mid-50s) and predominantly female”. These spiritual retreat tourist typologies were noticeable at both Mana and Aio Wira.

The inside/outside aspect of communities serves a symbolic function. Cohen (1985 cited in Delanty, 2003, p.46) describes how communities encompass symbolic boundaries which segregate them from others. This makes communities “a ‘cluster of symbolic and ideological map references with which the individual is socially orientated’” (Cohen, 1985, p.57 cited in Delanty, 2003, p.46). Becker (1973, p.3) studies outsiders in relation to deviance and in this way an outsider may be characterized as one who strays from a group’s rules. ‘Outsider’ is often a label and there is no homogenous group which such a label refers to, rather, concepts of deviance and who should be labeled ‘outsider’ is a result of socially constructed rules (Becker, 1973, p.9). In spiritual retreat tourism those outside of the retreat who may
be seen to break certain values and norms of the retreat culture may be viewed as ‘outsiders’. Those who abide by the rules of the retreat community may be conceptualized as ‘insiders’.

**Sense of belonging or home**

Identification with particular groups motivates people to join communities as they search for a sense of belonging to particular groups (Mason, 2000, p.176). These feelings were fostered in the retreat environment for some of the interviewees. Delanty (2003, p.41) claims that the interest in community based forms of belonging in urban society was one of the “chief concerns of the early Chicago School”. According to Bruhn (2005, p.11) the concept of community “implies a degree of constancy in fellowship and belongingness among members” where members “choose to associate with, or connect to, each other”. Hoey (2007, p.399) states “We all live in communities. Some we are born into; others we join, help sustain or leave as life progresses. In this sense they remain, like family, one of the basic components of society”. Communities can also be related to families in the way they can provide feelings of belonging or a sentiment of home which half of those interviewed described. Some comments were as vague as recognizing that the same people visit the same workshop year after year while others specifically mentioned a deep, spiritual sense of place (Bruhn, 2005, p.12).

Carol had discussed at a morning sharing circle, before the interviews took place, the feeling of “ahhh” that many people feel when driving up the drive to Mana. All those interviewed at Mana related to that sense of release and connection by retelling the driveway story in their answers:
At Aio Wira the sense of release when coming up the driveway was also mentioned by Laura, who had not heard the story at Mana. Laura reinforced the sentiment of those at Mana by describing the retreat as a place where visitors often feel relaxed and secure as soon as they enter the grounds. When Laura was asked; “Is there anything spiritual about this place and being here for you?” She answered: “feeling this peace. You know sometimes if you go somewhere and driving up the driveway you really kind of (go) ‘ahhh’. I guess for me that is the spirituality because you leave it all behind and just really take what’s here and... just feeling really at home here”. Delanty (2003, p.41) claims that “community in general concerns particular forms of belonging” and returning to the site of community can foster these feelings (Bruhn, 2005, p.12). The driveway anecdote tells a story of release and comfort often associated with concepts of belonging as found in communities.

Specific places can create emotion for visitors who feel the sites reflect values and beliefs that they have encountered at that setting (Bruhn, 2005, p.12). This highlights the reason why some visitors have an allegiance to a specific retreat. It was notable when conducting the interviews that people had a stronger loyalty to Mana than Aio Wira. Roesch’s (2009,

Table 2. The driveway story.
p.58) claims that “the underlying preconditions for bringing a sense of place into being are the underlying structures of power, the physical setting (i.e. the physical attributes of a place) and one’s own identity shaped by the cultural and historical context of self (i.e. self-identity) with its subsequent pre-visit conceptions and on-site experiences of place”. The interviewees were asked either why they chose to visit their specific retreat centre or why they thought other people did. The responses from the people affiliated with Mana or Aio Wira retrospectively differed greatly (see Appendix 2 for a table of the answers). Interviewees at Aio Wira were more likely to specify that their reason for visiting the retreat was because of the course or workshop being offered. In contrast, those at Mana described a sense of place, sense of community and also brought attention to their spiritual and visual appreciation of the geographical setting of Mana retreat specifically.

This can be analyzed in terms of push and pull factors. According to Leiper (1990, cited in Pesonen and Komppula, 2010, p.151) tourists are “pushed by their own motivation towards the places where they expect their needs will be satisfied”. Tourists to both Aio Wira and Mana were ‘pushed’ into attending retreats because they perceived that their visitation would fulfill a desire they had (for example, to attend a workshop of interest). Pull factors “are destination specific attributes that attract people to a specific destination once the decision to travel has been made” (Pesonen and Komppula, 2010, p.151). Mana, as a retreat site, had more ‘pull factors’ than Aio Wira for those involved in this study. Those people interviewed tended to be specifically attracted to Mana as a destination but the same was not overtly evident for Aio Wira’s visitors. The comments which affirmed loyalty to a specific retreat site denoted the emotional and social attachment some retreat-goers have to the specific place they visit for a retreat (Bruhn, 2005, p.12). The inclusive and friendly nature of Mana retreat may have fostered this loyalty by fulfilling the desires of the visitors (Mason, 2000, p.51).

The intensity of the references to home or belonging among the Mana participants were far more specific to Mana both as a site and as a community. Cindy described her discovery of Mana as a new ‘place’: “When I discovered Mana it was almost like okay, I’ve got a place. No matter what else happens I’ve got Mana. I can always come here, and I’ve come here on many different levels”. Mason (2000, p.54) proposes that “communities may possess
widespread instrumental value in virtue of satisfying desires or needs to belong”. Cindy gave many reasons as to why Mana provided an important, if not essential, sense of place for her:

I’ve lived out of the country for a long time and when I came back it was very difficult to settle, even though I’m a Kiwi, very difficult to settle back into this culture...Mana gives me a place. Because I’m an orphan, my parents are dead, there’s no family home, I’ve been away a long time, I don’t have a close connection of family in my everyday life, so this place is a spiritual, nurturing place that’s always with me no matter what.

Cindy went on to explain feelings she had ‘hated’ of being an orphan and not having a family home anymore. Mana retreat was seen to ‘replace’ the security of having an unconditional sense of place which Cindy associates with her memories of home and her mother saying “no matter what happens you can always come home”. For Cindy, Mana is a place where she can feel the security of home and belonging, “No matter what happens in my life I can always come here and it’ll be alright. It’s a great thing to have in your heart that you’ve got a place like that”. A sense of place is important because it provides individuals with feelings of belonging and this is why people identify with particular places (Roesch, 2009, p.57). Community characteristics, such as helping people identify with others and be recognized by others, as well as satisfying some people’s desire to belong, secures “goods such as psychological security, self-esteem and feelings of being at home in the world” (Mason, 2000, p.54). Cindy was accompanied by a relative at the Worker Bee weekend which also makes Mana a place where she reconnects with family.

Trinity described Mana as a “spiritual home” for many people and she claimed that the retreat provides a “sense of being” which helps people in “coming home to themselves”. Trinity was very animated when describing Mana which illustrated her affection and excitement for the retreat. Viewed as a site of non-judgement, Mana is a place where visitors can be “who they are apart from all the labels of what other people might see them as”. The ability to forge a path to one’s inner being, their “source”, is conceptualized as one of the most important features of a supportive retreat described by many of the interviewees. Leder (1996, p.107) uses the term “spiritual” to refer to “that dimension of
meaning which, for the individual, opens onto what he/she experiences as the most grounding and significant modes of connection”. This may involve:

Connection to one’s true self; to the beauty of nature; to other people through love and compassion; to the past of tradition, or the hope represented in future generations; to inner sources of creativity and imagination; to a divine force, be it labelled God, Brahman, Tao, Buddha, Nature, that underlies all of the above (Leder, 1996, p.107).

It is an element of spirituality which Cindy and Trinity describe as their connection to place and also to their inner selves. The ‘home’ of ‘belonging’ provided in spiritual retreat tourism can be the retreat site itself or the inner landscape which guests are given the possibility to explore and be (re)connected to.

**Interconnectedness**

*I feel connected to source, connected to myself, connected to life, and just grateful, very grateful* (Trinity, trustee at Mana).

Trinity described how the experience of being on a retreat helps her to feel “a connectedness with all of life within and without” and this was an important aspect of spiritual retreat tourism for many of those interviewed. For example, John described how the spiritual aspect of a retreat at Aio Wira was that “the yoga helps to and is a way of connecting, and of course there’s a lot of meditation with yoga which is connecting with one’s higher self, with things outside of this three dimension”. Kelly (2010, p.108) describes how wellness tourism fulfills important roles of aiding in “stress management, personal development, reflection, connection and meaning that cannot always be attained in everyday lives”. Being on a retreat was seen to aid in one’s connection to self as well as connection to external things such as nature, divinity, God, or something transcendent. The environment and people are intrinsically interlinked as “the health of the planet is important for the health of humans” (Thompson, 2010, p. 233). Monica defined spirituality for herself as, “in touch with nature... in touch with other people... it’s really the contact I think the connection”. She took this photo to represent the retreat:
Illustration 11. Monica’s photo of the greenery at Aio Wira.

Monica said “I wanted to represent the nature and the forest”. Sheldon and Bushell (2009 cited in Pesonen and Komppula, 2010, p.150) describe how connections with community and nature, among other things, are directly related to notions of ‘wellbeing’. Interconnectedness was the very essence of spirituality for many of the interviewees (see Appendix 3). Connectedness was an attractive aspect of spiritual retreat tourism as it was often not felt in the everyday lives of those interviewed.

Connection with the self

“I feel my spirit um more when I am here. I have more space and quiet to connect with it” – Eden, a workshop facilitator at Mana.

Many of those interviewed felt that having a spiritual retreat experience enabled them to (re)connect to themselves. Eden described giving people exercises to heighten awareness and connectedness between mind and body starting retreat-goers “on a path of connecting
to their bodies better”. Trinity described how being at Mana actively enables visitors to establish a connection with themselves as guests “come here to plug back into themselves, to their source”. It was thought by Trinity that often people feel disconnected or disjointed and as a result may experience “a longing to feel at one with themselves”. (Re)connection can be seen as one of the most important outcomes of spiritual retreats. Connection to the self was enabled by the environment and spiritual practices that the retreats encompassed.

**Connection with nature or a higher being**

Many of those interviewed discussed how a connection to nature or some other ‘source’ was enhanced by being on a spiritual retreat. Smith and Puczko (2009, p.48) claim that sociological perspectives on spirituality suggest that “the development of more individualistic cultures and societies has increased social alienation, rendering a greater need for seeking spiritual solace”. Trinity described the “really strong connection” she feels with the trees and birds at Mana. Eden described her spiritual beliefs as associated with the elements of water, earth, air, and sky that can be found at Mana. With reference to these elements she said that “the human body and soul can really connect with this and no one person will stand and feel nothing standing outside the labyrinth for example. It’s an experience to be felt”. Ben also described a feeling of connection that he felt was enabled by the architecture of the retreat which enhances the surrounding natural features. Ben chose the following photo to depict what he saw as one of the most important features of Mana retreat:

![Illustration 12. Ben’s photo of the dome ceiling at Mana.](image-url)
This image is taken of the ceiling in The Octagon Room at Mana which is where most learning and spiritual practices take place during a retreat workshop. When Ben was asked why he took this image he said “because I meditate underneath that dome and it’s like a feeling of being connected from the sky above and the earth below”. Referring to poet Dante Alighieri, Hammond (2005, p.161) claims that “Though Dante’s vision of heaven is medieval, its circular imagery is a timeless metaphor for the marriage of geometry and the sacred in the form of the dome”. The dome is significant in architecture as “Since its beginnings the dome has been used for religious purposes, becoming architecture’s universal expression of heaven” (Hammond, 2005, p.161). Ben related sitting under the dome to spirituality saying that “meditation is about being in contact with above and below, through the chakras”. A connection enabled by Mana’s retreat environment.

Architectural features, like having a labyrinth outside the Sanctuary and the stained glass dome ceiling in the The Octagon Room, are seen to aid in the retreat visitor’s feelings of spiritual connection to nature and beyond. The dome is meaningful for many people as “Since its prehistoric origins as a hemispherical hut, this archetypal form has symbolized the celestial realm to the ancients, to the peoples of the classical world, to Jews, Christians, and the peoples of Islam alike” (Hammond, 2005, p.162). The use of such architecture at spiritual retreat sites reinforces the ‘multi-faith’ ideals which many of these sites advertise:
This advertisement depicts the acceptance of people with various belief systems, from various cultures and backgrounds, who all seek particular benefits associated with retreat tourism. The multi-faith dimension of retreat sites is manifested in their architecture as “Just as the dome form itself represents the transcendent sphere, so its history transcends race and religion” (Hammond, 2005, p.162). The dome and labyrinth, along with various other architectural and symbolic features, have ancient spiritual origins. The retreat centres have integrated these structures as a way to enable connection. Various other features, such as constructing buildings of natural wood and optimizing the use of natural light, reinforce how nature can be brought into the retreat buildings through connective components.

**Positivity as a connective element**

Some described the interconnectedness between people and the universe and how this can be supported by ‘positivity’. Laura at Aio Wira described how she tries to be spiritual person by saying:

> I try to listen to the gut feeling, the trust to value the universe as it is and actions will follow... Positive things happen to positive people. It is the whole energy thing again... Believing in yourself and in the God and trying to put a positive spin on life rather than on the negative things which spirals into more negativity. I think there is the power of the positive energies, I think there is definitely a lot to be done, we could do a lot to (laughs) get that going.

Positivity was seen to add to a pool of ‘energy’ which affects everyone in broader society. Lea (2009a, p.75) argues that “A skilled engagement with the self, mediated through the question of how to live, opens up questions of self-conduct and relations to others and connects the relation with the self to external relations with others and the world”. Laura used the word ‘we’ to show that positivity is a collective action. Carol, the manager of Mana, described this too when she was asked what difference she felt having a retreat experience makes in people’s lives. Carol replied saying that her hope, and the reason she works in a managerial role at a spiritual retreat centre, is to be part of an environment where “every single person has the opportunity to have a positive impact on their daily life which then
ripples out to having a positive effect on every person that they come into contact with”. Carol described how positivity has a flow over effect which spreads “from family to colleagues to the service person in the shop (smiles)”. It was seen that a retreat experience assists in personal positivity which then creates a collective positivity. As Carol noted, this is “about making the world a better place one person at a time through them restoring themselves to something that allows them to be the best of themselves”. People were generally seen to be part of the interconnected world community and therefore personal improvement and positive thinking can be seen to enhance wellbeing on a global scale.

