

Pilgrimage, Tourism and Secular Religion/Spirituality: Realizing the Project of the Self Through Travel

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Abstract

This article explores the cultural commodity of travel and the mythology of transformation which surrounds it. This article does not claim travel to be a religion but instead highlights its capacities to be religious in certain forms; pilgrimage, spiritual tourism and voluntourism/wellness tourism.

Keywords: Ecotourism, Pilgrimage, Water, Travel, Volunteer, Tourism.

Introduction

Travel is cultural capital.¹ In the contemporary world travel is a commodity with the potential to be transformative for the individual, while facilitating an interesting division between the individual and his or her home society, and the formation of new, global citizens, of a new global society. This article will demonstrate that travel is not a secular or civil religious form *per se*, but rather it has the capacity to be religious in a traditional form (pilgrimage), to facilitate self-transformation and assist in the construction of meaning (spiritual tourism), and to offer opportunities for secular self-development which are experienced as powerful by travelers (voluntourism, gap year travel, and wellness tourism). Travel encompasses aspects of the 'civil', notably economic contributions to the destination cultures, in addition to being a way to alter the boundaries of lived communities. To illustrate the economic force of tourism, the World Tourism Organisation noted that in 2007 tourism (and therefore travel or human mobility, which is the essential element in all forms of tourism and pilgrimage alike) contributed as one twelfth of world trade and 10% of global employment.² Aspects of travel such as personal transformation, spiritual experiences, and visits to 'special' places identify travel as a potentially secular religious or spiritual form.

As a geographically isolated landmass, Australia's relationship with travel is particularly complex. From the colonial explorers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (portrayed in national mythology such as Patrick White's 1957 novel *Voss*) to today's 'Grey Nomads', domestic tourism has always been overshadowed by international tourism.³ This is partially due to the coupling of a colonial heritage that emphasized Britain (and Europe more broadly) as 'home', and the Australian 'cultural cringe' which, when augmented by the contemporary instant information and communication technologies, results in an increased desire for international travel and experiences. This desire is wrapped up in a rhetoric of

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¹ Cultural capital is accrued through, generally, non-financial assets (albeit often gained through a positive financial status) such as travel, experiencing art or music or a certain level of education.

² World Tourism Organization, *UNWTO world tourism barometer*, vol. 5, no. 2 (2007), 1–9.

³ Patrick White, *Voss* (New York: Knopf, 1957).

adventure, authenticity and spirituality; travel is promoted as an opportunity to explore, to experience but also, and most importantly for this article, an opportunity to evolve, improve and change the self into something better.⁴

This article introduces three case studies that examine, respectively: pilgrimage to a traditional shrine; and travel in search of meaning (and potentially spirituality) in the international and the domestic sphere. The first addresses a recognizable form of pilgrimage in Lourdes, France. The second is a brief study of gap years as avenues for, primarily younger and predominantly affluent, Westerners to escape their familiar surroundings before working or continuing study. The third case study, a second examination of domestic travel, focuses on the niche industry of wellness tourism, using as case study an Australian wellness ‘retreat’ investigating what this facility chooses to identify with and the testimonies of their visitors.

Method

This article focuses on travel as a secular religious or spiritual experience for individuals and groups. The work of anthropologist Victor Turner on pilgrimage and the centre, and the ‘phenomenological’ model of tourism modes developed by sociologist Erik Cohen, Alex Norman’s notion of the varieties of spiritual tourism, and the research of Michael Stausberg on religion and tourism are employed as interpretive lenses through which to view travel phenomena. First, Victor Turner’s concept of liminality (the concept of liminal space as the inbetween; the individual exits one social space but before they enter the next) and travel focuses on the upheaval of ordinary or known social conventions or codes allowing the individual space to reorient their self in an unrecognisable environment.⁵ This liminality, which occurs as part of the deliberate removal of the pilgrim/tourist from his or her profane existence, also allows the formation of *communitas* amongst people who may not otherwise bond together.⁶ The journey from everyday life to a site that holds a particularly central significance or which actively facilitates transformation is a classic form of pilgrimage, and the individual on returning home, is formed anew and has a changed status in the community.⁷ This change in the self may be both conscious and unconscious; while some may travel with the very purpose of nurturing the spirit, to develop a knowledge of the self which facilitates an ‘engagement with the world’s needs in an authentic’ way, or learning more about empathy and ethics through a gap year some are simply transformed by the liminal experience.⁸ Drawing on Turner’s 1973 work, “The Centre out There: The Pilgrim’s Goal,” the idea of an individual’s chosen ‘centre’ (a spiritual core, whether religious or cultural, which symbolises ultimate

