



**UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG**  
**SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, ECONOMICS AND LAW**

Master Degree Project in Marketing and Consumption

# **Eco-Tourism and the Learning-Scape: Consumers' Learning Experience at an Eco-Lodge in Australia**

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Master Degree Project No. 2015:111  
Graduate School

# Eco-Tourists and the Learning-Scape: Consumers' Learning Experience at an Eco-Lodge in Australia

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**Abstract:** Eco-tourism aims to have less negative impact on communities and the environment, while simultaneously promoting conservational behaviour and attitudes. Thus, eco-tourism is an excellent tool to educate tourists on how to become more responsible. Previous research has focused on learning experiences in eco-activities, while a focus on learning in sustainable accommodation experiences has been neglected even though these experiences play an important role in the overall tourist experience. Therefore, this study aims to get an increased understanding of the learning experience guests encounter while residing in an eco-lodge. The analysis and findings are based on a qualitative case study conducted through interviews, complemented by observations at a specific eco-lodge in Australia. The findings from this article show that there is a gap between the learning opportunities at the lodge and guests' aspirations of the learning experience. From these findings a learning-scape is proposed as a way to enhance the learning experience for consumers by combining three aspects: appealing to emotions and interests, playing on previous knowledge and involvement, and providing more learning opportunities.

**Keywords:** eco-tourism, learning experience, sustainable accommodation, learning-scape

## Introduction

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the world and has become more and more popular during the last few decades. In 2012 the tourism industry reached one billion travellers in one year (UNWTO, 2014). Tourism has major impacts (Budeanu, 2005) and mass-tourism can be linked to negative effects on the climate, local communities and the environment (UNEP, 2014). For example, transportation and accommodation within the tourism industry account for the most CO<sub>2</sub> emission (Hall et al., 2013), where accommodation accounts for approximately 20% (Juvan & Dolnicar, 2014). Accommodation has negative impacts on the environment due to waste, water and energy consumption (Warnken et al., 2005).

As opposed to mass-tourism, eco-tourism can be defined as a way of travel that has less negative impact on the local communities and the environment and involves for example: development of and respect for the local culture, improving quality of life, having a focus on minimizing environmental impacts, conserving nature, and educating tourists (Buckley, 1994).

Travellers who choose this type of nature based, responsible travelling can be called eco-tourists (Chan & Baum, 2007, Osland & Mackoy, 2004). An eco-tourist is motivated by a belief that the environment needs protection, and has a desire to feel like they did something good by choosing this type of travel (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2007). An eco-tourist can also focus on not engaging in harming behaviour such as not buying souvenirs from endangered species, trying to reduce travel distance and resource consumption, as well as choosing eco-friendly accommodation (Budeanu, 2007).

More and more tourists are looking for these types of accommodation that respect the environment (Kim et al., 2012). Accommodation can be seen as sustainable when it has a focus on for example, conserving energy, using grey-water, biodegradable soap (Osland & Mackoy, 2004), low flow showers, eco-friendly cleaning products, energy saving lightning, dual flush toilets, solar power, composting and waste sorting (Kim et al., 2012). An eco-lodge is a form of sustainable accommodation that goes along the lines of eco-

tourism and the principles of eco-tourists. An eco-lodge differs from other accommodation as it has a high standard of environmental sustainability, focuses on the surrounding natural environment, and can offer eco-experiences in the form of, for example wildlife viewing or interaction experiences with a focus on education (Chan & Baum, 2007). According to Chan (2010), a facility's commitment to preserving and conserving the environment, as well as protecting resources and endangered species seem to be important aspects and key motivators for guests who choose eco-lodges. Guests also look for adventure, excitement, self-fulfilment, escapism, a relaxing atmosphere, interaction with likeminded tourists and learning, to name a few (Ballantine & Eagle, 1994, Chan, 2010, Chan & Baum, 2007).

Eco-tourism involves learning, and this kind of travelling can be used as a tool to create awareness for nature conservation, animal protection (Chan, 2010), and promote responsible tourism. Previous research on learning in eco-tourism has focused on learning in eco-experiences. In eco-experiences the combination of providing interpretation material (Hill et al., 2007, Orams, 1997, Weiler & Ham, 2001), and creating an emotional connection to animals (Ballantyne et al., 2011, Tisdell & Wilson, 2005), or appealing to tourists' interests (Falk et al., 2001) all show increased engagement and awareness among tourists, and can even lead to a change in behaviour. Previous research has also shown that previous knowledge and involvement in eco-issues are important in tourists' learning experiences (Ballantyne et al., 2011, Beaumont, 2001, Falk et al., 2011, Lee & Moscardo, 2005). However, Falk et al. (2011) call for more tourism- and learning-related research, in order to find better ways to incorporate learning in tourist experiences. To understand a tourist experience, Quan and Wang (2004) suggest that daily activities such as sleeping, eating and transportation are also important aspects, as they play an important part in the overall tourist experience. Thus, not only "peak" experiences, as something opposed to daily activities, should be included when understanding a tourist experience. Therefore, rather than focusing on "peak" touristic experiences or eco-experiences, this article will present empirical evidence of consumers' learning experiences at an eco-lodge accommodation. More specifically, this exploratory case study *aims* to get an increased

