

## Outdoor Adventure Tourism: Exploring the Spiritual Dimension of Wellness

Christy Bidder

Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Sabah Campus,  
Malaysia

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v8-i16/5420>

DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v8-i16/5420

**Published Date:** 31 December 2018

### Abstract

This study explored the spiritual dimension of wellness within the context of outdoor adventure tourism. Specifically, it analyzed the definition of the term spiritual as it was understood by participants of outdoor adventure tourism and examined the ways by which engaging in outdoor adventure tourism could promote spiritual wellbeing. For a definition of the term spiritual, qualitative data was collected and analyzed using the conventional approach of thematic analysis. For ways by which outdoor adventure tourism evoked spiritual experiences, quantitative data were collected and analyzed using both descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis. The findings of the study confirmed some previous researchers' notion that defining the term spiritual was moving away from religiosity and toward secularism. It was also discovered that it was the settings of outdoor adventure tourism that had significantly contributed to the spiritual experiences of ineffability, connectedness, overcoming limits, timelessness, and sense of new meaning, which could potentially contribute to the participants' eudaimonic growth as the experiences were more than the hedonistic adrenaline rush or pleasure seeking. It was hoped that the findings of the study could contribute to the current literature of wellness tourism by examining the phenomenon from a perspective that went beyond the traditional wellness activities such as spas, meditation retreats, health resorts and medical interventions, and with a focus on the less-researched dimension of wellness tourism.

**Keywords:** Wellness Tourism; Spiritual; Outdoor Adventure; Wellbeing; Eudaimonic Growth

### Introduction

Although wellness tourism has emerged to become one of the fastest, profitable segments of the tourism industry, defining it is still very difficult due to the fragmented and diverse nature of wellness tourism (Laing & Weiler, 2008; Sheldon & Bushell, 2009; Stanford Research Institute International, 2013). Numerous studies on wellness tourism tend to focus on the activities or experiences that have been conventionally associated with wellness tourism such as spas, meditation centers, health resorts, and medical interventions. Nevertheless, the range of wellness tourism products has grown to include such activities or experiences as environmental immersion experiences, outdoor and adventure tourism,

volunteer tourism, pilgrimage, indigenous cultures, to name a few (Kulczycki & Luck, 2009; Sheldon & Bushell, 2009; Sheldon & Park, 2009; Smith & Kelly, 2006b) The growing list of wellness tourism products may be attributable to the fact that the term wellness tourism is increasingly defined in a way that is more holistic to include the dimensions of body, mind, and soul (Kelly & Smith, 2009; Kulczycki & Luck, 2009; Smith & Kelly, 2006b; Sheldon & Bushell, 2009).

The wellness wheel introduced by Motorine includes six elements namely physical, intellectual, emotional, social, occupational and spiritual (Kulczycki and Luck, 2009), at the center of which is spiritual (Bushell, 2009; Myers, Sweeney & Witmer, 2000). Defining the term spiritual or spirituality can be difficult as its definition is highly subjective. Nonetheless, numerous previous researchers have pointed out that defining the term has seen the departure from the conventional notion that ties it to religiosity (Brown, 2001; Kelly & Smith, 2009).

Outdoor and adventure tourism can be active contributors to health and being (Ashely, 2007; Fox, 1997; Frederickson & Anderson, 1999; Heintzman, 2007; Johnson, 2002; Kulczycki & Luck, 2009; Manning, 1989; Sheldon & Bushell, 2009; Stringer & McAvoy, 1992; Williams & Harvey, 2001; Willson, McIntosh & Zahra, 2013). Previous studies on the experiences of people-nature interaction, which is one of the essential characteristics of outdoor and adventure tourism (Ewert, Galloway & Estes, 2001; Plummer, 2005; Virden, 2006), tended to focus on places of high latitudes (e.g. mountains), in North America and Europe, and emphasized the psychological benefits; there is less representation from Asia and Australasia, none from South America or Africa, and only a few studies discussed the spiritual experiences or outcomes of people-nature interaction (Keniger, Gaston, Irvine & Fuller, 2013).

This study focused on the spiritual dimension of wellness within the context of outdoor adventure tourism. Specifically, it was interested in two research objectives namely 1) to analyze the definition of the term spiritual from an outdoor adventure tourism perspective, and 2) to examine the ways by which engaging in outdoor adventure tourism could promote spiritual wellbeing. With regards to the second research objective, two research questions were asked namely a) what were the types of spiritual experiences associated with outdoor adventure tourism? and b) what was the predictor of the spiritual experiences --- the settings or the activities? It was hoped that the findings of the study could contribute to the current literature of wellness tourism by examining the phenomenon from a perspective that went beyond the traditional wellness activities such as spas, meditation retreats, health resorts and medical interventions, and with a focus on the less-researched dimension of wellness tourism.

## Literature Review

Wellness tourism has grown to become one of the fastest developing segments of international tourism (Sheldon & Bushell, 2009). There has been a notable increase in interest in health and wellness tourism, which is attributable to such factors as relief of stress as well as beauty benefits and more rapid access to good-quality surgical interventions (Laing & Weiler, 2008). Stanford Research Institute International (2013) reported that wellness

tourism is positioned at a lucrative juncture between the growing wellness industry and the world's huge tourism economy.

According to Sheldon and Bushell (2009), wellness tourism is poorly defined; it has numerous aspects and meanings. It means different things in different contexts and countries (Kelly & Smith, 2009). It is believed that the word "wellness" was first coined by a physician named Halbert Dunn in 1959 who integrated two words "wellbeing" and "fitness" and who defined wellness as a condition of "great personal contentment" (Dunn, 1961, p. 3 as in Sheldon & Bushell, 2009, p. 6). Inspired by Dunn's work, Ardell (1977) stated that individuals choose wellness when they take responsibility for their quality of life. Heidegger approached wellness by suggesting the philosophical concept of "ringing of the fourfold," i.e., an intimate relationship between earth, sky, mortals, and divinities (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006). Essentially, Heidegger proposed that to be well, individuals need a strong connection with the mystery of their existence through worldly and human events. Myers et al. (2000, p. 252) explained wellness as a "way of life oriented toward optimal health and well-being in which the body, mind, and spirit are integrated by the individual to live more fully within the human and natural community." Smith and Kelly (2006a) regarded wellness as a very subjective (i.e., not static) psychological (i.e., not physical) condition.