**Summary**

Community and its fundamentals are attractive qualities of spiritual retreat tourism. Various social features of spiritual retreat tourism including friendship, feelings of safety, positive group ‘energy’, relationship ‘authenticity’, and ‘connection’, enabled guests to feel a sense of belonging or home and also generally at ease and accepted while at their retreat. It became apparent through this research that spiritual retreats actively aim to provide ‘safe containers’ for people to delve into their inner and also outer (social) landscape. This was seen to foster feelings of acceptance among those interviewed that were not necessarily found beyond the realms of the retreat where such objectives are not at the forefront of the workings of modern, capitalist society.
Escape

Retreat centres serve a purpose even to those who never for whatever reason visit them. Just knowing that sanctuary or haven or set of values is held. (Carol, Mana).

Every participant interviewed explained the functionality of retreat centres at providing a place to ‘get away’ from everyday life. This theme appears central to the essence of retreat centres. This can be seen in their advertisements:


Participants described getting away from home, work, the city, or more broadly ‘distractions’ encountered in everyday life. It must be noted that spiritual retreat tourism, as I have called it throughout this research, differs from notions of having a ‘holiday’ because of the intensity, and focus on deepening one’s spiritual practice (Yoga Holidays, 2007, cited in Smith and Puczko. 2009, p.95). Retreats also characteristically are set in a carefully chosen location, are fully residential, provide vegetarian (and often organic) food, and are thoughtfully laid out to fit around the workshop routine (Yoga Holidays, 2007, cited in Smith and Puczko. 2009, p.95). The ability to ‘escape’ provided the retreat-goers with an opportunity to have new experiences.
It is important to note that the desire to escape is linked to the desire to seek and therefore the tourist is seen to be getting away from some aspects of life in the hope to seek out new ways of being (Cohen, 2010, p.27). Wellness tourism is not only about relaxation and escapism because “tourists are purposefully driven by the desire to actively seek enhanced wellness” (Smith and Kelly, 2006a, p.2). Hartig et al. (2003 cited in Conradson, 2005, p.337) claim that many urban dwellers “experience the relative solitude of rural settings as a favorable contrast to the rhythm of their everyday lives”. This is reinforced by Pesonen and Komppula (2010, p.150) who studied Finnish rural tourists. Their study found that wellness tourism typically occurs in rural areas where the tourists often want to “relax away from the ordinary, escape from a busy everyday life, have a hassle-free vacation, get refreshed, have a sense of comfort and have an opportunity for physical rest”(Pesonen and Komppula, 2010, p.150). However, the ‘emotional gains’ associated with the solitude of the country are not necessarily about being alone for “in certain circumstances the presence of other individuals may enhance the therapeutic potential of a particular landscape” (Staats and Hartig, 2004, cited in Conradson, 2005, p.337). As spiritual retreat tourism offers the solitude of the country but the company of the other people attending the retreat, this type of tourism offers an interesting form of escapism from routine and normativity but with a sense of sociality. As argued by Smith and Puczko (2009, p.70), “most people have a strong need to belong somewhere, and a certain desire for familiarity, continuity and security in their surroundings”. This is where the characteristic features of spiritual retreat centres play a vital role for the general population as just knowing such a place exists holds societal value (as mentioned by Carol, manager of Mana).

**Getting away from the 'outside' world**

_The tourism escape is portrayed as special event (such as the annual summer holiday) taking place in contained places designed, regulated, or preserved more or less specifically for tourism, such as resorts, sightseeing buses, hotels, attractions, paths, promenades, and beaches (Larsen et al., 2007, p.246)._

When asked ‘what does the experience of being on retreat mean to you?’ participants described partaking in a new way of life which meant leaving their usual life beyond the gates of the retreat entrance. All the interviewees described this: Cindy at Mana said being
on a retreat meant “dropping out” from her life; Ben described a “palpable” difference related to “leaving the smog of Auckland and coming into clean air”; Laura at Aio Wira stated “I just really enjoy getting away from it all for the weekend”; John described the retreat as “an opportunity to let go of daily life”; and Monica said “It’s a good break away from home. It’s doing something out of the ordinary... being away in a different environment”. All these responses emphasize the importance of being in a new place, separate from their usual ‘everyday’ lives. Cohen (2010, p.29) notes that “tourism has been regularly used in modern attempts to allow alienated individuals escape from the constraints of a perceived mundane existence and/or anomie of Western society”. In this way the escape aspect of tourism is not uniquely linked to spiritual retreat tourism. For example, a study by Rodrigues et al. (2010, p.336) found that tourists taking part in a hiking holiday cited their main holiday motivation to be ‘escaping daily life’ with a 49.5% prevalence.

Edensor (2001, p.61) argues that instead of “transcending the mundane, most forms of tourism are fashioned by culturally coded escape attempts”. This argument suggests that tourists, like those at retreat centres, cannot escape their everyday existence because they bring to the site their own “baggage” influencing how they perform as a ‘tourist’ (Edensor, 2001, p.61). According to Edensor (2001, p.61) the retreat centres act as ideological sites where the tourist projects notions like ‘freedom’, ‘relaxation’ and ‘restoration’ subjectively. Tourism is linked to “the habits of everyday life” because of the tourist’s embodied habitual enactments, but the tourist may feel that ‘getting away’ provides space for breaking the normative cycle of everyday life and enjoying the ideology associated with being somewhere out of the ordinary (Edensor, 2001, p.61). Regardless of whether escapism can be attained by tourism, or why it is desired, it is important to discuss the reasons why people want to ‘get away’ and what they are getting away from (Cohen, 2010, p.30). Many of the visitors described what it was they were ‘getting away’ from. These factors will now be discussed.
**Rejecting technology**

The lack of technology could provide an escape from the ‘distractions’ of everyday life. Cindy at Mana said that being on a retreat meant “dropping out from life” including turning off her mobile phone and having a break from emails. According to Mary at Aio Wira, “people relax when they’re coming to a place like this. They forget their troubles”. Mary described how, because of a lack of cellphone reception in the area, people cannot be “got a hold of” which provides “a sense of freedom and breaking away”. According to Rojek (1993 cited in Cohen, 2010, p.29) the tourist pursuit for ‘escape’ may be seen as a “projection’ out from the values of their society”. Western technological advancement may be seen as one of those societal values the retreat-goers wish to ‘escape’. As technology appears limitless in modern Western societies so does it’s capitalist bias which many may wish to reject (Bakardjieva, 2006, p.15-16).

**Embracing peace and quiet**

Many participants described a more general sense of peace and quiet which was refreshing in comparison to their lives that encompassed work, families and cities. Ben gave his reasons for going on a retreat as, “Peace to the point of almost tranquility, an unwind... disengagement with the 'hub hub' and the 'busy busy', driving fast and traffic lights and cars”. This was recognized by Maree, a trustee at Aio Wira, who said “people come here for the quietness” as a result of “being away from the noise”. Nearly all of those interviewed claimed that among other things retreats offered silence. Both retreat centres had designated areas for silence such as the Sanctuary buildings at both Aio Wira and Mana. The below images of the Sanctuary at Aio Wira, taken during fieldwork, show the signs asking for peace and silence:
Illustration 15. ‘Silent Area’ sign at Aio Wira, researcher’s photo.
The manager of Aio Wira told me upon my first visit to the centre that the meaning of ‘Aio Wira’ is ‘peace wheel’ and it is written at the entrance of every building as a blessing and a reminder.

Aio Wira and Mana were tranquil, peaceful, and quiet places. People still talked, except for in the Sanctuary buildings and during rituals, but the talk was not over-bearing. People did not seem to talk for the sake of talking. Chatter during mealtimes at Mana got to be quite loud but then it could be brought back to absolute silence if someone rung a bell to make an announcement. There appeared to be a general consensus at both of the retreats that some spaces, like the dining rooms, were for talking, while others, like the Sanctuary, were for silence or spiritual rituals. In the Sanctuary at Mana it was fine to sing or chant but general chit-chat was not seen as appropriate to the site and silence in this sense was requested. One woman at Aio Wira reinforced this by reacting to a suggestion made by employees at the centre that I could conduct my interviews in the Sanctuary. The following is taken from my fieldwork journal:
Then it was lunchtime and my other participants came out and I went with one to the other kitchen for our interview as had been previously arranged. However, when we got there we were told by an employee that somebody was working in the kitchen and so we should go to the Sanctuary for the interview. I said okay and went to tell the other participant who was going to meet me in the kitchen that she should now meet me in the Sanctuary instead. The manager of Aio Wira overheard me relaying this to my participant as did someone who I think was a teacher running some classes at the workshop. The teacher said “but you can’t talk up there!” to which Aio Wira’s manager replied “it’s okay… unless anybody wants to go and be there” so I said if anybody came we would leave…

This interjection by the teacher expressed panic at the thought of me conducting an interview in the silent space of the Sanctuary. The value placed upon silence and respect for ‘the rules’ displayed the importance of such values at the retreat. Areas or buildings designated for silence are important features of spiritual retreats and they are very valued by visitors.

**Healthier addictions**

Laura described her enjoyment of “a weekend with no outside surroundings or outside distractions”. Trinity observed, from a long-standing trustee perspective, that for some people just being at Mana as a visitor or worker provides an opportunity for them to be away from ‘distractions’ like alcohol and drugs. Cindy, who attends singing retreats at Mana, reinforced Trinity’s claim by describing how taking part in the singing workshops replaces her previous addiction to alcohol and drugs. It should be noted that both of the retreat centres were drug and alcohol free which for some may provide a healthy alternative to their usual lifestyle and also the ability to focus on other interests. Cindy was asked whether taking part in the singing workshops adds to her sense of wellbeing to which she responded:

Oh my God yes! As I say I’d be a nutcase if I didn’t because I’m a musician and an addict and I’m also a very extreme person. Expressing myself through music instead of picking up a joint or a glass of wine, getting my highs from singing and all of that, is something that I need as much in my life now as I probably used to need a glass of wine or a joint. Even though I’ve been sober for 20 years I mean it’s still the same thing, very powerful.
The retreat centres offer a safe, healthy and stimulating environment for their visitors. Once during the *Worker Bee* I was walking with somebody through the bush and passed Cindy who was also walking along and singing out loud. She looked peaceful and happy and was not fazed when she saw us walking along towards her. She kept singing and I thought back to my interview with her where she had said “It’s such a free place just to be”.

**Breakaway from interpersonal relationships**

Another reason why some may feel the need to ‘get away’ is to have a break from interpersonal relationships. One woman, not interviewed, casually said over lunch one day that she was on the retreat to get away from her husband and their relationship issues. We laughed when she said she had looked at going to another retreat but street address was her husband’s name so she abandoned the idea. Her reasoning behind visiting the retreat was to get away from a stressful relationship in her life and she did not want to be reminded of it in any way during her retreat experience. It has been found that retreat-goers often like to be alone, especially women (Azara et al., 2007, cited in Smith and Puczko, 2009, p.145). At both of the retreats it was seen as acceptable for visitors to be on their own, to have time to themselves away from their partners and family. This was reflected in the bedroom design.

At Mana the rooms all contained two or more single beds which can be read in a number of ways: 1) it encouraged guests to buddy-up with each other which facilitates new friendships; 2) it does not put single people in a position where they feel isolated or disadvantaged; 3) it encourages couples to become individuals again which may be an important aspect of self-improvement or growth which were some of the aims described by retreat-goers; 4) it might reflect the typical population of retreat visitors as people retreating on their own away from partners, friends, and family; 5) it is practical from a business perspective whereby one double bed in a room can reduce catering capacities; 6) it rejects the hierarchy often seen in hotels or other such establishments where rooms are categorized according to wealth and relationship status for example, studio, standard, deluxe, corporate, honeymoon suite. In terms of interpersonal relationships, this bed layout
reflects an aura of celibacy. This removes any unwarranted sexual connotations about the retreat community and also means visitors can feel secure and safe from any untoward sexual advances during their stay.

Illustration 17. Bedroom layout at Mana (2011)

**Home and away**

The desire to have a break from home, and the people or relationship dynamics associated with home, does not reject the idea of ‘home’ (Larsen et al., 2007, p.249). As John pointed out, because his wife Mary was attending the yoga retreat at Aio Wira, he could have “spent the weekend at home with no distractions”. According to Crouch, (1992b cited in Crouch, 1994, p.96) “Escape becomes an escape for home, not just from home. There is an often confusing mixture of homeliness and reassurance, of surprise and difference in leisure”. Tourism can also be used as a way to improve home life, rather than escape from it, as the transformations that can occur often extend into everyday life (McCabe, 2002, cited in Smith and Puczko, 2009, p.145). Smith and Kelly (2006 cited in Pesonen and Komppula, 2010, p.153) describe how retreats and similar wellness tourism spaces offer an alternative
place to “engage in self-analysis without the stresses and distractions of home”. The specific place for this to occur is important to many tourists (Kulczycki and Luck, 2009, cited in Pesonen and Komppula, 2010, p.153). The retreat acts as a home away from home where one can feel relaxed and secure experiencing new and exciting events, while avoiding those which pose discomfort. The following Mana retreat flier (2011) references this aspect of retreat tourism:
‘Coming home’ is an expression often used by people to describe their Mana experience: the welcoming atmosphere and nourishing food; the wisdom of the labyrinth and the silence of Tara Sanctuary; the music of birdsong and the echo of the bells across the valley; the beautiful streams and bush paths; and the view to forever from the top of the mountain...

There are many ways to experience the magic of Mana:
- Come to an event on the Mana Programme
- Take time out for a personal retreat
- Teach a workshop at Mana
- Host a reunion, special event or conference

The delicious vegetarian food is garden-fresh, locally sourced and organic where possible.

Mana is alcohol free.

Illustration 18. ‘Coming home’ advertisement (Mana retreat flier, 2011).
This advertisement portrays the ‘Mana experience’ as one that provides a homely environment for guests. The nourishing aspects of a happy home life are depicted, leaving any negative connotations of home out of Mana’s ‘magical’ picture. In this way Mana could represent an idealistic home that some visitors may have never previously had.

Re-individualization

A process of re-individualization may be the result of this bed layout for couples. As couples sleep in their own single beds they too become individuals again. During the interview with John at Aio Wira I became aware of the re-individualization aspect of spiritual retreat tourism and perhaps spirituality more broadly. The following occurred halfway through the interview.

Kate: In what way do you think that taking part in spiritual practices adds to your wellbeing?

John: (pause and then little laugh) Well, (balance? His wife Mary suggests who has sat down next to us) no don’t you answer! (laugh, Kate) I’m being interviewed! How does it enhance me?