understanding of the learning experience guests encounter while residing in an eco-lodge. Hence, my research question is: *What role does the learning experience play in consumers' eco-lodge experience?* The article will focus on how, when, where and if tourists are educated at eco-lodges, what information is communicated and how this affects tourists' experience.

To answer the research question, a qualitative case study was carried out through in-depth interviews, complemented by observations. The findings of this article provide an understanding of what role the learning experience plays in consumers' eco-lodge experiences and increases the understanding of tourists' accommodation experiences, what effect learning has on tourism experiences, as well as what is important in a tourist accommodation learning experience. From this understanding it is possible to discuss how consumers' learning experiences in tourism can be enhanced. This article also provides eco-lodge managers with an insight into guests' perception of accommodation, how the learning experience affects guests' stay and how to incorporate learning into consumer experiences to enhance the awareness of sustainability among tourists.

## Theoretical Framework

To get an increased understanding of what role the learning experience plays in consumers' eco-lodge experiences, it is important to first understand the concept of experiences in relation to learning and tourism. Thus, in an eco-tourism learning experience there are some aspects that seem to be important to consider. Further, the environment in which experiences take place has an effect on what is experienced. In order to describe this, the concept of "scape" is introduced and explained, ending the theoretical discussion.

## *Experiences and Learning in Tourism*

In postmodernity, Pine and Gilmore (1998) mention the concept of experience economy, as a shift from a focus on goods or services, to a focus on experiences. This focus includes creating memorable experiences for customers. A customer experience should engage on an emotional, intellectual, spiritual and physical level (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Kolb (1984) suggests to use experiences as a basis for powerful and effective

learning. This experiential learning through real life experiences can lead to knowledge that we carry with us for life. According to Kolb (1984) this type of knowledge is much more likely to be remembered and acted on, since it is a learning process that is experienced first-hand. When it comes to tourism, Larsen (2007) defines tourism experiences as psychological processes, including expectations before a trip, events during a trip and memories from the trip. Thus, a vacation can be an experience that creates a memory that the tourist will remember for a long time. On those lines, Falk et al. (2011) state that more and more people are interested in this type of lifelong learning and that tourism has appeared as experiences through which tourists can gain knowledge and create new meaning. Accordingly, Oliver (1992) suggests that travel experiences have a bigger effect on changing behaviour, than any classroom setting learning. These enjoyable, first-hand, tourism experiences filled with emotions can create a connection to and appreciation for nature. This appreciation can create a desire to protect nature in return (Beaumont, 2001, Chan, 2010, Oliver, 1992). Correspondingly, Duenkel and Scott (1994) propose that a natural environment or wildlife experience can affect how tourists perceive the world, and make tourists more environmentally aware. These tourism experiences also offer learning opportunities through activities, interactions or visits with knowledgeable guides, with the intention to teach tourists about nature conservation (Chan & Baum, 2007).

### ***Emotions and Interests in an Eco-Tourism Learning Experience***

Previous studies have been carried out to show the relation between the tourist learning experience and interaction with different types of animals, such as sea turtles (Tisdell & Wilson, 2005) and other marine animals (Ballantyne et al., 2011). Tisdell and Wilson (2005) found that tourists enjoy gaining knowledge through this type of experience where education is combined with seeing animals. The experience creates an emotional connection to the animals and in combination with interpretation material, this plays an important role in actively engaging tourists in protecting or conserving the environment. Further, the experience can turn into a desire to conserve and actually take action, such as through donating to protect the turtles.

Similarly, Ballantyne et al. (2011) found that marine wildlife encounters or observations can create an increased awareness, appreciation and feeling of connection with nature, and can lead to conservational actions. The results show that to emotionally engage travellers through wildlife experience, can have an impact on long-term effect. Thus, appealing to emotions has been shown to have an effect on the learning experience tourists engage in when interacting with animals.

Falk et al. (2011) found that learning experiences through tourism are personal and closely related to interests. Further, meaningful experiences are created when tourists feel like the experience is engaging, in line with identity needs, interests and expectations. Falk et al. (2011) also mention that a meaningful experience is closely related to personal identity but it is not only the tourism experience alone that change behaviour, but rather a chain of related events throughout life. Thus, tourism experiences, related to interests or connected to emotions seem to be important factors in tourist learning experiences.