Steiner and Reisinger (2006) believed tourism has the potential to provide the connectivity, meaning, and wellness that Heidegger suggested if and when tourism is executed in a way that stimulates reflective space while being away from daily life. Smith and Kelly (2006b) discussed wellness tourism as holistic tourism where visitors enjoy a wide variety of activities and treatments that develop, maintain and improve their body, mind, and spirit. This idea was further supported by Kelly and Smith (2009) who pointed out that optimal wellness is achieved when there is a balance between well-being in the body, the mind, and the spirit. Kulczycki and Luck (2009) who mentioned the concept of wellness is a more holistic approach that encompasses pleasure, health and spirituality; and Sheldon and Bushell (2009, p. 11) who described wellness tourism as "a holistic mode of travel that integrates a quest for physical health, beauty or longevity, and/or a heightening of consciousness or spiritual awareness, and a connection with community, nature or the divine mystery"

The wellness wheel introduced by Motorine includes physical, intellectual, emotional, social, occupational and spiritual elements (Kulczycki and Luck, 2009). Bushell (2009) regarded the spiritual dimension as the key parameter in wellness tourism. Myers et al. (2000) also previously placed spirituality at the center of wellness. Defining the term spiritual or spirituality in the 21st century has seen the departure from conventional notion that ties it to religion. For example, Brown (2001) distinguished spirituality from religiosity by defining spirituality as a way by which individuals build their identities and their sense of self. Within the context of tourism, spirituality is viewed as the separation of material and imminent or inner self (Devereux & Carnegie, 2006). Kelly and Smith (2009), supporting Brown's (2001) notion, stated that traditional religious beliefs and practices have become more blended, coalesced and even replaced by a varied collection of spiritual offerings. They also pointed out several characteristics of spiritual tourists including a longing for peaceful natural landscapes; seeking quiet, calm, sacred places; needing to form communities; being interested in finding meaning in life, and personal quest for "enlightenment."

Wellness tourism has been largely viewed from the perspective of spa resorts (Sheldon & Bushell, 2009); nevertheless, there has been an increase in the number of tourists who seem to be searching for meaning from their vacation and leisure time (Sheldon & Bushell, 2009). The following is a list of wellness tourism types or experiences suggested by some previous studies:

- Spiritual, yoga, spa and religious tourism (Smith & Kelly, 2006b).
- The products of wellness tourism range from spiritual experiences that refresh the soul to medical surgery that mends the body, and many others in between meditation retreats, spirits safaris, visits to sacred sites, life coaching holidays, medical spas, wellness spas, day spas, dental spas, cosmetic surgery, organ transplants, beauty therapy, spiritual tourism, religious tourism, fitness tourism, environmental immersion experiences, nutrition courses, outdoor and adventure tourism, volunteer tourism, and transformational travel (Sheldon & Bushell, 2009).
- Fitness and sports, complementary treatments, indigenous cultures, healing accommodations, lifestyle modification, nature experience, relaxation and rejuvenation, inner pilgrimage, travel to serve others (Sheldon & Park, 2009).

Kulczycki and Luck (2009) believed outdoor, and adventure tourism can be active contributors to health and being. Previous studies often describe this type of tourism as including elements of real or perceived risk and danger; involving a close interaction with the natural environment; the outcome of which is uncertain and can be influenced by the participant and circumstance; and participants usually have the interest in taking part in outdoor and adventure tourism activities for risk-taking, challenge, sensation seeking achievement, competence and testing one's skills (Ewert, et al., 2001; Plummer, 2005; Virden, 2006). Wilderness recreation/tourism is a subset of outdoor recreation and tourism (Kulczycki and Luck, 2009). Activities often associated with outdoor and adventure tourism are hiking, fishing, boating, hunting, white-water canoeing, rafting, sky diving, mountaineering, rock climbing, caving, mountain biking, ocean kayaking and skiing (Ewert, 1989; Virden, 2006). The following is a list of several prior studies on the spiritual experiences or benefits of human-nature interaction:

- People may well be attracted to wild places in pursuit of deeper meanings (Ashely, 2007).
- Emotions of awe and wonderment at nature, feelings of connectedness, heightened senses, inner calm, joy, peace, happiness and relatedness (Fox, 1997).
- Religious-like or self-transcending feelings of peace and humility (Frederickson & Anderson, 1999).
- Peacefulness including peace with oneself and the world (Heintzman, 2007).
- The spiritual benefits of wilderness include the enduring, the sublime, beauty, competence, experience of peace, and self-forgetting (Johnson, 2002).
- Wilderness to provide recreation, to render a transcendent experience, and to have a therapeutic value in both a physical and mental sense (Manning, 1989).
- Intense and often positive emotions (Stringer & McAvoy, 1992).
- Transcendent experience in forest environments (Williams & Harvey, 2001).
- Understanding how participants of outdoor adventure tourism subjectively search for meaning and life purpose, their quest for meaning, and experiences of transcendence and connectedness (Willson et al., 2013).