The spiritual retreats included in this research accepted individualism and as a result single people were catered for and included while couples were in some ways encouraged to embrace their individuality again. Voigt et al. (2010, p.15) found in their market report that “considerably less than half of lifestyle resort and spiritual retreat visitors travelled with someone else”. This indicates that spiritual retreat tourists often embark on their retreat solo, connecting with others once they arrive at their retreat destination. In this way the retreat visitors saw the experience of being on a retreat as something they do for themselves.

Putting the ‘treat’ in retreat

Trinity describes being on a retreat as giving oneself “the treat, the gift, of some time apart from one’s normal life to really delve deeply into something more essential and meaningful”. Many of the interviewees picked up on the meaning of the word ‘retreat’ as an
apt description of their experiences at Mana or Aio Wira. Eden said that the word ‘retreat’ means “taking yourself out and having some quiet time alone or with similar people”. A retreat is a type of self-prescribed gift to the retreat-goer from themself, “...the main reason people come to a retreat is they want to give themselves some quality time. They want to give themselves something that they need” (as said by Eden at Mana). Monica claimed retreats “need to make you feel good”. Carol, manager of Mana, is careful not to say that visitors to retreats are giving themselves something that they need and rather points to the luxury of retreat tourism, “I think often it’s like a treat as oppose to filling a need... I think you can come as a kindness to yourself or as a kindness to your life that you’ve just taken time out of”. Monica agrees that she attends retreats to “do something really for yourself”. For others the retreat was seen as an important aspect of their wellbeing as well as a luxury. When Cindy was asked what difference she thought having a retreat experience makes in her life she answered “It keeps me sane!” which was followed by laughter but also a heartfelt anecdote about her need for the retreat as a representative site of home and belonging which was described earlier.

**Copping out**

Linda heavily critiqued the use of retreat centres for ‘getting away’ or having a ‘treat’. For Linda, workshop facilitator and co-founder of Aio Wira, this was counter-intuitive to gaining anything “dramatically helpful” from the retreat experience. Linda described how her objectives for Aio Wira involved the creation of a place “where people could actually learn to cope with life. It wasn’t a retreat in the sense that they were withdrawing from life but preparing themselves to actually advance into the art of living more fully”. While others interviewed described the importance of taking the retreat experience and skills into everyday life beyond their retreat weekend, they acknowledged the importance and feel-good factor of withdrawing. The following exert from the interview with Linda portrays her alternative perspective:
If someone was to ask your reasons to why you think people might choose to go on a retreat what would you say?

I don’t know because everybody has a different approach to life. Some of it is just straight cop out and others it is definitely to help improve the quality of their lives.

What do you mean by a ‘cop out’?

Well a lot of people go on retreats, particularly things like yoga retreats, so they can have a little trip into 'lalaland' - ignore all their problems and think that by being in a retreat for a couple of days they’re gonna come back and you know the problems will have gone away. They haven’t. When they come to retreat and my feeling is they need, and I’m not saying everybody does this, I don’t do if they do or not, but they need if they’re coming to a retreat to make the most of it to help them to improve the quality of their lives overall.

The ideology surrounding Linda’s comments runs concurrent with modern Western conceptions of the self as project and the New Ageism trend of self-help (Hazleden, 2003). This view can also be read as a type of new managerialism where the subject is seen to have “an autonomous, individualistic, transparent and self-interested, rational individual at its core that is admonished to ‘take responsibility’, to be 'self-motivated', and so on” (Fitzsimons, 1999). Linda’s interview comments highlight the weight placed upon active self-improvement in comparison to enjoyment and pleasure. According to Smith (2003, cited in Lea, 2008, p.90) retreat participants may be viewed as “‘alternative’ tourists because of their active interest in self-improvement and ‘finding their true selves’”. This means their patterns of behavior and interests on retreats may be slightly different to the “no-work, no-care, no-thrift” tourist (Cohen, 1972, p.181 cited in Larsen et al., 2007, p.246). During the interviews participants did not indicate that they conceptualized themselves as ‘alternative’ although their emphasis on learning and engaging in ‘spiritual’ things evidentially distinguishes their type of tourism from some other forms. Ellis (2008c, p.55 cited in Voigt et al., 2010, p.19) describes how even the more mainstream ‘spas’ of our time are becoming “‘non-denominational chapels’ for spiritual respite in anxious times”. It is thought that more spas will focus on spirituality, community, and connection as antidotes for stress (Ellis, 2008c, p.55 cited in Voigt et al., 2010, p.19). Trinity, a Mana trustee, described how spiritual retreat tourism offered people a break where “they feel they can stop, they can actually be
present”. This was the more general response from the interviewees whereby the retreat was seen as a chance to unwind and turn to the self-landscape (Conradson, 2005, p. 337). The tourists and their facilitators’ described the importance of their journey towards spiritual transformation which spiritual retreat tourism provides.

**The gendered self-project**

The gendered ratio of wellness tourists depicts how spiritual retreat tourism is a gendered realm with women making up the large majority of the population (Smith and Kelly, 2006a, p.3). This was particularly apparent when conducting fieldwork at Aio Wira where all except one, of 25 yoga retreat-goers, were female. This disparity was not as apparent at Mana because fieldwork was conducted during a Worker Bee and therefore not under ‘typical’ retreat conditions. However, Carol the manager noted that the large majority of visitors to the centre are female and as such suggested I only interview one male retreat-goer so as not to ‘skew’ the results. Pesonen and Komppula (2010, p.154) found that a large majority of Finnish rural tourists are female leading the authors to ascertain that “it is clear that women are more interested in wellbeing than men”. This assumption needs to be contextualized within a society which is obsessed with controlling and ‘improving’ the female body, mind, and perhaps now even spirit.

Popular culture overtly urges people to self-improve. Women in particular are continually pressurized by advertisements in popular culture to work on themselves insinuating that they are never ‘good enough’. While tourism has “always been seen as a process of self-regeneration as well as relaxation, education or indulgence” (Ryan, 1997 cited in Smith and Kelly, 2006b, p.16), wellness tourism brings with it new responsibilities regarding the “care of the psyche” (Kelly, 2010, p.108). This can be seen as a gendered responsibility.

Unfortunately, while spirituality is a concept one might think of as private and personal, the spirit is seen as an aspect of the self which one can work on much in the same way as body image. Conceptions of self-improvement and management are described by Bourdieu (1986) with regard to the acquired embodiment of capital:
The work of acquisition is work on oneself (self-improvement), an effort that presupposes a personal cost (on paie de sa personne, as we say in French), an investment, above all of time, but also of that socially constituted form of libido, libido sciendi, with all the privation, renunciation, and sacrifice that it may entail (Bourdieu, 1986, p.48).

Bourdieu (1986, p.49) argues that embodied capital, which is “external wealth converted into an integral part of the person, into a habitus”, cannot be transmitted instantaneously, by gift or inheritance, purchase or exchange. Retreat centres are spaces which one can buy into in terms of participation but they are also places which encourage the individual to invest energy into themselves through participation in a workshop or self-reflection. Sutton and House (2010, cited in Wray et al., 2010, p.160) claim that New Age tourism, as a product stemming from the 1960s, is characterized by the preoccupation of tourists with the self whereby “self-development becomes a leisure activity” as they become “tourists in their own identity”. The overwhelming popularity of these practices among women can be seen to be influenced by the media.

Miller and McHoul (1998, cited in Redden, 2002, p.36) argue that “Self-help is a movement that exists through bestselling books and daytime television”. On Oprah’s(Harpo Productions, 2011) official website there is a ‘Spirit’ section which features articles entitled: “Let the New You Shine Through”; “How Your Attitude Can Determine Your Life”; and “Who Am I Meant To Be?” Women’s magazines, television advertisements selling products aimed at women, and celebrities like Oprah, who are often attributed Guru status, can dramatically influence their (predominantly female) followers. In 1964 Marcuse (1964, p.8) questioned the role of media asking “Can one really distinguish between the mass media as instruments of information and entertainment, and as agents of manipulation and indoctrination?” Nearly fifty years on and media now proliferates all aspects of society making this question more relevant than ever before. Wellness is a concept which is heavily exploited by the mass media as people in the modern world seek something more than the materialism which pervades Western societies but that “does not always nurture the soul adequately” (Smith and Kelly, 2006b, p.16). Women are often the target market for messages centred on self-improvement and thus become a gendered ‘self-project’.
The wellness industry, seen within the realms of New Ageism, can be viewed as part of an exploitative industry: unorthodox, esoteric, unregulated, and therefore “potentially dangerous to the consumer” (Smith and Kelly, 2006a, p.3). As commented by one retreat-goer at Aio Wira, some retreat centres may indeed be hazardous to their visitors as untrained or uncaring people can wield power over individuals. Each retreat centre and workshop needs to be examined individually to ascertain this and regulation may indeed benefit the wellness sector (Smith and Kelly, 2006a, p.3). However, it can be argued that wellness tourism should not be at the centre of such critique as the wellness sector extends far beyond the retreat site. Popular media and celebrity ‘Gurus’ have a far wider influence over the general public and do not necessarily have the same active interest in the ‘wellness’ of consumers. The trustees, managers, and workshop facilitators involved in this research did have an invested interest in the genuine wellness of their customers, more likely considered their students. The perfection product which many media outlets urge consumers to work towards is ultimately unattainable and exploits the desire of some people to be ‘good’ or ‘worthy’. During fieldwork as researcher I never got the impression that the retreat-goers were being exploited or made to feel ‘bad’ about themselves and this is perhaps the sign of the genuine and ethical wellness tourism provider.

**The holistic retreat experience**

_I sang all the way from here to Thames (laughs) now that is very rare! I was replete, it was very nurturing, it was a new experience._ - Ben describing his drive home from Mana after his first retreat there.

Spiritual retreats are not only about ‘getting away’ but are also about embracing new practices, learning, and ways of living. Trinity claimed that people often came to the workshop of their choice to “explore their creative potential”. There is a range of workshops offered at each spiritual retreat throughout the year. Because of this, those interviewed expressed an interest in the specific retreat they attended. The holistic retreat involvement was seen to support the spiritual practices and values of those interviewed. A definition of holistic is “the belief that the parts of something are intimately interconnected and explicable only by reference to the whole” (Oxford University Press, 2011). The retreat
experience is one which is holistic as it encompasses a whole way of living for the duration of the retreat. This includes spiritual practices, learning, and food, among other things.

**Spiritual practice involvement**

Spiritual practices may be those things that are simple like “really wholesome food, or wandering into the bush”, as described by Trinity. Spiritual practices are also those things at the very core of a spiritual retreat workshop such as yoga, qi gong, or singing. Cindy, a singer, described how the experience of being on a singing retreat affected visitors who were not necessarily singers themselves but went on a singing retreat. Cindy said, “for people who aren’t used to singing a lot, when they suddenly discover their voice and go into that space it’s ecstatic!” Trinity, a trustee at Mana, also discussed with regards to singing how places like the Sanctuary at Mana enhance the singing experiences of retreat goers. “In the Sanctuary, the acoustics there, if you’re up there sing because it’s like singing with your higher self. It’s your voice like you would always wish your voice would be. It just! It’s like singing with angels”. These examples illustrate how retreats are seen to support spiritual practices. Smith and Puczko (2009, p.146) note that wellness tourists are often involved in some of these practices in their everyday lives and enjoy enhancing these by temporarily being in idealistic surroundings. Laura described Aio Wira as “a little event centre... we’ve got this beautiful environment and always get Linda and the teachers who every year feed us a bit more”. This is seen to add to one’s wellbeing. Ben said that being involved in spiritual practices “adds to my balance, adds to my peace, (pause) it’s sort of therapeutic as well”. According to Trinity, “spiritual practice is often just about stopping, about being still”. The spiritual practices, which often attract people to retreat tourism, enhance their experience at the retreat.

**Learning as transformation**

The acquisition of knowledge is central to the workshops. Many of those interviewed described the importance of learning when attending their chosen retreat workshop. Laura said one of the reasons she goes on yoga retreats is to deepen her knowledge “about what we’re there for”. Eden, a workshop facilitator at Mana, claimed that “Due to the intensity of
the amount of sessions they will do in this specific beautiful environment, often people finish a weekend here and they will comment ‘oh, it was life changing’ or ‘I am definitely going to continue now. I am going to make changes in my life now’”. Smith and Kelly (2006a, p.2) found that many wellness tourists are already engaged in a wellness activity such as yoga. Those who are not often aim to be after their wellness tourism experience as “even a short trip can have a long-lasting effect on one’s everyday life” (Smith and Kelly, 2006a, p.2). Trinity, a Mana trustee, described how often a retreat experience can act as “a wake-up call” which has transformative effects for the person in question even after they return home from a retreat. Carol pointed to the experience of merely being in the Mana environment as it “brings out something that you need to look at”. In this way Mana itself, regardless of workshop focuses, is seen to enhance one’s retreat experience. Grainger (2007, cited in Smith and Puczko, 2009, p.79) questions “the extent to which a holiday can have long-lasting effects on peoples’ lives”. Having a holiday or retreat experience may create a ‘geographic fallacy’ making people believe that “by changing location people can change what they are unhappy about” (Grainger, 2007, cited in Smith and Puczko, 2009, p.79). Trinity described how it is the specific attendance at a Mana retreat which aids in the transformation: “it’s the spiritual power to break free and transform that which needs to be transformed in themselves and yeah I think they (retreat-goers) just receive so much nourishment being here, support and kindred spirits!” The retreat experience can be seen to provide maximum impact to those who are there. For some a retreat can create effects beyond the confines of a workshop weekend spreading into other, everyday dimensions of peoples’ lives.

Wholesome food

“I love the food.” - Cindy at Mana.

Food is a key aspect of many forms of tourism and spiritual retreat tourism especially. The spiritual retreat experience, as a form of holistic tourism, includes the vegetarian (often organic) diet which is provided for retreat-goers. This conscious consumption of food can be seen as an act of ethics. Individuals and groups can use their food choices as reflections of reflexive, critical, selective, environmental and social awareness concerned with the “costs involved in their daily meals” (Johnston, 2008, p. 239 cited in Beagan et al., 2010, p.
Those interviewed at Mana and Aio Wira discussed food as an important feature of retreat tourism. When asked to take three pictures of or around the retreat which depict the most important aspects of retreat tourism, Laura and Maree at Aio Wira both took one of their three photographs of the kitchen and food provided for them. Maree’s photo can be seen below (Laura’s has been omitted because it featured identifiable people but it was of a similar nature):

Illustration 19. Maree’s photo of the kitchen and food at Aio Wira.