⁴ To illustrate the rhetoric of authentic experiences and exploration an advert for TravelPlanet.com reads; ‘You Travel with your mind every day, Wouldn’t it be nice if your body could follow?’, *The Syndicate*, Santorini Advertisement, Athens, Greece (2008). At: https://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/travel_planet_24_santorini.

⁵ Ellen Badone and Sharon R. Roseman (eds), *Intersecting Journeys: Approaches to the Anthropology of Pilgrimages and Tourism* (Chicago University of Illinois Press, 2004), p. 3. See also Victor Turner, ‘Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage’, in *Betwixt and Between: Patterns of Masculine and Feminine Initiation*, eds. Louise Carus Mahdi, Steven Foster and Meredith Little (La Salle: Open Court, 1994), pp. 3-22.

⁶ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New Brunswick: AldineTransaction, 1969).

⁷ Jamie Lynn Noyd, *Exploring Literary Pilgrimage: Interpreting Literature at the Intersection of Story, Place and Reader*, Union Institute and University, Cincinnati)PhD. Dissertation, 2007), p. 7.

⁸ Mary De Jong, ‘Journeying with Intention, Part 3: Returning Home’, *A Sacred Journey* (2013). At: <http://www.asacredjourney.net/2013/07/mary-dejong-3/>

meanings and dictates attitudes and behaviours) is employed in the analysis of gap years and wellness tourism.⁹

Expanding on this simple pilgrim-liminality-sacred site model, Erik Cohen discusses levels of authenticity in the tourist experience, working off Turner's understanding of the centre as that which gives structure to a journey and a nexus for moral values.¹⁰ Cohen explores the idea that tourism has a structure to its variety; it is recreational, diversionary, experiential, experimental, and/or existential.¹¹ The most relevant modes are the experiential, experimental, and existential, as the first two concern travellers or tourists who are committed to their home 'centre' and merely are diverted or entertained by visiting other places and cultures. The Experiential mode involves the rejection of the perceived meaninglessness of daily life and involves a quest for meaning situated in a search for experiences and authenticity, the latter of which is available only to those who actively break the mould of the drudgery of daily life.¹² The Experimental mode is a mode of continual seeking stemming from a disassociation from the spiritual centre of their own society and a search for an alternative that fits them, this attitude may become habitual and seeking may exclude the possibility of committing to a centre.¹³ The Existential mode is similar to religious conversion and involves the individual committing long term to a spiritual centre external to his native society and culture.¹⁴

Alex Norman's "The Varieties of the Spiritual Tourist Experience" provides a cohesive and clear approach to spiritual tourism, which is "characterised by an intentional search for spiritual benefit that coincides with religious practices."¹⁵ Norman identifies five purposes of spiritual tourism; healing, experiment, quest, retreat, and spiritual tourism as collective.¹⁶ In this article, the gap year most closely matches quest and experiment, and wellness tourism healing and retreat. Michael Stausberg's *Religion and Tourism* seeks to explore the portability of religious tendency, the relationship between tourism and pilgrimage, and how religious sites or experiences may be altered when used primarily as tourist attractions. Stausberg's overview of wellness (or holistic) tourism which offers body, mind and spirit balance, provides a self-constructed centre through which to approach the world.¹⁷ The wellness tourism industry has the advantage of providing a constructed experience which may reduce distance a client needs to travel which makes them more accessible to many and yet at the same time isolates a large number of people who lack the resources required to experience the facility. All these methodologists are concerned with travel, the journey, desired places, and self-transformation. At a basic level, Turner, Cohen, Norman, and Stausberg are concerned with experiences that arise from journeying. Anthropologist Roger Abrahams notes that 'experience' is a new 'holy'

⁹ Victor Turner, 'The Centre out There: Pilgrim's Goal', *History of Religions*, vol. 12, no. 3 (1973), pp. 191-230. Erik Cohen, 'A Phenomenology of Tourist Experience', *Sociology* 17 (1979), p. 181.