## Method

The study was conducted at Danum Valley Field Center (DVFC hereafter) which was established in 1986 by the Sabah Foundation (a state-sanctioned organization that was developed to promote educational and economic opportunities for the people in Sabah) to facilitate activities associated with research, education, training and wilderness recreation. The center situated in the perimeter of Danum Valley Conservation Area (a primary, undisturbed, predominantly lowland rainforest that is home to a prominent variety of flora and fauna species) in Lahad Datu in the east coast of Sabah, Borneo (Inno Travel, 2011). DVFC was not established to become a tourist destination; instead, its chief function is as a research center that welcomes both international and local scientists or researchers. Moreover, it serves as a field-training center for both undergraduate and graduate programs as well as environmental education. DVFC has progressed to become one of the leading research institutions in South East Asia with its wide-ranging, state-of-the-art facilities including permanent research plots and an extensive trail system, analytical laboratories, climatic station data, phenology monitoring database, a Nature Interpretation and Environmental Education Building, to name a few (Inno Travel, 2011). DVFC has only recently opened its doors to ardent and serious naturalists and independent travelers who are content with rustic and rudimentary facilities. The primary recreational activities offered are rainforest trekking, wildlife spotting, bird watching, natural trail walking, hill climbing, and environmental education.

This study predominantly employed a quantitative research design. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed to DVFC visitors on their first day of registration at the Welcome Center. The visitors were requested to drop the completed questionnaires in a box provided within the accommodation compound before exiting DVFC on the last day of their visits. Data collection was done for a period of 3 months. The questionnaires consisted of Section A which probed the respondents' socio-demographic profile; Section B which included one open-ended question that gauged the respondents' interpretation of the word spiritual. Section C contained items measuring the respondents' outdoor adventure experience in general and in specific relation to DVFC; and Section D asked the respondents about their spiritual tradition, motivation, and experiences; the spiritual concepts. Items for Section D were adopted from the work of Williams and Harvey (2001) who studied the transcendent experience in forest environments. Of the 500 questionnaires distributed, 282 were returned representing a 56.4% response rate.

A thematic analysis was employed in analyzing the respondents' personal interpretation of the word spiritual. The first reading of all the responses (38 respondents answered the open-ended question) was done repeatedly to gain familiarity and intimacy with the data. Open coding was used within individual responses to record main observations from the data, and these observations were subsequently grouped to represent initial codes. Comparisons of themes between responses were then made to revise and identify the most prominent themes. The descriptive statistics were used to obtain the mean scores and standard deviations. This method is done to analyze the data for question 1 of the second research objective. For question 2 of the second research objective, the data analysis was done using multiple regression.



A reliability test of the Likert-scale items produced the Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients of more than 0.7 indicating a high level of internal consistency with the chosen sample, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Results of reliability test of scale items*

Section	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha coefficient
C	9	.867
D	9	.917

## Results

### ***Respondents' socio-demographic profile, outdoor adventure experience and DVFC visits***

As indicated in Table 2, a large number of the respondents were female (68.1%) within the age range of 20 – 30 years (64.1%). Approximately half of them (44.6%) were from Asia, while more than a quarter (29.4%) were from Australia/Oceania. Over half of them (65.2%) had some form of post-secondary education. With regards to annual household income, a large number of the respondents (62%) earned less than \$10,000. About three-quarters of them (71.4%) acknowledged to not having affiliated with any form of organized religion. Of the remaining respondents who did concede an association with organized religion, most of them (92.31%) indicated the level of religiosity between religious and highly religious.

Over half of the respondents (59%) had some prior outdoor adventure experience, and more than a quarter (38%) claimed to have extensive experience with outdoor adventure tourism. About 37% of them participated in outdoor adventure tourism at least once a year. There were comparable numbers of respondents who engaged in outdoor adventure tourism once or twice a year and respondents who did three or more times a year, with the percentages of 27% and 29% respectively. The majority of the respondents (91%) were first-time visitors to DVFC. More than half of the respondents (56%) traveled in a tiny group of 2 to 3 people; most of them were couples. A considerable size of them (40%) traveled alone. About 70% of the respondents stayed for 3 to 4 nights at DVFC.

Table 2  
*Respondents' socio-demographic profile, outdoor adventure experience and DVFC visits*

Item		%	Item		%
Age	Below 20	5.4	Gender	Male	31.9
	20 – 30	64.1		Female	68.1
	31 – 40	18.5	Income	No income	20.3
	41 – 50	2.2		Less than \$10,000	62
	Above 51	9.8		\$10,000 - \$49,000	24.1
Continent of nationality	Asia	44.6		\$50,000 - \$99,000	11.4
	Australia/Oceania	29.4	Affiliated with organized religion	\$100,000 or more	2.6
	Europe	18.6		Yes	28.6
	North America	6.5		No	71.4
Education	South America	1.1	Not religious		
	No formal schooling	1.1			
	Non-university qualification	33.7			7.69

	Undergrad degree	50.6	Level of Religious	38.46
	Postgrad degree	14.6	religiosity Highly religious	53.85
			if yes	
Prior outdoor adventure experience	Never	3.3	First time to DVFC?	Yes 91.5
	Some	58.7		No 5.3
Frequency participating in outdoor adventure tourism	Extensive	38	Number of people on trip	Solo 39.3
	Never	7.5		2 – 3 56.2
	Rarely	36.6		More than 4 4.5
	Often	26.9	Number of nights	Day trip 0
	≥ 3 times/year	29		1 – 2 nights 14.1
				3 – 4 nights 68.1
				More than 4 nights 17.8

### Respondents' personal interpretation of the term spiritual

As shown in Table 3, there were four salient themes emerged from the respondents' personal interpretation of the term spiritual namely, in order of frequency of appearance in the respondent's answers, connectedness, transcendence, positive affect and religion/God. Each of these themes, with illustrative excerpts, is presented below. The most frequently cited theme was connectedness where the respondents felt connected with themselves, others (fellow visitors, researchers/scientists, and local people), higher being (which does not necessarily refer to a god) and surroundings (the sights, sounds, smells and tastes of DVFC). *Spiritual- a sense of connectivity with a greater being- possibly a superior or divine creator. The divine creator should not be confused with common definitions of 'God' (I do not believe in God!)" [Respondent 78]*

*Spiritual defined by myself as the connection of my human animal self and the universe of which I am made. Spirituality being connected with all of living organisms, feeling life at all sensory levels. Feeling like being part of one super-organism, earth. [Respondent 33]*

*Spiritual to me is having a connectedness with other living and non-living aspects of the earth-e.g., the biomes and ancient geology. All that is life beyond myself. [Respondent 32]*

*Being spiritual allows you to connect with both people and animals and the environment. To be connected with everything. [Respondent 1]*

The second most frequently cited theme was transcendence which was a spiritual quality marked by an awareness that went beyond oneself and viewing life from a bigger picture.