Laura said she chose to take a photo of the kitchen as it was seen to take care of her well-being which reinforces Halkier’s (2001, cited in Beagan et al., 2010, p. 751) claim that “Consumption typically connects the satisfying of personal needs with the expression of values and identity”. The healthy food at spiritual retreat sites is seen to run concurrent with ideologies surrounding health-food and wellbeing. Maree described the cleansing properties of eating vegetarian food and stated “this is all fresh and done with love”. Eden at Mana also commented on the food when asked about one of her photos with the vegie garden in the background:

We have the vegie gardens and the food that grows in them - the vegetables and the edible flowers and the herbs. They’re part of the spiritual experience as well. Through the body we eat this food which is beautiful and clean and the colours of the flowers - planted with love, picked with love and made with love so when you eat it you feel you’re
eating love. The body is well nourished and it is the body and it’s the soul that is nourished as well.

Many aspects encompassed in the retreat experience are seen to be based on an ethic of care and virtue. This is felt by the retreat-goers who feel that the vegetarian food provided for them supports their spiritual practices. Beagan et al. (2010, p.753) argue that the consumption of organic, vegetarian, fair trade foods, for example, “have in common a deliberate, conscious attention to the use of food decision-making in order to enact a political stance relating to discourses of moral good and global responsibility”. This can be seen to support ideologies surrounding healthy and conscious living and more specifically spiritual practices such as yoga. From a perspective that all beings are interconnected, yogic philosophy claims that “acts of violence will cause pain and ignorance whether carried out, caused, or approved of” and non-adherence to the principle of ahimsa (non-violence) can be seen to create one’s own “suffering and ignorance in the future” (Maehle, 2006, p.218-219). As Monica notes, “the food we eat here, that seems to always be at retreats, I like much more than I usually eat (laughs). It seems healthier and usually vegetarian which suits with my feelings but doesn’t always happen at home because of other people... it supports my feelings and my ideas”. The consumption of particular health foods can be seen as a political consumerist activity which stems from an individual or groups interest in the self and also common well-being (Micheletti, 2003, p.154). Ethical food consumption at spiritual retreats relates to spiritual practices enacted at the sites and also ideologies of interconnectedness.

Trinity, a trustee at Mana, commented on the holistic nature of the food as with many aspects of Mana retreat:

We grow as much of our own organic food, we have a big garden on the other side of the land, market garden, and so people get this really delicious food. And our cooks are amazing. And it’s not just the organic food but the water that feeds this food and waters this food comes from an underground stream/spring under a Pururi tree and it’s so vitalized. And they’ve done all this research on water and this water just adds something to the food. It’s like you can taste its vitality.

Just as the interconnectedness of the organic food, natural spring water, cooks and Pururi (New Zealand native) trees add to the food at Mana, the unique, interconnected elements
of the spiritual retreat adds to the holistic experience. Delormier et al. (2009, p.218) argue that “Eating patterns that are characteristic of different groups of people can be understood as being embedded in configurations of social relations and being shaped distinctively by them”. The foods at spiritual retreats symbolize health, interconnectedness, and green politics. These values are seen by retreeters to assist in the creation of a spiritual environment.

**Summary**

In conclusion, spiritual retreat tourism acts as a type of escape from the norms of everyday life which creates various new possibilities for visitors. The retreat package includes: getting away from distractions of the ‘outside’ world, delving into spiritual practices which are seen to offer health and well-being benefits, and enjoying being involved in learning and new experiences. Carol, the manager of Mana, described the set of attractive qualities which retreat centres offer to people: “people that come (to Mana) are coming for some sort of nurturance, restoration, learning, relaxation, but on some level to be reminded of what they value most, whatever that is”. As part of the tourism sector, wellness retreats and holidays are carefully packaged and advertised to offer the benefits which are sought by their market. Britton (1991, p. 462, cited in Roesch, 2009, p.62) claims that places, such as retreat sites, become commodified “through inherent attributes of the place into a saleable commodity… or symbolic image with recognisable attractions”. It can be expected by tourists that when they embark on a retreat they will be provided with healthy food (often organic and vegetarian), high quality teaching from workshop facilitators, and accommodation which provides something different from their usual lives whether this be luxury accommodation or a more simplistic, rustic approach. Alongside this, retreats are often held in beautiful environments, slightly off the beaten track, with luxurious surrounds. Edensor (2002, cited in Roesch, 2009, p.62) claims that places become commodities “by tearing them out of time and space constraints and repackaging them for the consumer”. Because of the wide array of wellness centres available to tourists they can also “choose and package their own wellness holiday” (Wray et al., 2010, p.165).One key attraction of spiritual retreats to wellness tourists is disintegration from everyday life which opens up
new opportunities such as, peace and quiet, the opportunity to make new friendships, and to generally enjoy the ‘treat’ of their purchase.
In this chapter the retreat ‘landscape’ will be discussed. The word ‘landscape’ refers to how one might conceive of a place and is therefore an ambiguous concept (Knudsen et al., 2008, p.20). According to Schama (1995, p.10) ‘landscape’ is a concept that dates back to the end of the sixteenth century as a ‘Dutch import’ signifying human occupation and jurisdiction as a “pleasing object of depiction”. The landscape has been described, defined and “can usefully be characterized in many ways” (Gesler, 1992, p.735). Bone (2007, p.13) claims that “the word landscape carries connotations that include natural and human endeavours”. Schama (1995, p.7) argues that “landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock”. Bell and Lyall (2002, p.6) state that “floating about in people’s heads are all the images of extreme, wild, rugged, beautiful landscape ... and that body of received knowledge of the “pure” spiritual values of nature itself”. Bell (1996, p.30) also describes the ‘sublime’ landscape claiming that New Zealand has “vast amounts of the ‘sublime’: mountains, volcanoes, avalanches, glaciers, the wide expanse of sky, the boundless oceans”. Gesler (1992, p.743) argues that in new cultural geography it is recognized that landscapes are influenced by physical and built environments, are a product of the mind as well as material circumstances, and that they reflect both “human intentions and actions and the constraints and structures imposed by society”. A key point to be taken from these theorizations of the term landscape is that it refers not only to physical, natural and human-made, features but also requires thought processes on the part of the viewer to construct meaning.

An important differentiation can be made between landscape and land as “it seems right to acknowledge that it is our shaping perception that makes the difference between raw matter and landscape” (Schama, 1995, p.10). The concepts of landscape and land are fundamentally different in their relations to people as ‘landscape’ is something modified, made, depicted, and visual while, contrastingly, ‘land’ is raw material, solid, territory, a base and a domain in its natural form. Landscape is *project* as a result of human interactionism while land just *is*. 
As the *tangata whenua* (the people of the land) Maori traditionally held particular values of the land because of its “spiritual status connected with *Papatuanuku*, the Earth Mother, parent of the Maori gods” (Cloher, 2004, p.47). For Maori, land can symbolize continuity with ancestors who have passed on to the spiritual world (Durie, 1985, p.483) and awareness of future generations (Smith, 2010, p.37). Wells (2001, p.224 cited in Bone, 2007, p.14) describes the land of New Zealand as a place of “strong physicality, where the spiritual voices from the indigenous culture have always been whispering in our ear”. Dann (1991, p.55) provides a narrative account of her enriched awareness of the environment that resulted from a hike in New Zealand with a Maori elder. As a Pakeha (non-Maori New Zealander), learning from stories told by the elder of the spiritual relationship between indigenous peoples and the land, Dan (1991, p.55) wrote: “Every plant, bird, peak, and stretch of river has an ancient name and an ancient story, and as they were related I felt my experience of the landscape deepening and expanding”. Ream (2009, p.147) found in her research that both Maori and Pakeha participants had in common “a commitment and sense of belonging to this land and the history of Aotearoa/New Zealand”. Distinguishing between Maori and Pakeha (non-Maori) views of the land in Aotearoa/New Zealand acknowledges indigenous perspectives.

As an analysis category in this research ‘landscape’ refers to the natural (geographical) environment as well as human-made features set in the spiritual retreat scenery. These environmental factors of the retreat were emphasized in every interview and the retreat landscape was also widely portrayed during the visual section of the interviews. Pesonen and Komppula (2010, p.156) suggest that beautiful landscapes “offer an ideal environment for a wellbeing holiday” and the findings of this study reinforce their claim. This chapter is presented using headings which depict key themes that came out of the research data with regards to the landscape of spiritual retreat tourism in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Well established theory is used to discuss the therapeutic, spiritual, architectural and ideological constructions of landscape.
Therapeutic landscapes

Gesler (1992) coined the term ‘therapeutic landscape’ which is broadly used across disciplines (cultural geography and sociology specifically) when discussing the relationship between land and health. For Gesler (1992) ‘therapeutic landscape’ becomes a “geographic metaphor for aiding in the understanding of how the healing process works itself out in places (or in situations, locales, settings, milieus)” (Gesler, 1992, p.743). The notion ‘therapeutic landscape’ is subjective and socially constructed (Lea, 2008, p.91). Wilson (2003, p.85) describes how indigenous ‘ways of knowing’ may “challenge and contradict ‘Western’ perceptions of health and place” and therefore the therapeutic landscape concept. Foley (2011, p.470) indicates an evolution in the literature surrounding therapeutic landscapes from a traditional preoccupation with spas and pilgrimage sites, to a broader approach comprising of both informal and formal sites which enhance wellness. Retreat tourism spaces are conceptualized as therapeutic landscapes that enrich the experience of the tourist (Gesler cited in Lea, 2008, p.90). The therapeutic landscape concept is topical at present.

At both Mana and Aio Wira the natural, geographical elements, as well as the human-made surroundings, were defined by participants as beautiful, healing and sacred. Usually participants described the natural and human-made aspects of the landscape in conjunction and termed this the ‘environment’. On the Mana website it is claimed “Embracing mountain, bush and sea, Mana provides a perfect atmosphere for the enrichment of body, mind and spirit” (Mana, 2011). This runs concurrent with Kelly’s (2010, p.110) research which found that most retreat tourism centres are located close to the sea or mountains and are advertised as “oases of calm” with features such as ‘good climate’, ‘secluded’, ‘pure’, and ‘natural’ used as descriptors.

In this research it was generally agreed among participants that retreat spaces hold something unique for visitors with regards to their scenery. As Trinity a trustee at Mana described, “Well for one thing, what’s interesting here is a lot of people find just being here, just the environment, the trees, the nature, the expansive views, the walkways in the bush, the Sanctuary up under the mountain, the mountain itself just that alone is very healing”. 

The landscape plays a vital role in spiritual retreat tourism as it is seen as a major draw-card for visitors. Lea (2008, p.91) argues for a critical appreciation of the therapeutic landscapes concept “in terms of the complexity of (imagined and material) relations between bodies and place in the creation of ‘healing’ or ‘restorative’ modes of being”. Conradson (2005, p.338 cited in Lea, 2008, p.91) suggests that the relationships created between an individual and their broader ‘socio-environmental setting’ may lead to therapeutic outcomes.

**Healing /salutogenic environments**

*Kate (researcher):* Do you think that retreat spaces are healing or therapeutic in any way?

*Cindy (retreat-goer at Mana):* Oh my god yes! I mean I think that if it isn’t then it’s not a retreat.

Spiritual retreat sites were seen by some involved in this research as spaces for healing, therapy or general positivity. Lea (2008, p.95) notes that it cannot be assumed such retreats result in only positive outcomes as “the ‘healing’ journey may not always be seen as a directly ‘positive’ one, and different ‘therapeutic imaginations’ might be quite diverse”. Although this is acknowledged, participants in this research focused heavily on the positive aspects of their experiences and the words ‘wellness’ and ‘healing’ have become buzzwords associated with retreat centres (Kelly, 2010, p.110). The following flier depicts how the ‘healing potential’ of Mana is seen to be promoted by the holistic environment:
When environments foster health they can be seen as 'salutogenic'. Antonovsky, (1987 cited in MacDonald, 2005, p.84) who coined the term ‘salutogenic’, understands health as "the positive interaction of the human life force with its environment" (MacDonald, 2005, p.84). Konu and Laukkonen (2010, p.148) found that the predominant “push factors for wellbeing trips is to refresh oneself” and this is one of the most important general travel motivations.
A salutogenic preoccupation can "convey a concern with the origins of wellness or health: health as the creation of well-being, through engagement with the environment" (MacDonald, 2005, p.85). Retreats may be contextualized as spaces which have the capability, and intention, of increasing health. The manager of Mana, Carol, described her role in creating a salutogenic environment when she said, “every person that comes here would have a different experience but it’s the Mana experience... my job is to hold a space to allow whatever needs to happen to happen and it can be from crying, to laughing, to being quite irreverent”. This space is the essence of what spiritual retreats offer and can be used as a place of healing or therapy if that is what the retreat-goer seeks.

Locations classed as salutogenic support healthy behaviors and responses (Thompson, 2010, p.231). Eden, a workshop facilitator at Mana, described how the different foundations of spiritual retreats work in conjunction to provide an all-encompassing wellness setting. Laura, a retreat-goer at Aio Wira, described how just being at the retreat strengthens the emphasis of the other elements of the workshop. Monica, a fellow retreater, said that retreats are typically held in beautiful environments which she found to be healing. When Eden was asked if she thought that retreat spaces were healing or therapeutic in any way she responded, “Yes! The actual space? This space? Mana? Yes!” When asked to elaborate she said “energetically you can feel at ease once you arrive, you can breathe, and the silence, the beauty, that works together with the teachings so that you have a serenity, calmness, and the beauty, you know the physical beauty... people feel good just being here.” Cindy, a retreat-goer and Worker Bee at Mana, also indicated the inadvertent healing qualities of being at Mana by claiming “you enter into that palpable energy so regardless of what retreat you’re doing, this place will have an impact in one way or another so that by its very nature is healing right? It can’t not be (laughs).” The spiritual practices which are incorporated into the retreat program also enable healing and wellbeing. As Eden said “all the techniques that are taught here whether yoga, tai chi or some kind of healing is for that reason, for healing”. Maree, a trustee at Aio Wira, said that taking part in spiritual practices means “tuning in to the energy field” which suggests that retreat sites each possess an ‘energy’ of their own.
John denied that the spaces which hold retreats, like Aio Wira, played a role in the healing or therapeutic dimensions of spiritual retreat tourism. He said, “the space isn’t necessarily healing... it’s the energy of the people that come here and what goes on”. During the visual phase of the interview John rejected his opportunity to take photographs because for him social interaction was the most important feature of retreat tourism, not any particular retreat scene. He went on to say “as far as the facility here, you can get the same effect wherever the space is because as I said at the beginning it’s the people that create the space”. John argued that “there is no art-typical retreat centre” and, to his wife Mary’s surprise, he described Aio Wira as “just bricks and water” to which Mary interrupted saying “although this has a wonderful atmosphere, it has a river we haven’t even walked around!” John agreed.