### ***Previous Knowledge and Involvement in an Eco-Tourism Learning Experience***

Ballantyne et al. (2011) and Falk et al. (2011) propose the importance of previous knowledge in tourism and learning. Falk et al. (2011) build on Aristotle's theories for learning including *techne*, *episteme* and *phronesis*. *Techne* is practical skills such as navigation, sailing or photography. *Episteme* is knowledge, for example learning about whales, either spontaneous or intentional. *Phronesis* is practical wisdom, something we acquire through life experience, for example social or cultural awareness or learning about sustainable and ethical behaviours or perspectives. Learning about conservation and sustainable issues would fall under the category of practical wisdom (*phronesis*). Further, Falk et al. (2011) argue that getting a guided tour from an expert may only lead to enhancing knowledge (*episteme*) and not practical wisdom (*phronesis*). However, Ballantyne et al. (2011) found that practical wisdom is highly influenced by previous knowledge about environmental issues, as well as a person's learning motivations. Accordingly, Falk et al. (2011) suggest that learning takes place when people are educated based on their previous and

individual interests, skills and knowledge. This argument ties back to the argument that the tourist is the co-creator of meaning (Falk et al., 2011, Mossberg, 2007).

Previous research also shows that customers' knowledge, involvement and attitudes towards environmental problems, play a big role in purchase behaviour. Kim et al. (2012) suggest that customers' selections of accommodation change depending on their perception of the hotels' commitment to sustainability. Factors affecting the decision are: waste, water, energy and biodiversity programmes. Further, according to Kim et al. (2012), guests who are positive towards eco-friendly programs have a stronger intention to stay at these accommodation facilities that incorporate these programs. Hence, tourists that have an interest towards or have knowledge about environmental issues are more likely to be motivated to choose this type of accommodation.

Correspondingly, Lee and Moscardo (2005) found that awareness of and involvement in environmental practices have a significant effect on environmental knowledge. Although, since an eco-accommodation attracts people who are already informed about such issues it might be difficult to prove any change in behaviour. On the contrary, Beaumont (2001) found that eco-tourism could in fact change environmental knowledge, create an awareness and understanding for nature, and promote a change in behaviour accordingly. However, the study points out the importance of motivating tourists before experiences and that tourists possess previous knowledge of sustainable issues, in order to facilitate involvement and learning. Beaumont (2001) also introduces the concept of the "ceiling effect". The ceiling effect means that tourists that are already involved in eco-issues reach a ceiling and their attitudes will not be changed by an eco-experience. The research also found that tourists who were already involved got their beliefs reinforced, while tourists who had little prior knowledge were influenced the most by the experience. However, an eco-experience can still enhance these thoughts or attitudes of any tourist, prior knowledge or not (Beaumont, 2001). Thus, previous knowledge and involvement in eco issues seem to be facilitators to enhance tourists' learning experience.

### ***Information and Interpretation in an Eco-Tourism Learning Experience***

Previous research shows the importance of providing information and interpretation material in order to facilitate learning in a tourist experience. For example, Weiler and Ham (2001) in a case of tour guides, Hill et al. (2007) in a study with tourists participating in a ropewalk, Powell and Ham (2008) in a study of a cruise around the Galapagos Islands and Orams (1997) in a dolphin interaction. Weiler and Ham (2001) found it important for an eco-experience to have an emotional connection between nature and places, along with intellectual and spiritual connections. The research also found that interpretation is important in making this connection. On those lines, Hill et al. (2007) found that interpretation is important for an eco-experience and that eco-tourists are keen on gaining knowledge during the experience. The research shows that visitors enjoy being close to nature and those who were provided with interpretation material were overall more satisfied with the experience.

Similarly, Powell and Ham (2008) found that successful interpretation strategies could have a positive effect on the experience, knowledge and future behaviour in conservational issues, for example through donating to conservational organisations. The research concludes that natural experiences in combination with interpretation material has an impact on tourists desire to conserve nature. Accordingly, Orams' (1997) dolphin interaction include an education program in order to facilitate enjoyment, enhance knowledge, intentions and attitudes towards environmental issues. The results showed that an emotional attachment to the animals enhanced empathy for nature and a wish to protect it, as well as that tourists who were part of the education program had an enhanced awareness and were more interested in getting more information about the dolphins, compared to those who were not in the educational program. Further, the research found that an education or interpretation program is necessary in order to facilitate a change in attitudes or behaviour, since an emotional attachment is not enough to generate the same results. Orams (1997) points out, without knowledge, education or interpretation, it does not matter how emotionally engaging it is.