*Spiritual denotes experiencing a connection beyond the self. The long treks were difficult for me when I was too focused on myself. But looking at and experiencing the treks outside of my limits, I had that feeling that there was more to me, there was more to the challenge of the long treks. It was almost like the whole thing was about going beyond my limits, about mastery. [Respondent 58]*

*Spirituality for me is to understand exactly where you are in our massive universe and to look up at the stars and reminding yourself to take a breath now and then. [Respondent 30]*

The third theme was positive effect which referred to the positive emotions that the respondents experienced such as inspiration, strength, peace, respect, calm, enlightenment, and harmless.

*Being spiritual is to be at peace. [Respondent 81]*

*Spirituality is a feeling of awareness, calm, peace, enlightenment, oneness. [Respondent 61]*

*It gives me strength; it inspires me. [Respondent 54]*

Only a handful of the respondents referred to a connection with religion or God.

*Spiritual for me is the existence of God who is beyond us, His presence, His being, His power. God who is beyond our understanding. God who created all living things. And as man is created in the image of God, we too have a spiritual part of us. [Respondent 17]*

*Spirituality is to realize that your life is not truly yours, but it is a gift from the God who created you. [Respondent 91]*

Table 3  
*Respondents' interpretation of the term spiritual*

Theme	Explanation	No. of respondents
Connectedness	Connectedness to oneself, others, higher being, and surroundings.	20
Transcendence	Transcendence or consciousness of beyond oneself and seeing life from a bigger picture.	8
Positive affect	Positive feelings such as inspiration, strength, peace, respect, calm, enlightenment, harmless.	6
Religion	Related to religion or God.	4

#### ***Respondents' spiritual experiences of outdoor adventure tourism at DVFC***

As indicated in Table 4, the spiritual experiences that the respondents derived from their participation in outdoor adventure tourism at DVFC, in the order of strength of agreement based on the mean scores, were ineffability/rarity/value (M = 1.61), sense of oneness (M = 2.06), overcoming limits (M = 2.40), timelessness (M = 2.45) and a sense of new meaning (2.47).

Table 4  
*Respondents' spiritual experiences of outdoor adventure tourism at DVFC*

Attribute	Statement	Mean <sup>a</sup>	SD
Ineffability/rarity/value	The feeling I had was too amazing to put into words. I felt lucky to have this experience at Danum Valley Field Center. It was not the sort of thing that everyone experiences.	1.61	1.080



Sense of oneness	When I was at Danum Valley Field Center, place and distance meant nothing to me. I felt part of the whole universe.	2.06	.961
Overcoming limits	The rainforest of Danum Valley Field Center and all the things in it felt perfect. It allowed me to look at the world in a new or 'higher' way.	2.40	1.081
Timelessness	Time meant nothing to me while I was at Danum Valley Field Center. It was like a piece of eternity.	2.45	1.152
Sense of new meaning	When I was at Danum Valley Field Center, I felt that I understood the forest in a new way. At the time, I felt that the experience gave me a new understanding of life.	2.47	1.153

<sup>a</sup>Based on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 – strongly agree and 5 – strongly disagree.

### ***The relationship between spiritual experiences and DVFC settings and activities***

Table 5 shows the results of the multiple regression analysis. It is conducted to investigate two questions: 1) how well do the measures of settings and activities predict the respondents' spiritual experiences? How much variance in spiritual experience scores can be explained by scores on the settings and activities scales? and 2) which is the best predictor of the respondents' spiritual experiences; DVFC settings or DVFC activities.

With regards to the spiritual attribute of ineffability/rarity/value, the results indicated the two predictors explained 51.4% of the variance ( $R^2 = .51$ ,  $F(2,276) = 145.95$ ,  $p < .05$ ). It was found that DVFC settings significantly predicted spiritual experiences ( $\beta = .70$ ,  $p < .05$ ); however, DVFC activities did not predict substantially spiritual experiences ( $\beta = .052$ ,  $p > .05$ ). DVFC settings made a much stronger contribution to explaining the feeling of ineffability/rarity/value that respondents felt in DVFC.

As for sense of oneness, DVFC settings and activities explained 36.5% of the variance ( $R^2 = .365$ ,  $F(2,276) = 79.32$ ,  $p < .05$ ). It was discovered that settings significantly predicted a sense of connectedness ( $\beta = .568$ ,  $p < .05$ ), as did activities ( $\beta = .122$ ,  $p < .05$ ). DVFC settings made a much stronger contribution to explaining the feeling of a sense of connectedness that respondents felt in DVFC.

The results for overcoming limits showed DVFC settings and activities explained 24.7% of the variance ( $R^2 = .247$ ,  $F(2,276) = 45.34$ ,  $p < .05$ ). It was found that both predictors significantly predicted the spiritual experience of overcoming limits and made a comparable contribution to the experience (settings:  $\beta = .331$ ,  $p < .05$ ; activities:  $\beta = .311$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

In terms of timelessness, DVFC settings and activities explained 17.7% of the variance ( $R^2 = .177$ ,  $F(2,276) = 29.68$ ,  $p < .05$ ). It was discovered that settings significantly predicted a sense of timelessness ( $\beta = .348$ ,  $p < .05$ ), as did activities ( $\beta = .178$ ,  $p < .05$ ). DVFC settings made a much stronger contribution to explaining the feeling of a sense of timelessness that respondents felt in DVFC.