Linda, a workshop facilitator at Aio Wira, also stated that she felt that there was no significant link between places and wellbeing, including a sense of spirituality. Linda described how Aio Wira as a site that may help facilitate spirituality for people but “no more than anywhere else”. According to Linda “everywhere has its own natural spiritual potential. It’s up to us as individuals to recognize that and realize it within its own valid context. That’s where coping skills come in because there are some places that look like hell holes and while this place is easy to recognize, because of the beauty, the spiritual nature, there are other places where it’s harder to access”. Trinity, a Mana trustee, agreed that at some sites ‘spiritual potential’ may be enhanced. Trinity described the various natural and human-made features within the perimeters of Mana as healing for anyone who enters the grounds. She also described how certain locales can have profound effects on people:

Just thinking of a particular person who was just here woofing for three weeks, he’s just recently left. He told me he went up the mountain every single day, and you know that’s not an easy feat! For some people those kinds of connections in the bush are the most powerful things that happen to them while they’re here. They’re up on the mountain and suddenly their life becomes clear, or you know they have this broad, expansive, vast view and things fall into place. A lot of synchronistic things happen here. People find things arising from within them... insights, spiritual names, just suddenly something comes to them that they were waiting for. All this seems to happen here - whether people are doing a workshop or a retreat doesn’t seem to matter, or they’re just here!
Gesler (1992) describes the “long tradition that healing powers may be found in the physical environment, whether this entails materials such as medicinal plants, the fresh air and pure water of the countryside, or magnificent scenery” (Gesler, 1992, p.736). Ben referred to the ‘clean’ and ‘clear’ air that he found unique to Mana as oppose to the ‘fog’, ‘smog’ and ‘distress’ that he felt permeated beyond Mana’s grounds. I conducted my fieldwork during a Worker Bee which was not a workshop or a retreat. From casual conversations with people throughout the weekend it became obvious that many found that just being at Mana provided them with some form of sustenance that they so relished. I also feel compelled to attend another Worker Bee because the weekend provided me with fresh air, nutritious vegetarian food, morning yoga, communal labour and a sense of general harmony with nature and those around. Sheridan argues that (cited in van Wormer et al., 2007, p.269) “human beings have known since the beginning of time that interaction with nature can be a source of healing and renewal. Direct and mindful connection with the earth provides sustenance, comfort, wonder, challenge, peace, beauty, and nurturance in a way that cannot be found elsewhere”. The healing qualities attributed to retreat tourism spaces make up the wellness package which retreats promote and their trustees, managers, visitors, Worker Bees, and woofers alike cherish.

The spiritual landscape

The retreat landscapes were often discussed using terminology relating to spirituality. Bone (2007, p.13) describes the ‘spiritual landscape’ as a place of multiple perspectives, definitions and opinions. Both Mana and Aio Wira offer retreats with a spiritual focus which many participants found aided in their healing or sense of well-being. Eden described how being at Mana, as a spiritual site, makes her feel her “heart opening up”. Bone (2007, p.13) discusses the ‘spiritual landscape’ saying that “metaphors of geography are used to link spirituality with context”. When asked “is there anything spiritual about this place or being here for you?” Ben replied, “Yeah there is. And it’s the environment, there’s something here that’s not available in most the places I visit, in fact nearly all”. Eden said “I feel my spirit more when I am here”. According to Bone (2007, p.13) “geographical metaphors connect to the land and this spiritual connection is very much part of the New Zealand story”. This is
reinforced by Hall (1996, p. 160, cited in McIntosh, 2004, p.4) who argues that for the Maori people of Aotearoa, “The landscape is imbued with symbolic, personal, cultural and spiritual significance”. These conceptions were shared by many of those at the retreats as the New Zealand landscape was described in spiritual terms across boundaries in this research. Eden, a workshop facilitator at Mana, originally from another country, told an anecdote about how she thought taking part in a retreat at Mana added to the visitor’s spiritual wellbeing:

For meditation again there’s a lot of variations but people may meditate using a rock to look at, or using a horizon to look at, and here at Mana there is all that. You can look out and immediately you’re in a state that can help you achieve, like a stepping stone towards, meditation. When you’re in that meditation your spirit can widen and you can become more connected with it. There are the rocks, the mountains, there’s the estuary and the water, the green and the trees. So yes it does help to have that environment, to be in it.

Mana is considered an “exceptionally sacred site” by Trinity a trustee at Mana. Spiritual value was attributed to the retreats by those who live and work on the land such as herself. This then carried over into stories about the spiritual landscape which were told by retreat-goers. Mist was a feature discussed by some retreaters as an important element associated with Mana’s spiritual landscape.
Spiritual stories

Mist

Illustration 21. Mana’s with misty mountains in background, researcher’s photo.

The mist characteristic of Mana’s landscape was described at various times during the Worker Bee weekend. Cindy described mist in her interview and others also casually discussed it around the dining room table over breakfast one morning. Reference to the importance of mist for New Zealanders was made by noting its role in the cosmological Maori story of Papatūānuku, the Earth Mother, and Ranginui, the Sky Father. A Maori translation for the word ‘mist’ is ‘Pūkohu’, “Mist uniformly covering the sky is papanui, said to be a sign of calm the next day. In one tradition, mist is said to be the soft, warm sighs rising from the mountains and valleys – the Earth Mother Papatūānuku. This was a sign of her love for Ranginui (the sky father), who was separated from her” (Keane, 2009). The mist was often discussed with reference to Tara Sanctuary which was recognized as the spiritual centre of Mana retreat. Ream (2009, p.1) writes that “commonly used building blocks in the formation of a nation are people’s spiritual stories of its land”. As well as the mist at Mana, the Solstice celebration reinforced notions surrounding Maori cosmology as Solstice
celebrates the coming of light which links back to the story of separation between Papatūānuku and Ranginui (Keane, 2009). It must be noted that such spiritual beliefs and stories are not necessarily held by all Maori. Cloher (2004) comments on the heterogeneousness of Maori cosmology: “Because Maori were tribal, were geographically separated and had their own traditions, there are a number of variations of the basic Maori world view” (Cloher, 2004, p.48). However, various indigenous perspectives, as well as those constructed at the retreat sites by tourists, were seen to carry over into the spiritual experiences of the retreat-goers.

**Water**

Water has long been associated with spirituality and was often mentioned in stories about the retreats. Ben, a long-term retreat-goer at Mana and Worker Bee, described how his spiritual practices are “enhanced by the space”. During the visual aspect of the interview Ben described a distinctive feature of Mana retreat, “the harbor, particularly at full tide, there’s the colour of the sea that is just magnificence in the landscape itself. What would you say? It’s almost like magic, visual magic.” The following image taken from Mana’s website depicts this scene:

Illustration 22. “View from Mana” (Mana, 2011).
Aio Wira’s equivalent would be the following image which features on the website:


Water signifies separation, purification, and cleanliness (Gesler, 1992, p.739) which is suggested in the caption on Aio Wira’s website for the photo of the stream that “borders the property” (Aio Wira Centre, 2011). The common theme of water within these examples is no coincidence as Gesler (1992) describes the curative and restorative powers associated with water.

Water has a symbolic value connoting purification, absolution, and mysticism (Kukral, 1989 cited in Gesler, 1992, p.737). Noakes (2011, p.8) describes how, for example, river spirituality has existed for a long time in New Zealand “with its own unique set of dynamics within a wider discussion of Pakeha earth centred spirituality”. Mana manager, Carol, said “our branding is the expansive view of the islands”. Urdde (1999, cited in Morgan et al., 2003, p.286) claims that when consumers make choices about branded destinations “they are making lifestyle statements, since they are buying not only into an image but also into an emotional relationship”. This branding denotes that at the retreats visitors could expect to experience the mystical qualities associated with being in an environment with water as a feature.
According to Smith and Puczko (2009, p.99) “many cultures still view bathing in healing waters to be a sacred or spiritual act”. This explains why Aio Wira had an outdoor spa pool for visitors use, and Mana an outdoor bathtub. New Zealand offers many retreats and is conceptualized nationally and internationally as a ‘pure’ and ‘green’ island, surrounded by water (TNZ, 2010). Water is an important feature of ideologies surrounding concepts of spirituality and health. It is no coincidence that spiritual retreat locations epitomize the ‘best’ branded features of New Zealand’s magnificent scenery by highlighting water features and also providing waters in which to bathe.

**Beauty**

The word ‘beautiful’ was frequently used to describe the environment at Mana and Aio Wira retreats. The visual splendor of the retreats was seen as an essential element of spiritual retreat tourism and also an aid for the other components of the retreat which were seen to be enhanced by the environment. It was perceived by trustees, managers and workshop facilitators that their retreat offered something special which attracted visitors to their specific haven. Ben, a retreater at Mana, described how “The harbor view is just beauty at its best. And it really isn’t hard to remember this place, because it’s so vivid I can bring up an image quite readily.” Retreat manager at Mana, Carol, recognized this by saying “The beauty (of Mana) still touches people in a way that is beyond their rational mind so people can take a moment not to have the mind being a dominant organ (laughs)”. This perspective summarizes my inspiration for having a visual element in the interview which will be discussed later in the chapter. The aesthetic value of Mana and Aio Wira was also reinforced by nearly all of those interviewed.

When asked why she thought people may choose to come to Aio Wira specifically, Linda, the yoga workshop facilitator and original co-founder of Aio Wira, answered: “Well its lovely here! You’d be silly not to (laughs). I mean it’s a very beautiful spot that was one of the reasons why we choose it.” Likewise Aio Wira trustee Maree described the retreat in terms of its peacefulness and pleasing aesthetic environment, “the birds and the bushwalks... and we’ve got our own little stream down there, in summer they (the visitors) duck down and swim in it”. There was a consensus among participants that the beautiful settings of the retreats were important to retreat tourism. Monica, a retreat-goer at Aio Wira, observed
that retreat centres “are set in beautiful environments” which are “those places where you might not normally come”.

Upon my initial visit to Aio Wira I wrote in my journal how the drive there and initial observations of the retreat reinforced my ideas about what spiritual retreats would stereotypically be like in New Zealand:

_Te Henga Road, on the way to Aio Wira, is typically New Zealand. It is winding, quiet, surrounded by lush native bush on one side and a vertical rock-face cliff on the other which reinforces the naturally rugged West coast. The road is sealed up to Aio Wira Road which is then gravel. The road/driveway is about 1km with a few houses off it and Aio Wira is at the very end being the final destination. The driveway is well maintained and the lush bush and low power lines depict the rural setting. My predictions were that typical retreat sites would be up long, unsealed driveways so I am pleased that this place might be just how I had imagined!_

_A large, carved wooden sign saying ‘Aio Wira Centre’ greets you and a small sign to the side saying ‘private property’. Driving past those signs the centre becomes visible. It is so warm in colour, an earthy orange. There is a contrast between the beautifully kept lawns and the wide expanse of mature, native bush. It looks very homely and relaxed with the parking bay right there outside the entrance. Words that spring to my mind are: warm, lush, special, New Zealand. This site has something awe inspiring about it. It makes you want to tread lightly on the ground, turn of your car radio, and be quiet. Like some sort of New Age temple the site oozes peace, calm and something spiritual. Are these anticipated values I am projecting onto the site or is there truly something special about particular places? I suppose that’s what I’m here to find out._

During my interviews I asked participants various questions to ascertain whether there was something special about the particular retreat they were visiting. A ‘Google’ (2011) search of ‘spiritual retreat New Zealand’ turns up 26,400,000 results, and retreat tourism is described by Lea (2008, p.90) as a “contemporary ‘trend’”. This led me to question participants as to what was special about and why people might choose to visit Aio Wira or Mana specifically in a very competitive market. Trinity at Mana acknowledged the broad range of retreats available in New Zealand saying “there are a number of lovely centres in New Zealand but of course this is my favourite! (laughs)”. At Mana, Carol the manager said, “I think it’s one of
the most beautiful in the world. I’ve been to a lot of retreat centres around the world and they’re all lovely and they all have different energies – I think Mana’s particularly exquisite.” The aesthetically pleasing aspects of each retreat were conferred when answering the interview questions.

Most of the visitors to Mana and Aio Wira reinforced the value a beautiful setting plays in their experiences as spiritual tourists. Smith and Kelly (2006a, 3 cited in Lea, 2008, p.91) argue that “retreats are characteristically located in ‘aesthetically pleasing [and] environmentally lush’ surroundings”. Laura at Aio Wira captured the following image during the photographic phase of her interview:

Illustration 24. Laura’s photo of statue in garden at Aio Wira.

When asked why this image was chosen as representative of one of the most important depictions of the retreat, she said “it’s just a nice visual look”. Laura also referred to the statue in this image as ‘a little Buddha sitting there’. Linda, a workshop facilitator and founder of Aio Wira, told me that the statue was actually of ‘Swami V’ her guru and yogi
who blessed Aio Wira upon its opening as a yoga centre many years earlier. This misunderstanding portrayed to me that it is not the specificity of the statues or symbolism which people necessarily link to concepts of spirituality or retreats. The broad range of multi-faith and nature focused symbolism presented creates a space which can be viewed as spiritually significant to all people who choose to visit them. Eden at Mana reinforced this by saying Mana is “very open to all faiths, sharing some common grounds”. Carol, the manager, agreed describing Mana as a neutral space “here to meet the needs of people who are here” and “very open both in its non-affiliation to a particular way, but also, it has a robustness to it that holds a lot of different energies”. This not only captures a wide market of potential visitors but also adds to the “good stuff” which Cindy referred to as “unity and expansion” which appear concurrent with the core values of spiritual retreats and thus also their visitors. The openness and acceptance of differing spiritual symbolism and visitor beliefs adds to the experience of retreat-goers as they can project their own beliefs onto the spiritual landscape. Morgan et al., (2003, p.286) argue that “In this marketplace what persuades potential tourists to visit (and revisit) one place instead of another is whether they have empathy with the destination and its values”. Spiritual retreats emphasize values synchronized with those of their target market and this is reflected in the workshops on offer and food provided and openness of space to peoples of all faiths. At the core of spiritual retreat tourism is the importance of providing spiritually satisfying practices to those who seek them. These are enriched by the retreat setting with which they are incorporated.