¹⁰ Cohen, 'A Phenomenology of Tourist Experience', p. 180.

¹¹ Cohen, 'A Phenomenology of Tourist Experience', p. 183.

¹² Cohen, 'A Phenomenology of Tourist Experience', p. 186.

¹³ Cohen, 'A Phenomenology of Tourist Experience', p. 189.

¹⁴ Cohen, 'A Phenomenology of Tourist Experience', p. 191.

¹⁵ Alex Norman, 'The Varieties of the Spiritual Tourist Experience', *Literature & Aesthetics*, vol. 22 no. 1 (2012), pp. 20-37.

Michael Stausberg, *Religion and Tourism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), p. 26.

¹⁶ Norman, 'The Varieties of the Spiritual Tourist Experience', pp. 28-33.

¹⁷ Stausberg, *Religion and Tourism*, p. 133.

word in contemporary social sciences, implying newness, salvation and renewal.¹⁸ This 'experience' is regarded as separate from the profanity of everyday life, which is associated with dull work, inauthenticity, and an inability to develop a true 'self.' According to Charles Taylor, a 'true self' is a person who understands where they are oriented in moral space, in addition to what is trivial and what is important.¹⁹ Thus the 'true self' signifies a level of spiritual development.

Pilgrimage to Water Sites

The links between travel and pilgrimage (as one of travels earliest forms) is well documented.²⁰ Particularly relevant to my focus on wellness tourism and gap years are ideas of sites of healing and sites of self-transformation as well as examples of secular religion. The overlap of religion and the ordinary can be found in localized, domestic travel. It may be very ordinary, in countries such as India and Nepal, to pass local shrines to deities such as Shiva and Tara. These shrines make the religious space more accessible to a greater number of people without requiring the sacrifice of time and resources to visit larger but more geographically distant religious sites.²¹

Traditional pilgrimage sites, and the following secular travel case studies, have a number of linking thematics which manifest in the lives of travellers, similar to religious experiences incorporating a sense of awe and a transformation of the self. Water is a primary thematic in the case studies discussed in this article. Pilgrimage sites that pertain to water vary from: the explicitly religious sites of water pilgrimage such as Walsingham in England, Lourdes in France, the Ganges River in India; to culturally significant sites such as Esalen at Big Sur, California and Bath, England. Many of the bodies of water at these sites are imbued with healing powers making them magnets for the faithful, the desperate, and the merely curious.

Water is the life source of the human race. Elusive in many areas of the world from desert, to drought stricken farmland to slums water can be the ultimate focus of many who struggle the world over.²² Therefore a water site automatically has certain significance to a local community, and shrines constructed at these sites become focus points for the local (and perhaps national or global) community, imbued with healing powers and mythical significance. The composition of water allows it to expand and fill whatever space it occupies; in this way it could be seen to operate like religion which influences and fills the human experience of its adherents, additionally water has been utilised in various traditions to represent a spiritual thirst. Certainly in the Christian Bible the ritual of baptism purifies the individual and a sates of their spiritual thirst. In John 4: 1-42 Jesus stops at a well in Samaria to drink and asks a

¹⁸ Aimee Mathews, 'Backpacking as a Contemporary Rite of Passage' in *Victor Turner and Contemporary Cultural Performance*, ed. Graham St John (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008), p. 176.

¹⁹ Ruth Abbey, *Charles Taylor* (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 180.

²⁰ Phil Cousineau, *The Art of Pilgrimage: The Seeker's Guide to Making Travel Sacred* (San Francisco, CA: Conari Press, 1998).