The results for a sense of new meaning showed DVFC settings and activities explained 19.4% of the variance ( $R^2 = .194$ ,  $F(2,276) = 33.28$ ,  $p < .05$ ). It was found that both predictors significantly predicted the spiritual experience of a sense of new meaning and made a comparable contribution to the experience (settings:  $\beta = .280$ ,  $p < .05$ ; activities:  $\beta = .289$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

Table 5

*Extract of multiple regression results*

Dependent variable	Model summary R <sup>2</sup>	ANOVA				Coefficients		
			df	F	Sig.	Beta		Sig.
Ineffability/rarity/value	.514	Regression	2	145.957	.000	DVFC settings	.705	.000
		Residual	276			DVFC activities	.052	.226
Sense of oneness	.365	Regression	2	79.320	.000	DVFC settings	.568	.000
		Residual	276			DVFC activities	.122	.014
Overcoming limits	.247	Regression	2	45.348	.000	DVFC settings	.331	.000
		Residual	276			DVFC activities	.311	.000
Timelessness	.177	Regression	2	29.680	.000	DVFC settings	.348	.000
		Residual	276			DVFC activities	.178	.002
Sense of new meaning	.194	Regression	2	33.287	.000	DVFC settings	.280	.000
		Residual	276			DVFC activities	.289	.000

## Discussion and Conclusion

Ascribing one specific definition to the term spiritual or spirituality can be difficult. Its interpretation is subjective depending upon the individual's own particular viewpoint and traits. Individuals who are devoutly affiliated with an organized religion may understand the term from a religious perspective, associating it with an omnipresent god or with religious traditions and beliefs. Nonetheless, based on the study's results, defining the term is moving away from religionism and toward secularism. This finding concurs with the findings of previous studies that the term spiritual or spirituality is increasingly being defined without associating it with any connotations of religion or god due to a decline in organized religious practices and a noticeable transition from religious and theistic convictions to more modern and secular propositions (Brown, 2001; Burack, 1999; Carr, 2001; McSherry & Cash, 2004; Sharpley & Jepson, 2011). The majority of the respondents explained the meaning of spiritual or spirituality in terms of being connected, lying beyond the ordinary range of perception, and experiencing positive emotions. The perspectives of connectedness and transcendence were also previously uncovered in Willson et al. (2013) who used a phenomenological analysis to study the relationship between tourism and spirituality. They highlighted that transcendence i.e. the experience of losing self-awareness and time when one withdraws oneself out of one's

sense of time and place to regard life from a bigger, more objective outlook (also mentioned in Marra, 2000; Piedmont, 1999; Van Ness, 1996) and harmony i.e. connectedness to oneself, to other and to the higher power (also mentioned in Miner-Williams, 2006; Piedmont, 1999; Reed, 1992; Schultz, 2005) are the two defining qualities of spirituality.

The spiritual experience of ineffability/rarity/value was the most intense for the respondents. This experience was associated with the respondents feeling a deep and heartfelt appreciation and gratitude for having experienced DVFC. This sense of gratitude was derived from the respondents' perception of the rarity or specialness of the experience as it was not something that everyone would have the opportunity to experience; it was something that was remarkably unique, extraordinary in comparison with what they were used to in their usual surroundings. This is particularly true given the fact that the rainforest at DVFC is one of the oldest, most bio-diversified rainforests in the world, and the fact that DVFC is principally a research center, not a tourist destination, thus making respondents feel they were the 'lucky few' who were even allowed to be at the center. Experiencing gratitude has been considered as one of the most effective ways of getting in touch with one's soul (Chopra, 2012), and the feeling of special or lucky for having experienced something that is rare or valuable may render a higher level of satisfaction with the trip.

The second highest ranked spiritual experience of outdoor adventure tourism at DVFC was a sense of oneness, which is related to connectedness to or in harmony with oneself, others, higher power, and surroundings. In a way, the respondents became more cognizant of their thoughts and feelings; of the presence of fellow visitors, researchers/scientists at DVFC, and the center's employees; of a power greater than themselves; and of the sounds, sights, smells and tastes that were immediately surrounding them. Oneness/connectedness/harmony was also frequently cited by researchers of previous studies as a significant characteristic of spirituality (see Miner-Williams, 2006; Piedmont, 1999; Reed, 1992; Schultz, 2005; Willson et al., 2013). In another way, this sense of connectedness may be a result of gratitude which, as previously mentioned, is a way to get in touch with one's soul. As Chopra (2012) states "When you are in touch with your soul, you eavesdrop on the thoughts of the universe; You feel connected to everything in creation".

Overcoming limits was another spiritual experience of outdoor adventure tourism at DVFC. The center presented a considerable amount of physical, mental and emotional challenge to the respondents. For many, the challenges began before the trip even started when they encountered difficulty in reserving accommodations. This is especially true for respondents who had to arrange their trips independently. A more significant challenge faced the respondents when they had to make do without the modern conveniences at their fingertips. As previously stated, DVFC is a remote, isolated place, its facilities and services are rusty and rudimentary, and there is no phone coverage and Internet connectivity. The greatest challenge, for most of the respondents, was the long, hard treks under blistering heat and high humidity. Adding to the challenge was the respondents' fear of leeches. Persevering through all of these situations that physically, mentally, and emotionally challenged the respondents not only boosted the respondents' confidence in overcoming limits but also elevated their sense of capability and worth, which might allow them to look at future challenges in a new or 'higher' way or from a broader perspective. Johnson (2002) explained