New Zealand’s therapeutic landscape brand

Destination branding is essential in the competitive global market of tourism. Morgan et al. (2003, p.283) argue that “the need for destinations to portray a unique identity is more critical than ever”. Piggott (2001, cited in Morgan et al., 2003, p.286) claims that destination branding “has become the basis for survival within a globally competitive marketplace where the ten major destinations attract approximately 70 per cent of the worldwide tourism market”. The branding of destinations seeks to sell a unique product which is often done by promising the potential customer an experience rather than a tangible object.
(Roesch, 2009, p.23). This is done in a highly competitive market place. New Zealand has created a highly successful tourism brand which has been ranked top in the categories of ‘authenticity’, ‘natural beauty’, ‘friendly locals’ and ‘desire to visit’ (Future Brand, 2008 cited in Roesch, 2009, p.24). The branding of New Zealand creates ideologies and mythologies about the landscape and space with which tourism occurs. Edensor (2001, p.63) describes how “Tourism takes place within meaningful spatial contexts” and this can be seen as New Zealand takes on an international identity of a ‘pure’ and ‘pristine’ but also actively enjoyed landscape. Morgan et al. (2003, p.294) claim that the New Zealand brand specifically targets ‘interactive travellers’ who are “people young in body or heart who love travel, seek new experiences and enjoy the challenge of new destinations”. Tucker (2005, p.268) describes the ‘interactive traveller’ as “the one who really interacts with New Zealand the place”. Edensor (2001, p.60) describes “the production of tourism, as a series of staged events and spaces, and as an array of performative techniques and dispositions”. In this way New Zealand as a branded space can be seen to be constructed and staged to portray all the elements which make up its international identity which attracts particular performances from tourists, such as the spiritual retreat tourist.

Many of the visitors to both Mana and Aio Wira when I conducted my fieldwork were domestic tourists. The New Zealand brand however surely influences even New Zealander’s perspectives about their country. Hall (2010, p.70) describes how place branding has internal and external markets. Internal place branding influences “place identity, including community pride and the creation and maintenance of an attractive environment” while external place branding portrays “brand values, including place attributes, to external markets in order to fulfil place branding goals and objectives” (Hall, 2010, p.70). In 1999 the ‘100% Pure New Zealand’ campaign was released and has been omnipresent in New Zealand’s global and local identity ever since (TNZ, 2010). In 2010 Tourism New Zealand personalized its marketing message changing ‘100% Pure’ to ‘100% Pure You’ (TNZ, 2010). On their website Tourism New Zealand (2010) write how with this new branding “Authentic and memorable experiences will become the major drawcard, while New Zealand’s beautiful scenery and environment will continue to be a vital part of the ongoing story as the backdrop” (TNZ, 2010). This personalization runs concurrent with spiritual retreat
tourists as they embark on a journey of the self in their pristine home environment. Smith and Puczko (2009, p.212) claim that across the globe many destinations have joined the “competition in health and wellness tourism”. Tourism New Zealand’s (2010) campaigns as well as indigenous beliefs about New Zealand’s land aid the spiritual consciousness associated with Aotearoa’s landscape.

It must be noted that branding is market driven and therefore branded messages do not necessarily refer back to truths about a place. While New Zealand has been portrayed internationally as a clean and green tourist destination, the reality of this may be contradictory and form part of the “promotional myths” which operators in the tourism sector contribute to in New Zealand (Bell, 2008, p. 351). This forms part of the mythology involved in place branding (Roesch, 2009, p. 24). Such ‘green-washing’ was not prevalent at the spiritual retreats included in this research. Sustainable, eco-friendly, environmentally conscious and responsible practices were actually carried out rather than only appearing in promotional material, literally, as the promotional material itself was printed on eco-recycled paper with natural inks. Bell (2008, p. 349) found in her research of backpacker hostels that “when it came to ‘environmental responsibility’ most of these establishments, in their domestic ‘green’ practices, had limited commitment to match practice to image”. The spiritual retreats in this research were seen to help one engage in more genuine experiences and communication. This may be the result of touristic performances whereby the retreat-goers “construct and reconstruct tourism places by performing and reacting to these places as prescribed by convention and imagination” (Hyde and Olesen, 2011, p.901). The retreat sites in this research showed a real commitment to environmental sustainability and responsibility which is contrary to many other forms of tourism. This reinforced notions of New Zealand’s branded landscape.

Through her research Ream (2009, p.1) found that “Kwis on an everyday level narrate Kiwi-ness” from “meaningful encounters with New Zealand’s landscapes and places”. Ream (2009, p.137) discusses the concept of ‘locally narrated roots’ and she claims that the concept of ‘roots’ which encapsulates land, ancestry and history, “expands on the idea that land is a symbol of unity in diversity”. The landscape of spiritual retreats becomes a collective treasure. Trinity, a trustee at Mana, described how she cherishes the land there, “I
live here on the land so I feel very blessed... every day I hear the bells ringing, everyday I’m walking in the forest”. The appreciation of the New Zealand landscape was apparent in many interviews. Various landscape markings like road signs also deliberated a national romanticism of the land. The roads surrounding Aio Wira all reflected the natural and spiritual dimensions of the area: Scenic Drive, Mountain Road, Unity Road, Falls Road, Summit Road, Te Henga Road and Aio Wira Road. The region where Aio Wira is situated named Waitākere is translated from Maori to mean ‘wave-swept rock’ (McClure, 2009). Aio Wira and Mana also share in common their mountain range surrounds. The geographical landscape of New Zealand is valued on a personal level as one admires the objective beauty of the land, but also collectively as road names and national tourism slogans reinforce the national identity of ‘Kiwis’. It is also notable that both names ‘Mana’ and ‘Aio Wira’ are Maori. The realm of spirituality may provide a platform where ‘kiwi’/Pakeha and Maori can share an appreciation of the land. Conceptions of the relationship between land and spirituality are closely related for many people and their connection to land is clear.

**Imagery**

The visual representations of the retreats boast the attractive qualities found in such settings. According to Morgan et al. (2003, p.286) “travel for leisure is often a highly involving experience, extensively planned, excitedly anticipated and fondly remembered”. According to Smith and Puczko (2009, p.42) “the anticipation of a trip and the relived memories can contribute to a sense of wellbeing, especially if travel is a constant or regular feature of one’s everyday life”. Photographs and other visual representations are often used as mementos of leisure tourism experiences. Participants were asked near the end of their interview to take my camera to capture photos depicting the most important features of the retreat for themselves. All the visitors to Mana who provided visual images for this research emailed me one or all of their photos. This suggests that they had taken photographs as ‘souvenirs’ or ‘props’ which act as triggers and displays of those previous retreat experiences at Mana (Morgan et al., 2003, p.286).
While four of the ten interviewees choose not to take photos and preferred to describe their images, all the rest of the images focused heavily on the natural and built environment typical to a spiritual retreat venue. It is worth noting that this is to be expected given that it is easier and more usual to photograph the landscape than it is to ‘capture’ the abstract notion of ‘energy’ mentioned by many. Community is another concept which was described as an important feature but could not be included in the research as the photos could not contain other people as a requirement of gaining ethical consent. Participants were very clear when they felt that because of the limitations of both technology and protocol their ideas could not be depicted and they chose not to use the camera but rather preferred to describe their ‘photographs’.

The six who decided to take snapshots often depicted the natural, geographical landscape as well as the human-made features such as buildings and sculptures. The juxtaposition of both the natural and constructed features of the retreat scene indicates that it is both the natural physical setting of the retreats in conjunction with the contrived features which make up an ideology of ‘spiritual retreat’. A tree on its own could be anywhere but a tree with a Buddha statue placed at its trunk produces a new signifier and therefore meaning for those reading the symbolism.

**Spiritual architecture: sacred geometry**

*Unlike Euclidian and more recent geometries, the starting point of ancient geometric thought is not a network of intellectual definitions or abstractions, but instead a meditation upon a metaphysical Unity, followed by an attempt to symbolize visually and to contemplate the pure, formal order which springs forth from this incomprehensible Oneness* (Lawlor, 1982, p.16).

Various spiritual architectural designs have been deliberately incorporated into the retreat landscape to convey messages about the sites. Spiritual retreats are then defined as spiritual, or not, by their inhabitants. Knudsen et al. (2008, p.20) describes how, within a landscape, “identity is manifested in physical symbols” whereby architectural style can be seen to be “infused with the identity of a people”. Symbolic landscapes are essential in understanding therapeutic landscapes as “semiology could be called the science or art of discovering the symbolic pathways between biological and cultural codes” (Gesler, 1992,
p.739). Upon entering the grounds of Mana and Aio Wira the various symbolisms became apparent and the retreats can be seen as culturally constructed sites. In opposition to John’s claim that “there is no art-typical retreat centre” it appears that certain features found at retreat sites connote their unmistakable identity. Paine (2004, p.9) describes how particular places have always been labeled as sacred, holy or taboo as they are instilled with special qualities.

Both Aio Wira and Mana had a ‘Sanctuary’ which at each was a building associated with spirituality. The word ‘Sanctuary’ originates from the Latin ‘sanctus’ meaning ‘holy’ and in contemporary times refers to refuge or safety from pursuit, persecution, or other danger, a nature reserve or a holy place or temple (Oxford University Press, 2011). According to Smith and Puczko (2009, p.97-98) spiritual tourists may find that religious buildings offer a “calm sanctuary in which they can feel meditative and transcend everyday life”. While in the past sacred places, for Westerners, would have been thought of as churches or monasteries, nowadays an interest in broader definitions of spirituality has marked the creation of different spiritual spaces (Paine, 2004, p.9). Eden, a workshop facilitator at Mana, described the Sanctuary as the “spiritual centre”, citing the cathedral, religious symbols, beautiful building and labyrinth outside which all make it so. The ‘sacred geometry’, with which many sacred art forms and buildings have been designed using, represents ideologies surrounding conceptions of unity, wholeness and oneness. These beliefs can be seen to support ideas of holistic wellbeing and the interconnected philosophies which yogic teachings and other ancient belief systems present.

The ‘Sanctuary’ buildings typical of spiritual retreats are architecturally similar to religious buildings like churches with arched, stained glass windows, mosques with dome shaped ceilings, and Hindu and Buddhist temples with colorful depictions of Gods and sacred symbols such as the lotus flower. Globalization has advanced means of travel so that people are “familiar with the sacred places of many other countries, traditions and religions” (Paine, 2004, p.9). The ‘sacred geometry’ of Tara Sanctuary at Mana is detailed on their website. It is written that “The design of TARA Chapel is based on the laws of sacred geometry. It’s strongest components are harmony and the golden mean proportions”. Lawlor (1982, p.44) describes how it was “the goal of many traditional esoteric teachings to
lead the mind back toward the sense of Oneness through a succession of proportional relationships”. In her interview Trinity specifically described the sacred geometry involved in the construction of *Tara Sanctuary*: “It’s built on lay lines, energy crossing lines, and the whole place where it’s built was worked on deeply to get exactly the right place. It’s built in sacred proportions and on the golden mean so it’s *all perfectly proportioned* like a finger 3, 5, 8, (measures out proportions of finger using other hand), like a koru, like nature”. These are philosophical ideologies, measured and equated to make the ‘Golden Mean’: “There are grand philosophical, natural and aesthetic considerations which have surrounded this proportion ever since humanity first began to reflect upon the geometric forms of its world” (Lawlor, 1982, p.53). Sacred architecture, based on the ‘Golden Mean’, can be found around the world and through many artistic ages.

Strachan (2003, p.35) notes the appropriateness that sacred geometry “should become fashionable in our postmodern world, for it’s pedigree goes back a long way, to the pyramids of Egypt, the ziggurats of Mesopotamia, Hindu temples and Islamic mosques”. This can explain why many of the architectural features of sacred buildings are similar in their design through time and space. There is no coincidence that the ‘Sanctuaries’ at spiritual retreat sites echo the design of other religious buildings spanning the globe. For example, the characteristic hexagonal shape of such buildings is described in the following phrase from Mana’s (2011) website: “The centre of the chapel is a point of gravity, union and essence and it radiates symmetrically out in all directions touching annexes and octagon corners”. This terminology used to describe *Tara Sanctuary* is that which could be applied to an Italian *Duomo*/church as the ‘chapel’ and ‘bell tower’ echo Catholic descriptions. Seen side by side the visible similarity between sacred buildings on opposite sides of the worlds, and from different time frames, can be seen:
Illustration 25 (left). The Duomo in Florence, Italy (Fletcher, 2011).

Illustration 26 (right). Tara Sanctuary (Mana, 2011).

This type of building is common at spiritual retreat centres. Aio Wira’s Sanctuary is depicted below along with two other retreats with equivalents in New Zealand:

Illustration 27. Website depiction of The Sanctuary (Aio Wira Centre, 2011).


*Tara Sanctuary* at Mana featured prominently in the photos taken by Eden, Ben and Trinity and was photographed both from the outside looking in and from the inside looking out:
Trinity and Eden both captured this same scene looking out to the islands and harbor from inside *Tara Sanctuary* at Mana. The arched window acts like a frame for the view and echoes the shape of a church window. The pointed arch “is the most distinctive feature of the Gothic style” although there are many debates as to where this design actually originates from (Strachan, 2003, p.16). The way spiritual architecture infiltrates many areas of the globe, so much so that it often cannot be traced back to a single place, suggests the eclectic nature of much contemporary spiritual building design. Here the relationship between nature and the human-made *Sanctuary* window frame exemplifies sacred geometry as “it can be said that wherever there is an intensification of function or a particular beauty and harmony of form, there the Golden Mean will be found” (Lawlor 1982, p.53). In this way the carefully constructed building acts in conjunction with the natural landscape to provide something special and unique to the observer.

Photos were also taken by participants from outside the building:
Illustration 32. Trinity’s picture of *Tara Sanctuary* nestled into the vast, green landscape of the *Coromandel Ranges*.

Illustration 33. Ben’s picture of *Tara Sanctuary*.  

Ben’s photo is taken from the opposite angle of Trinity’s and depicts a more build-focussed image. He told me this photo was one he loved and had put on his computer screensaver. This photograph includes cars and empty benches signifying the omnipresents of people. Trauer and Ryan (2005, p.481) argue that often personal relationships create holiday memories and that “place attributes possess importance only in the way that people use a place and then subsequently evoke place to relive a happy memory”. Throughout his interview Ben emphasized the importance of the people at Mana in making the whole experience of being on a retreat what it is. Tara Sanctuary can be seen as a spiritual communal meeting ground.

All of these images depict the spiritual architecture which is an important aspect of spiritual retreat tourism in New Zealand. Cultures from around the world each have spiritual buildings. The Sanctuary buildings at Mana and Aio Wira are spiritual in nature rather than purely religious. According to Benitez (2009, p.7):

> Religious buildings are often perceived as closed spaces anchored in the past, but when they distance themselves from traditional dogmatic structures, offering free spaces for the interpretation of spiritual affairs, they can become modern and open places that promote dialogue and understanding among believers.