When it comes to accommodation, Lee and Moscardo (2005) state that more information and interpretation material should be available for guests in eco-accommodation experiences. On those lines, Kim et al. (2012) found that hotels should communicate their commitment to waste, water and energy programs, as customers wish to learn more about the hotel's commitment to these issues. Thus, education and interpretation should be incorporated into the tourist experience to lead to environmental awareness and conservational behaviour.

### ***A Scape***

In theory, different scapes have been presented over the years, where one of the first was Bitner's service-scape (1992). A service-scape explores the effect the physical surroundings have on customers and employees in service organisations. The physical surroundings can have an effect on the behaviour of guests, for example, during a stay in a hotel. The service-scape may also have an effect on the interactions of customers and employees. For example, guests and hotel employees can be affected by the service-scape into a change in beliefs, emotions and even influence or change behaviour. Thus, a service organisation's physical environment can have an effect on how guests perceive and experience the service. It can either work in favour or against reaching goals of the organisation.

Some other categories of scapes have also been proposed, such as a gaze or visual-scape (MacCannell, 1976), sense-, smell-, or sound-scape (Dann & Jacobsen, 2002, Urry, 2002). Building on Bitner's (1992) service-scape, O'Dell and Billing (2005) propose an experience-scape. An experience-scape is a place where experiences can occur and includes pleasure, enjoyment, entertainment, and interacting with others. Further, Mossberg (2007) suggests that tourist experiences take place in an experience-scape. However, the experience occurs within the consumer, and organisations can only provide an environment or a scape where the experience can take place (Mossberg, 2007). Mossberg (2007) further points out five factors that are important and affect the tourist experience. The first factor, also building on Bitner's (1992) service-scape theories, the physical environment including music, lighting, signs,

symbols, furnishing etc. affect the tourist experience. Secondly, the role of, for example guides, employees or other personnel through different service encounters affects the experience. Thirdly, also other tourists affect the experience, this effect can be both positive and negative depending on different settings. Fourth, products or souvenirs such as, a tangible reminder of the experience, also affect the tourist experience. Lastly, the incorporation of a theme or a story, such as a guide being a storyteller could turn the service into a more meaningful experience (Mossberg, 2007). Taken together, scapes are surroundings or environments that create conditions or provide prerequisites for how things will be experienced in the scape, which can enhance or discourage what is trying to be achieved.

## **Methodology**

### ***Case Study of an Eco-Lodge in Australia***

This exploratory, qualitative study aims to get an increased understanding of the learning process that takes place during an eco-lodge experience. Exploratory research aims to explore phenomena that are fairly unknown, in this case, studying learning experiences in eco-accommodation. A qualitative approach is chosen since the study focuses on consumers', employers' and managers' understanding of the learning experience. This approach suits well, as qualitative research aims to get a detailed understanding of the participants' behaviour, perceptions and experiences (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Further, the methodology chosen for this article is a case study. The aim of a case study is to understand what is unique about the case or cases it focuses on. A common method of case studies is in-depth interviews, which help to explore and get a better understanding of the specific case (Guest et al., 2013). Thus, in-depth interviews are often the primary source of collecting empirical data, which can also be complemented by other methods (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). In this study, the empirical data was gathered in two stages, firstly through observations of the eco-lodge and secondly, through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Positively, together this data can answer how, when, where and if tourists are educated at eco-lodges, what information is communicated and

how this affects tourists' learning experience regarding this specific case.

Australia was chosen as an appropriate geographical location, firstly since it is a big country with many popular tourist destinations. For example, the Great Barrier Reef, the Gold Coast, Fraser Island, Bondi Beach, the Blue Mountains, Ayers Rock, Margaret River, the Outback and the Great Ocean Road to name a few (Tourism Australia, 2015). Further, Australia had almost 6 million international tourist arrivals, for the year ending in September 2013 (Tourism Research Australia, 2013), which is an increase of 22% since 2003 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). Thus, these international visitors account for 212 million nights in the country annually (Tourism Research Australia, 2013). Also, when it comes to emissions, the tourism industry in Australia is the fifth biggest sector and the accommodation sector in Australia accounts for 9% of the total carbon emissions (Dwyer et al., 2010). Secondly, Australia was chosen because its tourism is highly dependent on the preservation of the natural environments and its wildlife (Buckley, 1996). The climate change with rising sea levels, rising temperatures, more severe weather climates including droughts, fires, floods, heavy rain and heat, has a major impact on Australia's environment. Also, because of its isolated location over 80% of the flora and fauna is unique to Australia and cannot be found anywhere else (Fauna & Flora International, 2015). Hence, a change in the climate might have an impact on many tourist attractions such as the coral reefs and its marine life, which is dependent on stable climate conditions (Amelung & Nicholls, 2014, Ruhanen & Shakeela, 2013). Lastly, Australia's natural climate state is drought, which requires the population to be highly aware of their water consumption. Large parts of the country have permanent water restrictions in place, with guidelines on how to use water efficiently. These water restrictions are incorporated by all tourist facilities and apply to all international guests staying in the specific areas as well (Australian Government, Bureau of Meteorology, 2015, Warnken et al., 2005). Taken together, this makes Australia an interesting geographical location to investigate from an eco-tourism perspective.