²¹ Robert Pigott, 'Are British Muslims being priced out of pilgrimages?' *BBC Online*, 15 November (2010). At: <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-11749511>

²² An article discussing the lack of clean water in slums illustrates urban water crisis; see 'Water: Slums in Crisis', *IRIN*, 23 March (2010). At: <http://www.irinnews.org/report/88533/water-slums-in-crisis>.

woman to help him. He tells her God provides the living water and once one has drunk of the Living Water they will never be thirsty again. It will “become in them a fountain of water which bubbles up to eternal life.”²³

Case Study 1: Traditional Intersections of Travel, Religion and Water: Lourdes

The southern French shrine, Lourdes, has been a destination for Catholics since the Virgin Mary appeared to a young local girl, Bernadette Soubirous, in 1858.²⁴ Lourdes operates in this article as a case study on a traditionally religious site based around water, specifically water as a healing force from a local spring at which the Virgin Mary appeared. The pilgrim may be submerged in the water, drink the water or bottle it the latter of which provides a take away experience that allow the physical aspect of the pilgrimage to return home with the traveler.²⁵ By providing an overview of how Lourdes operates as a destination for spiritual tourism this case study will provide an exemplar for the attitudes identified in the following two case studies. Lourdes is a case study which exemplifies Turner’s understanding of liminality. Travelers and pilgrims who visit Lourdes do so temporarily, they journey for Lourdes for a specific liminal experience with the goal to transforming the body and mind.

It is not just Catholics who make up the temporary *communitas* at Lourdes. Regular Lourdes volunteer Lloyd Murphy wrote that “Believers, non-believers ... gay, straight, we all come together as a team, for one week of the year to help these sick pilgrims. Religion or personal beliefs does not come into it.”²⁶ Even a large number of pilgrims are non-believers travelling to experience some of the positive emotion of awe which may, according to Patty Van Cappellan and Vassilis Saroglou, trigger religious and spiritual feelings.²⁷ Host of the PBS series *Sacred Journeys*, Bruce Feiler, produced a 2014 episode on a group of wounded active duty and retired US military travelling to Lourdes.²⁸ Feiler notes that although numbers in organized religion are dwindling the number of pilgrims is more than 200 million a year. The soldiers in this episode include the faithful, skeptics and non-believers who travel with the hope that Lourdes will provide spiritual and emotional healing for their various ailments including PTSD. This is true to Murphy’s claim that the journey is “not just about ‘the cure’ or having a Lourdes bath.”²⁹ By sharing in Turner’s *communitas* these soldiers are able to relate to each other and experience the comfort facilitated and inspired by their presence in Lourdes. These soldiers seek a journey of peace, reconciliation and self-acceptance which Marlene Watkins

²³ John 4: 1-42.

²⁴ Wil Gesler, ‘Lourdes: Healing in a Place of Pilgrimage’, *Health and Place*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1996), p. 95.

²⁵ ‘Catholic Gift Shop - Lourdes Water’, *Direct from Lourdes*. At: www.directfromlourdes.com/lourdes_water_gifts.

²⁶ Lloyd Murphy, ‘A lot of people miss the point of Lourdes – its about faith but also about fun’, *The Journal*, 20 September (2013). At: <http://www.thejournal.ie/readme/my-lourdes-experience-faith-fun-and-charity-1092241-Sep2013/>.

This idea is also explored at length in Ruth Harris, *Lourdes: Body and Spirit in the Secular Age*, (London: Allen Lane, 1999).

²⁷ Patty Van Cappellan and Vassilis Saroglou, ‘Awe Activates Religious and Spiritual Feelings and Behavioural Intentions’, *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, vol. 4, no. 3 (2012), p. 223.

²⁸ Bruce Feiler, ‘Lourdes’, *PBS – Sacred Journeys*, 18 June (2015). At: <https://youtu.be/Ga7QTHhh3ZI?si=E5--fNXzK3FXEELX>.

²⁹ Murphy, ‘A lot of people miss the point of Lourdes – it’s about faith but also about fun’.

(Founder of the North American Lourdes Volunteers) says stays with them upon their departure.³⁰

Lourdes allows for a community to be formed, based on hope from a place of pain and a belief in the possibility of transformation associated with that particular site. Whether religious or not travelers are likely to experience an awareness of awe from combined experience of journeying, the energy of religious fervor around them and the historical mythology surrounding a power based in faith, community and water.

Case Study 2: In Search of the Self/ The Transforming Gap Year

Aimee Mathews determined that the motivation for an individual to embark on a gap year is often centered on a desire for experiential learning.³¹ Cohen refers to a postmodern sense that the 'centre is a quest for the purpose of...life' in this way the spiritual centre is dedicated to the project of self-discovery.³² Therefore, by pushing the perceived boundaries of the personal experience these, frequently young, individuals seek a greater understanding of their selves and their own capacity for self-directed fluidity and development. While many choose to travel the continents of Europe or Asia an increasing number of youth (predominantly from the USA, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) are becoming involved in volunteer tourism (Voluntourism), a subset of the ethical tourism movement which challenges mass tourism.