The ‘sanctuaries’ at spiritual retreat centres can be seen as post-modern equivalents to traditional religious buildings. They may also be conceptualized in Aotearoa/ New Zealand as Pakeha versions of the indigenous Maori’s spiritual meeting houses.

**The Marae**

Marae are spiritual meeting houses for Maori, the indigenous peoples of New Zealand. Lambert (2009, p.31) describes the marae as a “focal point for Maori where families and communities come together for various reasons”. The wharetipuna (ancestral house), which makes up part of the marae, is “conceptualised metaphorically as a human body” (Harrison, 1999, cited in Lambert, 2009, p.32). With this conceptualization the door, described as the mouth or ‘kuwaha’, symbolizes the entry “where the spiritual and physical spheres meet and come together” (Harrison, 1999, cited in Lambert, 2009, p.32). Tapsell (2002, p.142)
found in his research that when Maori elders were asked about their understanding of the marae they conceptualized their home marae as “both a tangible (physical) and an intangible (spiritual) space to which they belong—*turangawaewae*—where the “now” is metaphysically embodied within their ancestral past”. Conceptions of the modern retreat vary from indigenous perspectives of their own spiritual spaces. Retreats may however be seen as spaces which provide a spiritual backdrop to some Pakeha. Retreats also often use features from ‘Other’ cultures to enhance spiritual ideologies. At Mana, for example, a South American sweat lodge was situated in the bush. The retreats in this research provided a place for people where spiritual symbols and buildings were accessible and spiritual discourse and practices were accepted and enacted. As Eden at Mana described, when asked if there was anything spiritual about Mana, “I feel my spirit more when I am here. I have more space and quiet to connect with it”. Spiritual retreat sites can provide the equivalent of indigenous or religious buildings or meeting places for people who seek such a space.

**Art-typical retreat features**

Certain similarities could be seen between Aio Wira and Mana, features which reinforce a retreat ideology. The following fieldwork images (taken by the researcher unless otherwise indicated) depict similar scenes or signs found at the cast study sites:
The ‘alternative’ shop products including books, yoga blankets, art and crafts, candles and merchandise.

Illustration 34. The shop at Aio Wira.

Illustration 35. The shop at Mana.
The bells and gong used to notify guests that meals were served, break times were beginning or ending, and other such announcements.

Illustration 36. Bells at Aio Wira.

Illustration 37. Bells at Mana.
The lily ponds:

Illustration 38. Lilly pond at Aio Wira.

Illustration 39. Lilly pond at Mana.
Seats for silence and reflection amongst the native bush:

Illustration 40. Seat in bush at Aio Wira.

Illustration 41. Seat in bush at Mana.
Buddha statues:

Illustration 42. Buddha statue at Aio Wira.

Illustration 43. Buddha statue at Mana.
Maori art and sculptures:

Illustration 44. Carved wooden Maori sculpture at Aio Wira.

Illustration 45. Carved wooden Maori sculpture at Mana.
Stained glass windows especially featured in the Sanctuaries:

Illustration 46. Lotus flower depicted in stained glass in Aio Wira’s Sanctuary.

Illustration 47. Aum sign and lotus flower depicted in stained glass in Tara Sanctuary (Mana, 2011).
Residues of rituals:

Illustration 48. Flowers placed on the lap of ‘Swami V’ at Aio Wira which Maree, a trustee, told me meant that Linda must have performed a ritual to her late Guru.

Illustration 49. Flower petals and fern leaves which had been scattered on the floor of Mana were seen thrown on the grass the day following the solstice ritual.
Various other retreat centres depict similar scenes on their websites such as *Anahata Yoga Retreat* (2007) situated in the South Island of New Zealand which displayed images of statues, flowers, fern leaves and candles outside among nature.


The rich array of symbolism at both of the case studies featured in a journal entry after my initial visit to Aio Wira, I wrote:

*There was also much symbolism both inside and outside the centre and many sculptures and other pieces of art which represented a wide range of religious and spiritual beliefs. Notably, a large tapa cloth hung on the wall in the dining room, a carved Maori statue stood outside, a small Buddha statue sat under a tree and, the Hindu god Ganesh was featured.*

This various symbolism reflects the commodification of spirituality in the West whereby various religious or spiritual and cultural symbols are appropriated from elsewhere. In particular the East to West movement of symbols is notable. A current trend “is for Western tourists to seek solace in Eastern philosophies and therapies” (Smith and Kelly, 2006a, p.2). Buddha from the East and Tibet, Krishna from India, the Aum (yogic symbol) in the stained
glass church looking windows all represent various religiosity and spirituality and show the fusion of faiths as they appear all together within the same space. Smith and Kelly (2006b, p.17) categorize spiritual tourism in terms of its likelihood to “include rituals, ceremonies, and traditions that are derived from Eastern religious (e.g., Buddhism, Hinduism)”. This then permeates through the design and symbols found at retreat sites.

Combining the church window with yogic philosophy symbols would be seen as the amalgamation of contradictory symbols for many people but it appears that each belief system and culture is incorporated. The Italian bell tower and the New Zealand touch with our fern leaves scattered about and Maori art combine to show another mixture of two very different cultures. It is seen as typical of spiritual tourism that “rituals, ceremonies, and traditions that are derived from different religions” are encompassed in the setting (Smith and Puczko, 2009, p.97). The deeper meanings of these artifacts may not be known or important to spiritual retreat tourists but they all echo an ideology associated with spirituality. Spiritual symbolism in abundant at retreat sites and can be considered an eclectic, identifying feature of this type of tourism. The sites are often multi-faith and therefore incorporate symbols from various religious and secular positions. Benitez (2009, p.7) claims that religious buildings must “meet a number of symbolic requirements. Spiritual architecture, like music, images and prayers, contributes to providing another dimension to the religious experience, to finding peace or a moral path”. The buildings at Mana and Aio Wira do not lend themselves to one religion, rather they are spiritual spaces which can fulfill the desires of those that use them, whether for religious worship, spiritual contemplation, or enjoyment of the beautiful surroundings. They make up part of the construction of an art-typical retreat site.

**Spiritual journeys**

There were mythical symbols found in the landscape at the retreat sites. These could often be linked back to conceptions of spirituality. ‘Spiritual journeys’ were often referred to ideologically and the labyrinth at Mana, as a metaphorical spiritual path, was one symbolic construction of spiritual ideology.
A weekend at a spiritual retreat centre could be viewed as an opportunity for retreat-goers to find their spiritual path or it may be seen as “part of a spiritual journey” (as described by Ben). Trinity, a Mana trustee, saw that for some retreat-goers experiencing a weekend at Mana “is a new journey” offering many possibilities. Smith and Kelly (2006b, p.23) note that “whilst holistic tourism offers an increasingly diverse array of activities linked to escapism from postmodern anomie, many holistic tourists appear to be wholeheartedly embracing ‘journeys of the self’…” This can be seen as synonymous to conceptions of one’s own spiritual path. Eden, a workshop facilitator at Mana, described how one might “find a spiritual path” by being at Mana whether it had been offered specifically or not. Eden’s belief was that a workshop at a spiritual retreat could open some people’s mind to the belief that there is more ‘out there’: “people definitely go out of here seeking more or finding more”. Ben described how his own spiritual journey and the “spiritual world” has been fascinating for him because he felt that some unusually generous experiences had “come from left-field, like there is no reason for them to arrive at me, it’s almost like being guided”. Experiencing what Ben saw as possibly spiritual guidance along his path led him to believe that “there is another being or another ‘thing’ that guides us”. Ben felt that people can be their own guide as well but that he personally had experienced some spiritual guidance from elsewhere. Trinity described the retreat-goers at Mana as “the people that are called here” which suggests that visitation to a spiritual retreat site may be viewed as part of a spiritual ‘pathway’ or ‘calling’. The presence of a labyrinth at Mana, right beside Tara Sanctuary, suggests that spiritual journeys are symbolically represented at the site. A labyrinth was also constructed in one of the buildings for the Solstice ritual.
Eden chose to photograph this labyrinth (above) as a representation of what she saw to be one of the most important features at Mana. She pointed out the spiritual centre built inside the labyrinth (it is the diamond shape near the middle of the labyrinth pictured above). Eden claimed “underneath the labyrinth are many crystals from around the world so it’s a very sacred place. They have collected a lot of crystals for healing from around the world and actually built them underneath the labyrinth so when you walk on it you are receiving lots of gifts (smiles)”. Labyrinths “have long been used as meditation and prayer tools” and represent a spiritual path as “a metaphor for the journey to the center of your deepest self and back out into the world with a broadened understanding of who you are” (Johnston, 2011, np). Eden described her qi gong “walking meditation” to me during her interview and then when we went to the site, to take the above picture, she showed me and my mother the walking meditation exercise and we all did it together. It was a common perception among those at the retreats that people have spiritual pathways and that these spiritual journeys can be metaphorically represented using labyrinths. The retreat sites are composed to include various features that align with the spiritual values and beliefs of their guests.
Retreat composition

At Aio Wira spiritual value was attributed to various natural and constructed aspects of the retreat landscape. The following two photos taken by Monica show how a spiritual landscape can be composed for spiritual retreat tourism:

Illustration 52: Monica’s photo of bonsai trees at Aio Wira.
Both of these photos emphasize the particular placement of objects within the landscape to create a scene of spirituality. Monica claimed that the photographs link back to her ideas surrounding the concept of spirituality. The images encapsulate how natural and human-made features at the retreats come together to present a particular spiritual landscape which for Monica exemplified the ‘art’ aspect of an ‘art-typical’ retreat. She said “I wanted to represent the art of Bonsai and in the background you saw the little wall. I think it’s just the whole creativity that is around spiritual or around retreats is quite amazing. I think if you were to ask me about spirituality then creativity probably comes together with it as well”. The top image, encapsulating plants, statues, buildings and seats, makes up part of what Monica described as the ‘creativity’ of retreat centres. The bottom image depicts how natural resources can be compiled in artistic ways are the rocks are engraved and piled to make the game ‘Naughts ‘n’ Crosses’. Natural features are assembled alongside human-made artifacts in a way that fashions the typical retreat centre landscape. Nature was also depicted on it’s own in a raw, untouched form:
This was Laura’s representation of ‘nature’. Carol, the manager of Mana, also described nature as one of the most important representations of spiritual retreat tourism. She describes her photo as “natural beauty: a ponga frond, the islands out there, a sunflower in the garden, a silver beet plant thriving”. It was claimed by Carol that people get “touched” by natural beauty which “is very spiritual”. Nature is an important element of the sites where spiritual retreats are held. Often the retreat landscape is centred on amplifying aesthetically beautiful natural scenes with the presence of symbols and constructions which aid in the composition of a spiritually meaningful site.

**Summary**

The spiritual and symbolic landscape which is created for retreat-goers makes up a part of the entire package of this type of tourism. Retreat owners have configured the sites to fulfil the expectations of their visitors who are looking for an experience somewhere unique and
special with spiritual undertones. Visual representations of identity make places ‘real’ whereby “Buildings, memorials, statues, and painted representations of the national landscape are more than mere constructions of society, but rather they are symbols of social identity, created and maintained to perpetuate the idea of place” (Knudsen et al., 2008, p.20). The composition of the retreat landscape reinforces the identity of the community which inhabit the site. Symbols found encompassed in the retreat landscape are symbols of identity for guests. Retreat operators construct the physical elements that are expected within the perimeters of the retreat. Attention is placed upon the creation of a site occupied with symbols from multiple belief systems and various spiritualties.
Conclusion

This thesis has explored the topical phenomenon of spiritual retreat tourism in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The opening section provided a critical discussion of the issues surrounding the marketing of spirituality and New Ageism. I then discussed the findings of this research throughout the chapters that presented the key themes that emerged from the data. The qualitative ethnographic case study research design was explicated in a conjoined methods and methodology section which positioned this study within the field of sociology.

Summary of findings

The main findings of this research have been addressed in the chapters. In summary, it is clear that various aspects of spiritual retreats combine to create a holistic experience for tourists. Four themes were identified in the data which represented the most important aspects of spiritual retreat tourism for the ten participants interviewed. These were as follows: going somewhere with a sense of community, enjoying an escape from everyday life, consuming the aesthetically attractive and symbolically rich landscape of retreats, and being in a spiritually accepting environment.

Retreat spaces aided in the interviewees’ experiences of therapeutic places, spirituality and well-being. The two case studies, Mana and Aio Wira, were extremely important to tourists of a spiritual pursuit.

Limitations

This research is limited in that the sample size was small with only ten participants interviewed and two case study retreat centres involved in fieldwork. However, some of the discoveries of this research do echo other findings within the field suggesting that there are some homogenous features within the sector. As such this study reinforces some previous research findings and can also inform other researchers interested in the topic. The findings
of this study contributes to a growing body of knowledge centred on wellness tourism and a more specific aspect of this concerned with spiritual retreats.

**Implications**

The attraction of spiritual retreat tourism for visitors and their perspectives on the holistic retreat experience have been presented. This research adds to wellness research specifically located in a New Zealand context and compliments the field as it fills some gaps in the literature. Hopefully this research will inspire others to further develop the field.

The findings of this research inform those interested in the growing sector of wellness tourism. Retreat owners are educated about their guests’ perspectives and this may shape what they offer to retreat-goers in future. The findings of this research also reinforce why particular aspects of spiritual retreat tourism should be upheld. For example, the social warmth found at the centres, health food which was seen to nourish, and the aesthetically pleasing and spiritually imbued landscapes were all major draw-cards for the wellness tourists interviewed.

The participants themselves, as well as other retreaters, can benefit from reading and reflecting on their own experiences and those of others in their circle. Spiritual retreat-goers are often aware of the self-landscape and this thesis provides a tool for self and spiritual reflection.

On an international scale, the benefits and niche qualities of spiritual retreat centres and workshops in New Zealand could be publicized to attract wellness tourists to this country. Wellness tourism is ever expanding as a growing industry and Aotearoa/New Zealand already has a ‘pure’ and ‘green’ image which compliments this niche market.
Future research

While I have not dwelt upon this aspect of wellness tourism, the gendered nature of the wellness industry cannot be denied. This is significant to the topic and was extremely noticeable when conducting fieldwork. Future research might investigate the reasons why women tend to be the most active patrons of the wellness sector.

Also outside the agenda for this research is the consideration of Western, middle class self-care. Wellness practices such as yoga, meditation, and spa visitations are becoming increasingly popular. Tourism is one example where such practices are carried out and holiday packages are designed especially for these consumers. The current preoccupation with self-preservation and self-care is connected to the society in which we live. Studies addressing this area would be of great relevance to many academic fields.