This case study is limited to look into one location of an eco-lodge, in order to be time efficient and to

collect focused, detailed data. The eco-lodge was chosen based on *Eco-Tourism Australia's* certified *Eco-Lodges of Australia* (EcoTourism Australia, 2015b). Out of 19 lodges, the studied eco-lodge was selected based on its educational program and rigorous commitment to sustainability. Due to the eco-lodge's publishing policy, the eco-lodge wishes to keep its identity confidential and will therefore from here on out be referred to as the fabricated name NangaMai Eco-Lodge.

### ***Observation of the NangaMai Eco-Lodge***

The empirical data was firstly collected through observations, as a complement to the in-depth interviews. Zemliansky (2008) suggests that observations should focus on general collection of data to learn about the site and collect background information. On those lines, the purpose of using observations for this study is that the researcher can become familiar with the selected facility and to get a general picture of the eco-lodge, prior to all interviews.

Based on Fuentes' (2011) ethnographic observation techniques, four types of observations were carried out for the purpose of this study:

- Accommodating observation, to gain increased knowledge by participating as a guest.
- A grand tour observation, to get an overview of the premises and the service-scape.
- Consumer observation, to get a better picture of the learning experience of consumers.
- Follow-up observation, to follow-up already made observations of the sites and service-scape.

The first three observation forms were interlinked, as it can be rather challenging to be a participant and an observer at the same time (Zemliansky, 2008). Upon arrival the researcher spent the first 24-hours at NangaMai as a guest. This allowed for the opportunity to conduct accommodating observations in order to gain increased knowledge of the facilities by participating. During this observation the researcher focused on checking the facilities for information about sustainability, and took the role of a guest, to experience NangaMai's sustainability communication and learning points. The grand tour observation blended in with the

accommodating observations, as it was very difficult to keep them separate. Getting more detailed information about the available learning points was also incorporated into the first interview with a manager. This interview was held in the morning of the second day and included a guided tour of the facilities. Following the grand tour observation was observing the consumers to get a better understanding of the learning of guests. The consumer observation included taking notes of how consumers acted at NangaMai with a focus on the different learning points. Lastly, to conclude this data collection method, a follow-up observation was made to potentially make observations from a different angle.

Throughout the different observations, an observation guide (See Appendix C) was closely followed to cover all areas. The observation guide was grounded in previous theories to enhance reliability, as suggested by Yin (2009). Further, to build the observation guide, information from various tourist organisations regarding eco-accommodation certification criteria were analysed. For the purpose of this study, the following certification organisations were selected: *Eco-Tourism Australia* (Eco-Tourism Australia, 2015a) and *Vakinn – Iceland* (Vakinn, 2014), which builds on the New Zealand certification organisation *Qualmark* (Qualmark, 2015). *Eco-Tourism Australia* is a globally recognized and respected organisation that promotes sustainable and responsible tourism (Warnken et al., 2005). This certification program was included as a basis for evaluating NangaMai, since *Eco-Tourism Australia* has strict regulations and compliance standards. Further, the Icelandic organisation *Vakinn* has an extensive criteria checklist, which is why it was added as a guideline for evaluating the chosen eco-lodge. *Vakinn's* (2014) checklist includes, for example to provide information about the actions taken towards preserving nature and social affairs, have a declaration and vision of sustainable tourism, support education of nature conservation, and to educate and inform tourists on how to become more responsible.

To ensure reliability, in accordance with Yin's (2009) suggestions, detailed and consistent notes were taken throughout all observations, followed by rigorous summarizes, reflections and analyses of the material. As for this study, the empirical

data collected through observations was repeatedly analysed, since it, as Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) highlights, forms an understanding of the culture by discovering descriptive components and themes to lay the foundation for further analysis. Thus, analysis of the observation material is an on-going process that develops over time as the study progresses (Fuentes, 2011). The empirical data collected through observations translated into being able to ask more direct questions during the interviews, such as about certain artefacts or experiences throughout the eco-lodge. The observations built a good foundation for the researcher to stand on before entering into the process of the interviews.