The rhetoric of Voluntourism advertises an opportunity to foster and develop global social responsibility, opportunities for adventure and an experience of the strange and novel. Voluntourism appeals to those who seek 'purpose' and 'meaning' in their travel, demonstrating a desire for more than commercial holiday packages and searching for experiential learning and authenticity in all aspects of life including leisure.³³ The volunteer tourist experience is increasingly conceptualized as an opportunity that moves the tourist beyond the outsider experience and facilitates their residence in, and contribution to, a new community. This fosters ideas of mutual benefit for host community and tourist.³⁴ The movement from outsider to an experience, if only constructed, as an insider allows tourists to experience mobility and a sense of renewed personal satisfaction stemming from a perception of personal devotion towards global citizenship and community.

The activities of Voluntourism are varied but many voluntourists are deployed to teach or to build infrastructure.³⁵ This is supposed to facilitate mutual benefit by developing the skills of the tourists and providing for the host communities. Problems arise as young western tourists commonly lack the skills required to make a valuable contribution to the community or build effective infrastructure.³⁶ Gap Year provider Projects Abroad is one organization that encourages volunteer infrastructure building facilitating a solar pump project with BridgIT in Tanzania, providing clean water to communities while allowing for volunteers to take notice

³⁰ Murphy, 'A lot of people miss the point of Lourdes – it's about faith but also about fun'.

³¹ Mathews, 'Backpacking as a Contemporary Rite of Passage', p. 174.

³² Cohen, 'A Phenomenology of Tourist Experience', p. 182.

³³ Cohen, 'A Phenomenology of Tourist Experience', p. 182.

³⁴ Kevin Lyons, Joanne Hanley, Stephen Wearing and Joh Neil, 'Gap Year Volunteer Tourism: Myths of Global Citizenship?', *Annals of Tourism Research*, vol. 39, no. 1 (2012), p. 368.

³⁵ Lyons et al. 'Gap Year Volunteer Tourism: Myths of Global Citizenship?', p. 367.

³⁶ Lyons et al. 'Gap Year Volunteer Tourism: Myths of Global Citizenship?', p. 368.

of the differences they have helped create.³⁷ On the other end of the volunteer spectrum environmental projects such as Coral Cay Conservation allow young people to foster a responsibility for their world by helping to preserve “threatened [marine] ecosystems” in the Philippines or the Caribbean.³⁸ This type of project can be interpreted as a way to atone for the sins of humanity against the earth.

One criticism, levelled by Harng Luh Sin is that “many volunteer tourists are typically more interested in fulfilling objectives relating to the ‘self.’”³⁹ Certainly the western project of the self is increasingly focused on, as Moskowitz writes, the sacrality of feelings and a salvation based in self-esteem.⁴⁰ Consequently Voluntourists may be more concerned with the long term goal of improving their own prospects, Martin Stevenson recalls contacting Oxfam aged 17 and asking if they needed anyone to ‘dig a well or build something’ the response was “We can give a local person a wage to do that. Call us back when you’ve finished your degree,” however since then the voluntourism industry has grown exponentially and generally paying their way will earn travelers a ‘socially responsible’ experience.⁴¹

Case Study 3: Domestic Wellness Tourism in Australia: Spa Culture

Michael Stausberg situates health resorts and spas as an intermediary sector between medicine and medical tourism.⁴² Olivia Newton John has made an unconventional move from actress to spa owner, Gaia Retreat, co-founded by John in 2005, is centred around a large salt water pool and nestled in the Byron Bay hinterland; a location that is already a hotbed of travellers and those interested in alternative therapies, new age and pagan traditions.⁴³ Gaia Retreat is a multimillion dollar spa facility which requires significant resources to access; the Revive Package which includes 2 nights’ accommodation, meals and snacks, a 1 hour massage, gift pack, two 90 minute yoga sessions, use of facilities and daily retreat activities the cheapest room will set a customer back \$1,145 and the most expensive comes in at \$3,100.⁴⁴ Its board of directors (Gregg Cave, Ruth Kalnin, Olivia Newton-John, and Warwick Evans) collectively call themselves ‘G.R.O.W’ and identify a goal to create a space of the ‘heart’ which facilitates focus, rebalance and restoration of the individual by encouraging a retreat from the day to day drudgery to a liminal space of relaxation and transformation.