The concept of healing spaces, as addressed in the theories of therapeutic landscapes and salutogenic environments, are topical and hold a lot of value. Future researchers may be interested in the creation of wellness settings beyond the retreat. For example, the environments of urban yoga studios, holistic health clinics, and leisure centres could be analysed to see how a health inducing environment can be constructed and is perceived as so, if so, for those that visit them. This knowledge would add to the growing body of literature concerned with the creation of pleasant and healthy environments incorporated into everyday life.

An aspect of the retreat spaces in this research, which runs concurrent with others identified in previous studies, is the focus on well-being. Holistic well-being is taken into account from the foundations of these settings. This has emphasized for me the disparity between the medicalized Western world and that of more holistic traditions. Retreat spaces hold value not only as alternative places for those inclined to visit them, they should act as prototypes for the creation of healthy and nurturing spaces of our everyday lives such as doctors surgeries, universities and work places.

Ethical retreat spaces represent zones of sociality, positivity, thoughtfulness, care, nourishment, rest, beauty, spirituality, environmentalism and unity. The way buildings are
considerately constructed, the environment is conserved, and people’s well-being is supported, contributes to ideologies surrounding meaningful and respectful living. Retreats offer something to anyone who wishes to be involved with them. In an increasingly demanding, fast-paced and technological world these holistic centres set in nature are becoming increasingly popular as a tourism market niche.
Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview questions

OPEN-ENDED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS WITH RETREAT VISITOR:

Interview with.... Starting at time.... On date......

Before we start, just a note to say thank you for doing this interview with me and please feel at ease when answering my questions. There are no right or wrong answers - I am interested in your ideas and comments above anything else.

- Can you tell me why you chose this retreat centre?

- What does the experience of being on a retreat mean to you?
  - (Do you think that retreat spaces are healing or therapeutic in any way? How?)

- If someone asked you to give your reasons for going on a retreat what would you say?
  - (What difference do you think having this experience will make in your life?)

If the word ‘Spirituality’ arises during the interview so far these questions will follow otherwise I will introduce this topic:

- What does the word 'spirituality' mean to you?

- Is there anything spiritual about this place or being here for you? What?

- Do you consider yourself to be a ‘spiritual’ person?

- Is the retreat somewhere which supports your spiritual practices? How? (In what way do you think that taking part in spiritual practices adds to your wellbeing?)

I’m also interested in visual representations of the retreat:

- If I give you my camera would you please take 3 pictures which depict the most important features of being on this retreat for you?

  - Could you briefly tell me why you chose to take these 3 photos?

  - Do any of these photos link back to your ideas about spirituality?
OPEN-ENDED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS WITH RETREAT EMPLOYEE:

Interview with…. Starting at time…. On date……

Before we start, just a note to say thank you for doing this interview with me and please feel at ease when answering my questions. There is no right or wrong answers I am interested in your ideas and comments above anything else.

- Could you please explain to me what your role here is?
- What does the experience of being on a retreat mean to you?
  - (Do you think that retreat spaces are healing or therapeutic in any way? How?)
- Why do you think people might choose to come to this specific retreat?
- If someone asked you to give your reasons for why you think people may choose to go on a retreat what would you say?
  - (What difference do you think having this experience will make in peoples’ lives?)

Thank you. I now have some questions about spirituality:

- What does the word 'spirituality' mean to you?
- Is there anything spiritual about this place or being here for you? What?
- Do you consider the visitors to Aio Wira/Mana to be ‘spiritual’ people?
- Is the retreat somewhere which supports the visitor’s spiritual practices? How? (In what way do you think that taking part in spiritual practices adds to your wellbeing?)

I’m also interested in visual representations of the retreat:

- If I give you my camera would you please take 3 pictures which depict the most important features of being on this retreat for you?
  - Could you briefly tell me why you chose to take these 3 photos?
  - Do any of these photos link back to your ideas about spirituality?
OPEN-ENDED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS WITH RETREAT MANAGER/TRUSTEE:

Interview with…. Starting at time…. On date……

Before we start, just a note to say thank you for doing this interview with me and please feel at ease when answering my questions. There is no right or wrong answers I am interested in your ideas and comments above anything else.

• Could you please explain to me what your role here is?

• What does the experience of being on a retreat mean to you?
  - (Do you think that retreat spaces are healing or therapeutic in any way? How?)

• Why do you think people might choose to come to this specific retreat?

• If someone asked you to give your reasons for why you think people may choose to go on a retreat what would you say?
  - (What difference do you think having this experience will make in peoples’ lives?)

Thank you. I now have some questions about spirituality:

• What does the word ‘spirituality’ mean to you?

• Is there anything spiritual about this place or being here for you? What?

• Do you consider the visitors to Aio Wira/Mana to be ‘spiritual’ people?

• Is the retreat somewhere which supports the visitor’s spiritual practices? How? (In what way do you think that taking part in spiritual practices adds to your wellbeing?)

I’m also interested in visual representations of the retreat:

• If I give you my camera would you please take 3 pictures which depict the most important features of being on this retreat for you?
  
  • Could you briefly tell me why you chose to take these 3 photos?

  • Do any of these photos link back to your ideas about spirituality?
## Appendix 2: Table displaying the loyalty of visitors to Mana and Aio Wira as specific retreat sites

### Mana:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Comments summary</th>
<th>Positive (+)</th>
<th>Negative (-)</th>
<th>Neutral (0)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Cindy (visitor)     | • Well, this centre has got everything that I need in terms of a place to be completely free (long pause) to do whatever I want to do really  
• If I choose not to be 24/7 involved in the singing workshop I often go up to the sanctuary, sing on my own which is just such a joy, I can go for a walk in the hills, I can sit quietly and read in my room, I can have a sauna, I love the food.  
• I also happen to particularly like people that are at the centre and that manage it you know I have a connection with them because we have a complimentary world view and that permeates down through everything else that goes on there.  
• You know there are so many retreat centres that are just too New Agey and too airy fairy and too old hippie and it just doesn’t feel real whereas the spiritual core of this place is beautifully earth bound and very real, very rooted in everyday life so I really resonate with all of that. | +            | +            |             |
| Ben (visitor)       | • (my first visit) was a fluke  
• as soon as I got here I knew this place was different. There is something like um… leaving the smog of Auckland and coming into clean air.  
• when I come back… when you drive in the gate it’s like you’ve left the smog behind… things are more in perspective here. | 0            | +            | +           |
| Eden (workshop facilitator) | • every weekend there is something else on offer so people might choose a topic  
• If a person is needing of change they will find it here due to the intensity of the amount of sessions they will do in this specific beautiful environment | 0            | +            |             |
| Trinity (trustee)   | • it’s actually become a spiritual home to many people  
• The beauty of the place  
• the friendliness of the staff and the people that work here is quite awesome. | +            | +            | +           |
It’s just beautiful and I mean there’s a number of lovely centres’ in New Zealand but of course this is my favourite! (laughs)
• it has all sorts of ingredients (extensive list follows)
• it’s an exceptionally sacred site.

Because I think it’s one of the most beautiful in the world. I’ve been to a lot of retreat centres around the world and they’re all lovely and they all have different energies – I think Mana’s particularly exquisite.
• Some retreat centres have more of a one emphasis and very consciously by design Mana is a very expansive place
• Mana is very deliberately built where it is with the main building and the Sanctuary to open and expand. A lot of other retreat centres are very contained and held and you feel like you’re in a womb. Mana’s very different to that as you can tell it’s very open

Total:
Positive comments affirming loyalty specifically to Mana: 5/5 people (20 comments +)
Negative comments rejecting loyalty specifically to Mana: 0/5 people (0 comments)
Indifferent comments about loyalty to Mana: 2/5 people discussed neutral reasons for people visiting Mana initially but continued on to describe a loyalty to Mana specifically (2 comments)

Aio Wira:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Comments summary</th>
<th>Positive (+)</th>
<th>Negative (-)</th>
<th>Neutral (0)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laura (visitor)</td>
<td>• It was suggested by my yoga teacher and we’ve been coming here for several years now and it’s a yearly weekend we do to get some additional teaching</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monica (visitor)</td>
<td>• It wasn’t a choice of why to come here it was more because of the course that was given here.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John (visitor)</td>
<td>• because of what was going on here and my wife has been here I think two or three times before and I’ve gradually been getting involved with the yoga and so I decided to come with her this time. So it’s specific to the program that is going on that’s why we come to Aio Wira.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda (workshop)</td>
<td>• Well it’s lovely here! (laughs) you’d be silly not to (laughs).</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
facilitator) | • I mean it’s a very beautiful spot that was one of the reasons why we choose it.  
Maree (trustee) | • Word of mouth I should imagine people hear of the place.  
• There are other places that are probably more flash.  
• If you just want something that’s nice, not too elaborate, and something quiet would suit you, this is the place.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Totals:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive comments affirming loyalty specifically to Aio Wira: 2/5 people (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative comments rejecting loyalty specifically to Aio Wira: 0/5 people (0 comments)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indifferent comments about loyalty to Aio Wira: 3/5 people (5 comments)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix 3: Definitions of spirituality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name and description of interviewee</th>
<th>Answers to the question “What does the word spirituality mean to you?”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cindy (retreat-goer and Worker Bee at Mana)</td>
<td>Oh shit! That’s like asking someone what religion means! (laughs, I know! It’s a big question!) I <em>hate</em> that question. Well, it’s um (pause) I’ll give you my drop out answer! (laughs) which is it’s indefinable, which is why it’s my spiritual being because it’s an indefinable <em>thing</em>. (pause) The only thing I can say that’s a little bit sane is that it’s a deep connection with the earth and that’s what bought be back to New Zealand, it certainly wasn’t the people. It’s a connection with some very powerful energy that the earth holds in New Zealand and so my spirituality is an earth-based spirituality (great. That was a really good definition, there you go!) Oh good, I’ll try and remember it for next time (yeah! Just in case anyone asks.) Yeah, if they do!!! (laughs).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben (retreat-goer and Worker Bee at Mana)</td>
<td>(pause) Another positive force. Force sounds heavy so I’m trying to think of another word to replace it... it’s an influence... perhaps (yeah I know what you mean about the word force um like something else like you mean there’s something else?) force is like heavy, heavy (forceful?) pushy. No it’s not like that at all. It’s um (pause) tranquil. Yep.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eden (workshop facilitator Mana)</td>
<td>Ok the spirit... the spirit... you can look at the spirit as an essence of the divine within you like a spark, the soul, um... so we have the physical body, the emotional, the mental and the spiritual um selves so a higher self which is us which we can connect with or deny but it’s there! And we all have that spark which is what connects all human beings. It has many ways of ah being expressed but its lying there within us, um, so we can find it through breath work through just being quiet in meditation or people find it through prayer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol (retreat manager at Mana)</td>
<td>(pause) Being connected to something greater than your just personality self that interfaces with the daily business of life so something greater that can mean as many different things to many different people. It’s beyond the ordinary daily personality, yeah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinity (retreat trustee at Mana)</td>
<td>(pause) mmm... that’s a very big question! Mmmm... Well... spirituality to me means recognizing that there’s nothing separate. All life is one, all life is connected into being interdependent and so we can no longer live a life that believes in separation like that I am any different from you and that we’re not connected. Can’t buy that anymore! Spirituality, it to me is the recognition that um we’re all in this together and that we all come from the same web, the same energy field and just as the wave is not separate from the ocean we are the ocean and we can’t any longer think of ourselves just as the wave because the wave just rises up and falls back into the ocean. Spirituality for me is recognizing the oceanic part of our...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
being, the vastness, the incredible truth that all life is connected and that we have a responsibility to live in a way that honors that, supports that, and helps other beings to awaken to that because I think *everybody* on some level is longing to wake up to who they really are and to me spirituality is waking up to who we really are, *living* that not just speaking about it but really living it looking at *all* aspects of our lives um you know like you know like it says in the Bible ‘every stone has to be overturned and looked under’ it doesn’t mean that we’re just spiritual when we do yoga or when we sit and meditate it actually means we have to look at our whole life – where are we not in full integrity? – and you know, clean up our act really! Because um, the planet isn’t gonna change unless we transform ourselves so um spirituality is taking responsibility of um our part and not blaming anybody else for the way things are but recognizing that *we can change!* And when we change, we’re connected to everything so *everything* can change with us.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laura (retreat-goer at Aio Wira)</th>
<th>(pause) For me I think it’s a belief there is something out there, there’s something of a higher power you know some energies. Something I don’t know I’m a sort of destroyed Catholic so after I deciphered my Catholic upbringing which I thought was quite detrimental in the whole you know to believe in the God thing. But with spirituality it’s the person and sometimes you still think that you see things, things happen that are not explainable and just it’s more like the gut really! It’s almost like a gut feeling and you suddenly just sort of trust and you don’t know what you trust but... I can’t explain it really well I guess but I just know something is out there, no particular somebody but I don’t know some spirits, something.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monica (retreat-goer at Aio Wira)</td>
<td>(pause) it means, that’s a difficult one, it could be anything, but it means in touch with nature. It can be spiritual, in touch with other people, and it’s really the contact I think the connection. It could be in your daily living you’ll be in touch as well with other people but it could be sort of more superficial or more factual. And to have a spiritual connection seems to be a higher level, a deeper level, a level maybe where you can... what seems to add more to life than just the facts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John (retreat-goer at Aio Wira)</td>
<td>(pause) a belief that there’s something higher than me or really anything on earth and certainly a lot higher than churches (laugh Michael) I don’t consider churches spiritual. There may be a few people <em>in</em> the churches but in general no spirituality is very much a personal thing, a personal connection between the physical me and the source, my higher self, that we’re connected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda (workshop facilitator at Aio Wira).</td>
<td>Crikey, that’s a bit of a whopper innit? (laugh Kate). Spirituality is life itself. From the manifest form right through to the cosmic sublime unmanifest. All those things put together as a unit and that’s what yoga’s all about.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maree (retreat trustee at Aio Wira)</td>
<td>(pause) well, nature or atmosphere. Not anything religious no idols, no icons, no idolizing anything or anybody. It’s just the aura, the feeling and that’s around you.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of references


Clark, Martin. 2010. *Om Yoga and Lifestyle*, May/June, back cover.


Fliers


Anahata Yoga Retreat flier. Spring 2007. Anahata Yoga Retreat [Obtained from participant at Mana retreat].

Anahata Yoga Retreat flier. 2011. Transformation of the Mind through Yoga. [Obtained from participant at Mana retreat.]

Mana retreat flier. 2011. Mana Retreat [Obtained from Mana retreat].