### ***Interviews with Guests, Managers and Employees***

For this case study, all guests staying at NangaMai were asked if they were interested in participating in the study. Interviewees were chosen based on a purposeful sampling (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Out of the total number of guests staying at NangaMai, 16 guests agreed to participate. This method of convenience sampling can be seen as biased, compared to a randomized sample (Kalton, 1983). However, the guests selected for this study provided detailed information and interesting inputs. Thus, the bias will not generate negative effects on the result. Further, a small sample of 16 guests and one location of an eco-lodge cannot be representative of, or generalized to the entire population (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008) of learning experiences in eco-lodges. However, that is not the purpose of this study, as it aims to get a deeper insight into and explore the learning experience that guests staying at an eco-lodge encounter. The selected interview respondents (IR) generated a fairly diverse distribution; one country, gender, income or educational level was not over-represented. As shown in the table below (see Table 1) the interviewees are from 11 different countries, the male-female distribution is fairly equal, age range from 26-64, all income levels from 0 - >100 000 AUS \$ are represented, as well as educational levels from a high school diploma to a doctoral degree. All international respondents got to Australia by air and to the eco-lodge by car or bus. Some domestic travellers also used air transportation to get to the specific region and then by car or bus to the eco-lodge. Most respondents



were travelling around Australia and not just visiting the eco-lodge, some were also travelling around South East Asia and a few respondents were travelling to Australia and New Zealand.

**Table 1 Distribution of Interviewees**

<i>IR No./ Name*</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Income level (in 1000 AUS \$)</i>	<i>Education</i>
1 Cate	Australia	F	37	50-75	Bachelor
2 Louis	France	M	56	75-100	Bachelor
3 Russell	Australia	M	30	25-50	High School
4 Lucy	New Zealand	F	41	50-75	Bachelor
5 Zhang	China	F	39	>100	Master
6 Li	China	F	37	50-75	Bachelor
7 Toshiro	Japan	M	52	>100	Master
8 Rani	India	F	48	25-50	Bachelor
9 Connie	Denmark	F	34	50-75	Bachelor
10 Jodie	USA	F	26	0-25	High School
11 Aamir	India	M	33	50-75	Bachelor
12 Geoffrey	Australia	M	35	25-50	High School
13 Robert	USA	M	31	50-75	Master
14 Rachel	Canada	F	64	>100	Doctoral
15 Aki	Finland	M	61	75-100	Bachelor
16 Heidi	Germany	F	32	50-75	High School
Total/ Mode/ Average	AU: 3 CN / IN / USA: 2	F 9 / M 7	41	50-75	Bachelor

\* All names are fabricated in order to keep interviewees anonymous

Individual semi-structured interviews with these 16 guests, as well as, two managers and two employees represent the main empirical data collection for this study. Interviews were chosen for this study in order to get a detailed understanding of how consumers perceive the learning experience at the eco-lodge. Further, to get an insight into managers' and employees' perception of consumers' learning opportunities. Interviews were chosen to gather empirical data as it allows the interviewee and interviewer to engage in the discussions. Semi-structured interviews give the possibility to modify questions as the interview takes place. Interviews also give the interviewees the opportunity to answer with their own words

and to give their point of view (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Mostly open-ended "what" and "how" questions were asked, to let interviewees elaborate on their answers (Clough & Nutbrown, 2007). All interviews followed an interview guide (see Appendix A-B) in order to enhance reliability (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

The interviews with guests took between 30-50 minutes, while the interviews with employees took between 20-40 minutes. The interviews with managers took between 40-90 minutes as a guided tour of the facilities was incorporated into one of the interviews. The interview guide for guests (See Appendix A) was closely followed, while the interview guide for managers and employees (See Appendix B) was used more as a guideline. Both the theoretical framework and the different eco-certification organisations criteria for getting certified (Eco-Tourism Australia, 2015b, Qualmark, 2015, Vakinn, 2015) were drawn upon when the interview guides were constructed. However, interviews were not outlined to follow theoretical themes but rather constructed in a way to create a good flow throughout the interviews.

A longer version of the interview guide was tested and questions that were the easiest for guests to answer and provided the best answers were picked for the final interview guide. The interview guide for guests aims to:

- Get an understanding of guests' travel habits.
- Understand guests' perception of the learning experience at NangaMai.
- Establish guests' position in and knowledge of sustainability.

During interviews with managers and employees the interviewer asked one or two general questions under each sub-topic and allowed the interviewee to elaborate on the answers. This led to a rather disarranged but flexible order of the interview guide, as an answer to one question often covered more than one topic. Thus, the interview guide was used as a complement in order to ask additional questions to make sure that all topics were covered efficiently. The interviewer often asked the managers and employees to give an example, explain a concept or elaborate further on an opinion. The main topics of the interview include:

sustainability at the lodge, how sustainability is communicated, *Eco-Tourism Australia*, education and guests' learning experience, the accommodation facilities, transportation, nature and community involvement, available activities for guests, and reflecting on the future.