Gaia Retreat is an interesting amalgam of religious tradition and neo-paganism. The name Gaia is in reference to the Greek goddess of the earth, the retreat claims to be able to ‘seduce you to drift into infinity with spectacular views and unsurpassed, natural, sustainable

³⁷ ‘Conservation, Education & Health Projects’, *BridGIT Water Foundation* (2021). At: <https://www.bridgitwater.org/water-projects-tanzania>.

³⁸ ‘Volunteer’, *Coral Cay Conservation*. At: <http://www.coralcay.org/volunteer/>

³⁹ Harng Luh Sin, ‘Volunteer tourism—“Involve me and I will learn”’, *Annals of Tourism Research*, vol. 36, no. 3 (2009), p. 497.

⁴⁰ Eva S. Moskowitz, ‘Introduction’, *In Therapy We Trust: America’s Obsession with Self-Fulfilment* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001).

⁴¹ Martin Stevenson, ‘Is Voluntourism Helping the Right People?’, *GapYear.com* (2015). At: <https://www.gapyear.com/articles/208112/is-Voluntourism-helping-the-right-people>

⁴² Stausberg, *Religion and Tourism*, 131.

⁴³ Gaia Retreat, *Home*. At: <http://gaiaretreat.com.au/>

⁴⁴ Gaia Retreat, *Revive Package*. At: <http://gaiaretreat.com.au/retreat-packages/retreat-packages/revive-package-2-nights/>

design' using the natural, earthly environment as a space for visitors to sink deeper into their heart centres.⁴⁵ This language brings to mind the thinking of Cohen and Turner on the individual's centre.

Online testimonials of Gaia include a number of celebrities and high ranking business officials. One such review by Terri Irwin, wife of deceased zookeeper Steve Irwin and a minor celebrity in her own right, discusses Gaia as a 'life changing experience' (an example of the experimental mode) which allowed an 'escape' from life's pressures (the experiential mode), soothed the body and soul and was healing (an example of Norman's spiritual tourism as healing).⁴⁶ Irwin even bestows upon Gaia a compliment which isn't really hers to bestow, and calls it Nirvana or Paradise.

Adding another layer to Gaia's confusion of religious and spiritual traditions is the Samira Yoga Hill which is the highest point in the Ballina shire area. The webpage providing information on the hill is titled 'Samira Yoga Lookout: Wind of God and Breeze' presumably referring to the Sanskrit meaning of Samira which is a gentle cool breeze on a summer day.⁴⁷ Sanskrit is the liturgical language of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism and consequently the mixing pot of traditions expands even further.⁴⁸ The Samira Hill sports a large statue of Buddha which, though its presence is unexplained, presumably illustrates the connection of Buddhism and meditation and yoga practices. Although yoga is a Hindu tradition, Buddhism, with its significant commercial sway of Buddhism in the western spiritual marketplace, has incorporated yoga into its meditative teachings.⁴⁹ To sum up the ethos of awe and spirituality at the retreat is a statement from Gaia's Chief Operations manager who declares that "at Gaia we treasure the natural beauty of this sacred land as a gift from nature, we are truly blessed." This observation returns full circle to the idea of Gaia mother of the earth. It also fits in with ecological themes present in religions such as Jainism and Buddhism.⁵⁰ The land on which the Gaia retreat is situated on land that holds significant attachment for the Indigenous Bundjalung women who would come to the areas lakes to "give birth and wash in the medicinal waters."⁵¹ Retreat owner Gregg Cave said in an interview that it is the energy of the land which makes Gaia special and that the Indigenous history of the land 'contributes to the deep healing' work at the retreat.⁵² This is a strange situation somewhere between occupation of the land of Australia's first peoples and a deep respect for its natural history and power. Aside from the political issues this incorporation of Indigenous spirituality is yet another tradition to add to the mix at Gaia.