the spiritual experience of competence by pointing out that successfully meeting trials and challenges often presented in the wilderness (a subset of outdoor tourism) can increase our sense of capability and worth subsequently leading to feelings of calm, quiet and confident. When we engage in activities associated with the wilderness, we are compelled to face our limitations and not compete with other people. This allows us to temporarily set aside competition and concentrate on competence instead (Johnson, 2002). Johnson further mentioned that the wilderness is a place of testing from which we emerge strengthened and cleansed in spirit. The activities that are commonly related to outdoor adventure tourism often contain elements of danger and adventure (Virden, 2006). DVFC is no exception. Examples of risks at the center include being bitten by poisonous insects, being attacked by wildlife, coming into contact with toxic plants, natural hazards such as tree falling and bad weather, slipping, to name a few. All of the respondents were engaged in some level of risk-taking. This risk-taking experience gave them a sense of pride, a sense of adventure, a sense of competence, and a belief or confidence in themselves which were all connected to the spiritual experience of overcoming limits.

The respondents also reported the spiritual experience of timelessness. Several prior studies have recognized the timelessness aspect of visitor's spiritual experience in nature-based tourism including Jarratt and Sharpley (2017) who investigated visitors' spiritual experience in a seaside environment; Sharpley and Jepson (2011) who looked into the spiritual dimension to tourism in the rural English Lake District and; and Williams and Harvey (2001) who stated absorption in and significance of the moment in their study of the transcendence experience in forest environments. The remote, isolated location of DVFC and the absence of phone coverage and Internet connectivity "forced" the respondents to be present at the moment and not get lost in the constant stream of information brought by today's telecommunications technology. Another factor that contributed to the respondents' sense of timelessness reflected the finding of Curtin (2009) that wildlife viewing creates a temporal experience in which all concentration is focused on the moment. DVFC offered the respondents with ample opportunities for wildlife spotting, and the chances of actually sighting wildlife were high. 17 out of 38 respondents who answered the open-ended question reported their experience of seeing different types of wildlife particularly Orangutans, gibbons, red and silver leaf monkeys, flying squirrels, mouse deer, slow loris, a range of frogs, hornbills and other types of bird species. The spiritual experience of timelessness may be related to the spiritual experience of connectedness. Being able to spot wildlife required the respondents to have a high consciousness of their surroundings. Seeing wildlife was a rare opportunity for them; when they did see one, the experience could be so amazing that the time and space between them and the wildlife seemed to merge or disappear. The past and the future were out of the picture; the only moment that existed and mattered was the present.

The spiritual experience of a sense of new meaning may, to some extent, be attributable to the prior spiritual experiences of ineffability/rarity/value, connectedness, overcoming limits, and timelessness. It only makes sense that when one values something that is considered impossible and rare, one feels a sense of gratitude. When one feels connected to others and a power bigger than oneself, one feels a sense of belonging. When one manages to overcome limits, one feels a sense of personal growth. When one is fully

present in the moment, one truly lives. All of this combined contributed to the respondents' renewed sense of meaning and purpose for life.

The results of multiple regression analysis indicate that it was the settings of DVFC that made a more significant contribution to the respondents' spiritual experiences than the recreational activities that the respondents took part in. As mentioned previously, the rainforest of DVFC is one of the oldest, most bio-diversified rainforests in the world. It is dominated by dipterocarp trees with the canopy reaching the height of more than 70 meters in some places (Inno Travel, 2011). It is also home to the world's tallest tropical tree named Seraya Kuning Siput towering at 94.1 meters (Sugau, 2017). Additionally, it provides important natural habitats for an outstanding number of fauna species – 40 species of fish, 120 species of mammals including 10 species of primates (Orangutan, Borneo pygmy elephant, banteng, Malayan sun bear, clouded leopard, bearded pig and deer) and over 300 species of birds (Inno Travel, 2011). The physical environment of DVFC is essentially wild, undisturbed with the minimal imprint of human manipulation and is beautiful and peaceful. The ecological and geological features of the place are of scientific, educational, scenic and historical significance. As the artificial light at DVFC is very limited, a clear night sky is filled with stars. DVFC exists precisely because of and for its environment, and not for the outdoor adventure activities that visitors partake in. Had the activities done in a contrived environment, the respondents might not have experienced some of the spiritual experiences to the same degree as they had in a wild, natural environment. The finding that spiritual experiences at DVFC were attributable to the center's settings is aligned with the findings of some prior researchers such as Curtin (2009) who pointed out that the settings of a wild natural environment produce a temporal experience in which all concentration is focused on the moment; Heintzman (2013) who suggested that the natural setting of parks produces a variety of spiritual outcomes including wonder and awe, connectedness, peacefulness, calm, stillness, and tranquility; Johnson (2002) who highlighted six spiritual benefits of being in or interacting with wilderness attributable to the wilderness settings rather than activities; and Williams and Harvey (2001) who stated that spiritual experiences are rarely the result of the activities, but instead are attributable to the qualities of the physical environment.

As stated by Kulczycki and Luck (2009), outdoor and adventure recreation and tourism can be active contributors to health and wellbeing, despite not conventionally acknowledged as wellness tourism. This study identified the spiritual dimension of wellness tourism within the context of outdoor adventure tourism. Previous studies have recognized the health and wellbeing benefits of outdoor, wilderness tourism (refer to Keniger et al., (2013) who created the typology of settings in which interactions between people and nature occur and the typology of benefits of interacting with nature based on previous studies in the topic). The findings of this study will position outdoor adventure tourism as a much more profound and important type of tourism and leisure that offers experiences that are beyond adrenaline rush or hedonistic seeking. The spiritual benefits of outdoor adventure tourism at DVFC may help promote the eudaimonic growth of the visitors. This is particularly true for the spiritual experiences of connectedness which produces feelings of belongingness, of sense of new meaning which invokes feelings of meaning and purpose, and of overcoming limits or persevering through challenging situations which contributes to personal growth especially in terms of increased self-confidence which can subsequently impact visitors' social

interactions and confidence in future travel undertakings. Knobloch, Roberston, and Aitken (2016) indicated eudaimonic effects could result from quite unpleasant activities at the time but having delayed positive effects. While the respondents were undertaking the long, difficult treks which averaged 6 to 17 hours in a day in an environment that was characterized by high humidity combined with hot temperatures, they experienced a rather high level of unpleasantness, discomfort or even distress.