All interviews went by smoothly and it seemed like guests, employees and managers were highly interested and passionate about the topic. This led to stimulating and rewarding discussions with all participants. Although, one must keep in mind that sometimes interviewees say one thing but do something different (Elliot & Jankel-Elliott, 2003). In addition, when it comes to tourism research related problems, Swarbrooke and Horner (2007) mention that tourists can give more positivistic answers, because they do not wish to say that they did not enjoy the stay at for example, a hotel.

During the interviews the interviewer carried a pen and paper, in order to cover any additional themes and insights. In accordance with Yin's (2009) suggestions, to ensure reliability all interviews were also audio-recorded, transcribed, and summarized. The data was also coded, in order to detect themes (Crang & Cook, 2007), to help facilitate the analysis (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). This study ensures validity, as described by Yin (2009), through matching empirical material with already existing theories. As the analysis progressed the material gathered through the interviews and observations were compared in order to identify and connect the different themes. This was carried out in accordance with Yin's (2009) suggestions, to get a better understanding of the concepts as a whole, by understanding the parts. In the analysis, as suggested by Kvale (1997) quotes were incorporated from the interviews to strengthen the arguments. The interviews provided thorough answers to how, when, and where tourists are learning, as well as insights into how learning affects consumers' eco-lodge experience.

## Findings

In this section the analysis is presented. Firstly, the learning points at NangaMai are discussed, as well as the sustainability actions taken at the lodge, followed by an analysis of guests' learning experiences. This analysis answers the question of what information is communicated, as well as,

how, when, where and if tourists are educated at NangaMai. The analysis ends with a discussion on how education affects consumers' experience and how to provide a better and enhanced learning-scape.

### *Observing and Understanding NangaMai*

As stated by *Eco-Tourism Australia* (2015b) NangaMai has a high focus on sustainability. An interview with a manager (Manager [M]1) indicates that NangaMai is run by environmentalists and that the "...first focus in every step is on sustainability, we try to be as sustainable as possible in every aspect, it goes a long way if you put it first at every decision" (M1). Interviewed guests were also very positive towards the actions NangaMai is taking when it comes to sustainability. This was made visible through several of the respondents, here is an example from Zhang: "I am very impressed about everything they do here. I feel like there is sustainability in every little detail, from the moment we set foot on the ground, until we leave...". Thus, respondents even mention that they were seeking out NangaMai because they heard about its sustainability focus: "I heard about their good work on TV and wanted to check it out for myself. I heard that they did a good job on sustainability and that they had a focus on animal protection" (Cate).

NangaMai incorporates sustainability into every single decision it takes (M1) and as an observer the researcher noticed several learning points and sustainability actions around the lodge. The *learning points* at NangaMai include signs asking guests to reflect on their behaviour. For example, there are signs about water preservation asking guests to take shorter showers and not leave the tap running while brushing teeth. There are also signs asking guests to reuse their towel and to help sort waste. Another important point of learning is through employees who aim to incorporate sustainability into conversations, by for example promoting the quality of tap water and offering guests filtered tap water in glass bottles.

Other sustainability actions NangaMai is taking, include a focus on *preserving resources, material, purchases, supplier services, transportation, rooms and communication*. For example, when it comes

to *preserving resources*, NangaMai uses solar power to heat up hot water, grey-water in the toilets, low flow showerheads, and soap dispensers (Field Notes from observations [FN]). Further, the lighting around the eco-lodge is energy efficient and all outside lamps have a timer installed to only go on at night. As for the use of *material*, all material for constructing including beds, mattresses, and furniture are all chosen to have as little impact on the environment as possible. A manager (M1) also mentions that all employees' clothes are made from an Australian company. Sustainability is also incorporated into every step including production, and shipping for all *purchases*. For example, all patio furniture is made from recycled plastic and will last forever. NangaMai aims to only work with companies that have a sustainable focus and tries to stay as local as possible, since it requires less transport. For example, the timber floors are produced by a company that incorporates sustainable harvesting and the bed mattresses are from a company that tries to provide the community, where it is produced, with another source of income, rather than selling ivory.