⁴⁵ William Smith, 'Gaea', *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology*; Gaia Retreat.

⁴⁶ Cohen, 'A Phenomenology of Tourist Experience', pp. 186, 189. See also: Norman, 'The Varieties of the Spiritual Tourist Experience', p. 28.

⁴⁷ 'Samira', *Project Gutenberg*. At: <http://self.gutenberg.org/articles/samira>

⁴⁸ Mahāwittayālai Sinlapākōṇ, *Sanskrit in Southeast Asia: the harmonising factor of cultures: proceedings of papers at the International Sanskrit Conference on Sanskrit in Southeast Asia* (Bangkok: Sanskrit Studies Centre Silpakorn University, 2003), p. 32.

⁴⁹ Michael Stone, *Freeing the Body, Freeing the Mind*, (London: Shambhala, 2010), p. 227.

⁵⁰ Allan Hunt Badiner, *Dharma Gaia: A Harvest of Articles in Buddhism and Ecology* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1990), p. xiv.

⁵¹ Thanh-Thy Tiffany Tran, 'How Byron Bay Should be Seen: With an Indigenous Elder', *adventure.com*, 4 July (2021). At: <https://adventure.com/indigenous-elder-byron-bay-road-trip/>.

⁵² Nancy Gould Chudha, 'Gaia Retreat and Spa wins top International Honours in Australia', *Huffington Post*, 1 October (2015). At: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/luxeco-living/gaia-retreat-and-spa-wins_b_8218000.html?ir=Australia.

TripAdvisor reviewer Kate N. wrote that her third treatment at Gaia was “simply life changing, As if the first two were just scraping away my 'busy layers'. I was more centred for the third treatment. And boy, did that open me up for (sic.) pleasure journey!” Kate’s language candidly aligns with Cohen and Turner’s concept of the centre which is the key to the individual’s journey and references the transformative nature of experiential travel.⁵³ Although the experience at Gaia is constructed for the consumer and yet the experience does not fit neatly in Cohen’s ‘recreational’ mode, like the thermalists referenced by Cohen those who attend the spa believe in the recuperative and restorative powers and therefore are open to receiving the anticipated value.⁵⁴ The spiritual tourist does not simply journey to Gaia but journeys in their time at Gaia through the smorgasbord of religious and spiritual traditions on offer, in this way the traveller is encouraged to be an experimental seeker but runs the risk, as Cohen warns, to be never content unless on the search for the elusive self (or a centre) and a format of life which elicits an appealing resonance with the individual.⁵⁵

Conclusion

Discussion of the explicitly religious travel experience of Lourdes, and the spiritual undertones of Voluntourism alongside the overt spiritual emphasis of wellness retreats, has positioned travel as a form of secular religion. Elements that point towards this comparison include an individual determination and willingness to undertake a journey with faith invested in its positive outcome, a sense of social responsibility and, perhaps most importantly, prosletysing about the experience upon return (this acts as advertising both for the organising company and for the individual). The intent of the tourist or traveller is fundamental to the transformation that may occur, although a wellness retreat may be highly constructed in a manner that would trivialise it in the eyes of Cohen, the traveller may still encounter the same transformative experience regardless because that is what they seek. The 1970’s scholarship of Cohen and Turner discuss Tourism and Religion as separate forces but the more recent work of Norman and Stausberg introduces Tourism and Religion as subtle and nuanced. Its important to acknowledge that, although tourism is not a replacement of the religious pilgrimage but more an interpretation of such, that the ability of secular experiences like travel to take on spiritual and religious import and, similarly, for the spiritual and sacred (such as yoga and meditation) to be embraced in the secular sphere. This demonstrates the centrality and fluidity of religious practice in a world balancing secularity and religiosity and the possibility of secular traditions such as travelling to be inherently religious.

⁵³ Kate N., ‘Blew My Mind’, *TripAdvisor*, October (2015). At: http://www.tripadvisor.com.au/ShowUserReviews-g1556977-d554908-r321033424-Gaia_Retreat_Spa-Brooklet_New_South_Wales.html.

⁵⁴ Cohen, ‘A Phenomenology of Tourist Experience’, pp. 183-184.

⁵⁵ Cohen, ‘A Phenomenology of Tourist Experience’, p. 189.