Nevertheless, at the end of the day or the trip or even a short while after the trip, overcoming limits provided them with a spiritual experience that enhanced their psychological well-being, i.e. increased self-confidence and sense of capability and worth, as indicated in the findings of this study and some previous research. The study of tourists' wellbeing from hedonistic and eudaimonic perspectives is gaining attention such as Filep, Macnaughton, and Glover (2017), Filep and Laing (2018), Pyke, Hartwell, Blake and Hemingway, 2016, and Smith and Diekmann (2017). Examining the health and wellbeing aspects of outdoor adventure tourism from the perspectives of hedonism and eudemonism is not within the scope of the current study. Nevertheless, it may be a topic that is worth a thorough exploration of future research.

In sum, this study sheds light on the health and wellbeing benefits of outdoor adventure tourism from a spiritual perspective. Its findings advocate Kulczycki and Luck's (2009) notion that outdoor and adventure recreation and tourism can be active contributors to health and wellbeing, despite not conventionally acknowledged as wellness tourism. Outdoor adventure tourism in remote, wild, undisturbed, minimal-presence-of-human-use places like DVFC has the capacity for developing, maintaining and improving the body-mind-spirit. Therefore, it is imperative that outdoor adventure tourism is recognized and positioned as a much more profound and vital type of tourism and leisure with benefits or experiences that stretch past pure, instant, short-lived adrenaline rush and pleasures. The findings of this study also highlight the fragmented and diverse nature of wellness tourism as indicated by some researchers investigating the area, e.g. Kelly and Smith (2009), Sheldon and Bushell (2009), and Sheldon and Park (2009). There is much to wellness tourism than the small types or experiences typically associated with spas, meditation retreats, and health resorts. Along with all the previous studies that emphasized the all-encompassing benefits of human-nature interactions, this study also underscores the immense importance of conserving nature as it has the most wonderful ways of developing, maintaining and improving the body, mind, and soul.

### Corresponding Author

Christy Bidder, Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA,  
Locked Bag 71, 88997 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia  
Email: chris822@sabah.uitm.edu.my

### References

- Ardell, D. B. (1977). *High level wellness: an alternative to doctors, drugs and disease*. Berkley: Rodale Press.
- Ashley, P. (2007). Spiritual revelation in wilderness under-down-under. *USDA Forest Service Proceedings RMRS-P-49* (pp. 431-437).



- Brown, C. (2001). *The death of Christian Britain*. London, United Kingdom: Routledge.
- Burack, E. H. (1999). Spirituality in the workforce. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 12(4), 280-292. doi: 10.1108/09534819910282126
- Bushell, R. (2009). Quality of life, tourism and wellness. In R. Bushell & P. J. Sheldon (Eds.), *Wellness and Tourism: Mind, Body, Spirit, Place* (pp. 19-36). New York, NY: Cognizant Communication Corporation.
- Carr, W. (2001). Spirituality and religion: chaplaincy in context. In H. Orchard (Ed.), *Spirituality in Health Care Contexts* (pp. 21-32). London, UK: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Chopra, D. (2012, November 20). 3 essential practices of gratitude. Retrieved from <https://spiritualityhealth.com/articles/2012/11/20/3-essential-practices-gratitude>
- Curtin, S. (2009). Wildlife tourism: the intangible, psychological benefits of human-wildlife encounters. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 12, 451-474. doi: 10.1080/13683500903042857
- Devereux, C., & Carnegie, E. (2006). Pilgrimage: journeying beyond self. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 31(1), 47-56. doi: 10.1080/02508281.2006.11081246
- Ewert, A. (1989). *Outdoor adventure pursuits: foundations, models, and theories*. Columbus: Publishing Horizons.
- Ewert, A., Galloway, S., & Estes, C. A. (2001). Adventure recreation: what's new for resource management, public policy analysts and recreation providers. *Parks & Recreation*, 36(2), 26-34.
- Filep, S., Macnaughton, J., & Glover, T. (2017). Tourism and gratitude: valuing acts of kindness. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 66(2017), 26-36. doi: 10.1016/j.annals.2017.05.015
- Filep, S., & Laing, J. (2018). Trends and directions in tourism and positive psychology. *Journal of Travel Research*, 1-12. doi: 10.1177/0047287518759227
- Frederickson, L. M., & Anderson, D. H. (1999). A qualitative exploration of the wilderness experience as a source of spiritual inspiration. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 19, 21-39.
- Fox, R. J. (1997). Women, nature and spirituality: a qualitative study exploring women's wilderness experience. In *Proceedings of ANZALS Conference 1997* (pp. 59-64). Newcastle, Australia: University of Newcastle.
- Heintzman, P. (2007). Men's wilderness experience and spirituality: a qualitative study. In *Proceedings of the 2006 Northeastern Recreation Research Symposium* (pp. 216-225). Newton Square, PA: Northern Research Station, US Department of Agriculture-Forest Service.
- Heintzman, P. (2013). Spiritual outcomes of park experience: a synthesis of recent social science research. *The George Wright Forum*, 30(3), 273-279.
- Inno Travel. (2011). Danum Valley. Retrieved from <https://www.danumvalley.info/>
- Jarratt, D., & Sharpley, R. (2017). Tourists at the seaside: exploring the spiritual dimension. *Tourist Studies*, 17(4), 349-368. doi: 10.1177/1468797616687560
- Johnson, B. (2002). On the spiritual benefits of wilderness. *International Journal of Wilderness*, 8(3), 28-32.
- Kelly, C., & Smith, M. (2009). Holistic tourism: integrating body, mind, spirit. In R. Bushell & P. J. Sheldon (Eds.), *Wellness and Tourism: Mind, Body, Spirit, Place* (pp. 69-83). New York, NY: Cognizant Communication Corporation.
- Keniger, L. E., Gaston, K. J., Irvine, K. N., & Fuller, R. A. (2013). What are the benefits of interacting with nature? *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 10, 913-935. doi: 10.3390/ijerph10030913

- Knobloch, U., Robertson, K., & Aitken, R. (2016). Experience, emotion and eudaimonia: a consideration of tourist experiences and well-being. *Journal of Travel Research*, 56(5), 651-662. doi: 10.1177/0047287516650937
- Kulczycki, C., & Luck, M. (2009). Outdoor adventure tourism, wellness, and place attachment. In R. Bushell & P. J. Sheldon (Eds.), *Wellness and Tourism: Mind, Body, Spirit, Place* (pp. 165-176). New York, NY: Cognizant Communication Corporation.
- Laing, J., & Weiler, B. (2008). Mind, body and spirit: health and wellness tourism in Asia. In J. Cochrane (Ed.), *Asian Tourism: Growth and Change* (pp. 379-390). Amsterdam, the Netherlands: Elsevier.
- Manning, R. E. (1989). The nature of America: visions and revisions of wilderness. *Natural Resources Journal*, 29, 25-40.
- Marra, R. (2000). What do you mean, 'spirituality'? *Journal of Pastoral Counselling*, 35, 67-88.
- McSherry, W., & Cash, K. (2004). The language of spirituality: an emerging taxonomy. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 41(2004), 151-161. doi: 10.1016/S0020-7489(03)00114-7
- Miner-Williams, D. (2006). Putting a puzzle together: making spirituality meaningful for nursing using an evolving theoretical framework. *Journal of Clinical Nursing Science Quarterly*, 15(7), 811-821. doi: 10.1111/j.1365-2702.2006.01351.x
- Myers, J., Sweeney, T., & Witmer, J. (2000). The wheel of wellness counseling for wellness: a holistic model for treatment planning. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 78, 251-266. doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.2000.tb01906.x
- Piedmont, R. L. (1999). Does spirituality represent the sixth factor of personality? Spiritual transcendence and the five-factor model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 67(6), 985-1013. doi: 10.1111/1467-6494.00080
- Plummer, R. (2005). *Outdoor recreation: an interdisciplinary perspective*. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company.
- Pyke, S., Hartwell, H., Blake, A., & Hemingway, A. (2016). Exploring well-being as a tourism product source. *Tourism Management*, 55(2016), 94-105. doi: 10.1016/j.tourman.2016.02.004
- Reed, P. G. (1992). An emerging paradigm for the investigation of spirituality in nursing. *Research in Nursing and Health*, 15, 349-357. doi: 10.1002/nur.4770150505
- Schultz, E. K. (2005). The meaning of spirituality for individuals with disabilities. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 27(21), 1283-1295. doi: 10.1080/09638280500076319
- Sharpley, R., & Jepson, D. (2011). Rural tourism: a spiritual experience? *Annals of Tourism Research*, 38(1), 52-71. doi: 10.1016/j.annals.2010.05.002
- Sheldon, P. J., & Bushell, R. (2009). Introduction to wellness and tourism. In R. Bushell & P. J. Sheldon (Eds.), *Wellness and Tourism: Mind, Body, Spirit, Place* (pp. 3-18). New York, NY: Cognizant Communication Corporation.
- Sheldon, P. J., & Park, S.Y. (2009). Development of a sustainable wellness destination. In R. Bushell & P. J. Sheldon (Eds.), *Wellness and Tourism: Mind, Body, Spirit, Place* (pp. 99-113). New York, NY: Cognizant Communication Corporation.
- Smith, M., & Kelly, C. (2006a). Wellness tourism. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 31(1), 1-4. doi: 10.1080/02508281.2006.11081241
- Smith, M., & Kelly, C. (2006b). Holistic tourism: journeys of the self. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 31(1), 15-24. doi: 10.1080/02508281.2006.11081243

- Smith, M. K., & Diekmann, A. (2017). Tourism and wellbeing. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 66(2017), 1-13. doi: 10.1016/j.annals.2017.05.006
- Stanford Research Institute International. (2013). *The global wellness tourism economy*. Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2037&context=ttra>
- Steiner, C. J., & Reisinger, Y. (2006). Ringing the fourfold: a philosophical framework for thinking about wellness tourism. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 1(2006), 5-14. doi: 10.1080/02508281.2006.11081242
- Stringer, L. A., McAvoy, L. H. (1992). The need for something different: spirituality and the wilderness adventure. *The Journal of Experiential Education*, 15(1), 13-21.
- Sugau, J. B. (2017, March 11). World's tallest tropical tree in Danum Valley. *The Borneo Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.theborneopost.com/2017/03/11/worlds-tallest-tropical-tree-in-danum-valley/>
- Van Ness, P. (1996). *Spirituality and the secular quest*. New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company.
- Virden, R. (2006). Outdoor and adventure recreation. In T. Tapps & M. S. Wells (Eds.), *Introduction to Recreation and Leisure* (pp. 307-332). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Williams, K., & Harvey, D. (2001). Transcendent experience in forest environments. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 21, 249-260. doi: 10.1006/jevp.2001.0204
- Willson, G. B., McIntosh, A. J., & Zahra, A. L. (2013). Tourism and spirituality: a phenomenological analysis. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 42, 150-168. doi: 10.1016/j.annals.2013.01.016