When it comes to *supplier services*, for example the catering and cleaning services, NangaMai lets five companies apply for the position when they are looking for a new contract. The companies are picked based on their commitment to sustainability and if they are locally sourced. The company that shows the greatest commitment to sustainability gets the contract for the next few years (M1). As for *transportation*, NangaMai has electric cars (FN) and all employees receive discount on public transportation as an encouragement or incentive to use that type of transportation. However, the manager (M1) states, "we cannot force anyone to use public transportation, but we can try and encourage them to use public transportation. Same goes for guests, we cannot ask them to use certain types of transportations as it is rather difficult to get to Australia without using a plane". The *rooms* also have a sustainability focus and every room at NangaMai has a "room animal", for example the giraffe, sun-bear, and corroboree-frog room. (FN). Guests staying in each room are meant to get the feeling that they are adopting their room animal (M1). As for *communication*, NangaMai has a comprehensive sustainable statement that says "for the wild", meaning that the lodge tries to do

everything that is best for nature and the wild in general. Further, the lodge has to answer to *Eco-Tourism Australia* when they visit every year to evaluate the actions taken towards sustainability, to see if the lodge will get picked as an *Eco-Lodge of Australia* the following year (M1). NangaMai also aims to become paperless and move everything online.

Guests understandings of eco-lodges are similar to previous theories on eco-lodge definitions (Ballantine & Eagles, 1994, Chan & Baum, 2007, Kim et al., 2012, Osland & Mackoy, 2004) as they both mention concepts such as: sustainability, eco-friendliness, recycling, water-, waste-, and energy savings, resource preservation, relaxations, local and organic food, knowledge and learning, interaction with like-minded people, nature experience, environment, saving animals, closeness to nature, and "knowing that my stay does not affect the surrounding environment negatively" (Lucy). Further, as stated by Louis: "An eco-lodge is a place which spreads eco-awareness. It does not only preserve the environment where it is located but also provides the guests with opportunities to spread these messages around the world". When interview respondents were asked to explain their experience with one word, terms like eco-friendly, fun and relaxing were mentioned. As mentioned previously, Chan (2010) also states these concepts when talking about customer satisfaction and expectations of eco-lodges. However, during the discussions of NangaMai the terms educational, inspiring, interesting and rewarding also came up. Thus, this points to that the educational aspect and learning experience are of importance to guests and play a role in the over all eco-lodge experience. As mentioned by Ballantine and Eagles (1994), eco-tourists are motivated by experiencing and learning about nature.

### ***Learning Experiences at NangaMai***

As a participating guest and observer the researcher got to experience NangaMai's learning activities first-hand. However, it was rather difficult for the researcher to participate as a guest without paying extra attention to, for example the signs aimed to educate guests around the facilities. NangaMai has opportunities for learning (FN) and management has an ambition to educate guests

(M1). This was made obvious through the interview with a manager (M1): “We want guests to feel a connection with nature, a sense of wonder and that nature is fascinating and needs protection. Hopefully this [the eco-lodge experience] will lead to a feeling of ‘I need to do something’” (M1). The eco-accommodation certification organisation in Australia, New Zealand and Iceland also mention that education and providing information on how to be responsible tourists are part of being certified (EcoTourism Australia, 2015a, Qualmark, 2015, Vakinn, 2014). This includes, informing guests about actions taken by the accommodation facilities towards environmental protection and sustainability, as well as how guests can support and engage in these activities (Eco-Tourism Australia, 2015a, Qualmark, 2015, Vakinn, 2014).

Further, Beaumont (2001) and Chan (2010) state that eco-lodges play a role in the education of tourists. These theories were made visible through the manager (M1) mentioning that education is one of the main focuses and that NangaMai aims to provide guests with resources to make changes at home. One guest also exemplifies this by mentioning: “I gained a lot of knowledge during my stay...” (Robert). However, as an observer the researcher noticed that NangaMai seems to have a focus on verbal messages (FN). There is some information around the premises for guests to interact with on their own, but the NangaMai’s main source of transferring knowledge seems to be through the employees. Managers and employees are trying to share information and tips with guests. This information can, for example, be to ask guests to always keep their pets inside at night so the pets do not chase and harm native animals. Another tip could be to suggest that guests plant native plants at home that require less water, since there are a lot of water restrictions in place (FN). A manager (M1) admits that Australians in general do not care too much about the environment so there is a great need to have eco-lodges around Australia in order to teach Australians about these issues. The manager (M1) also mentions that, “it is important to utilise our position to pass on the environmental message, not only to Australians but to all our guests”. Chan (2010) suggests that eco-tourism can be used as a tool for educating tourists. Zang made this theory visible by stating: “...this [an eco-lodge] is a great possibility to educate people on how to use these resources efficiently”.

Thus, there are learning opportunities around NangaMai and management aims to educate tourists during their stay. Following are three aspects that are important when understanding tourists’ learning experiences.

### ***Emotional and Interest Appeal***

Previous research points to that an emotional involvement is important in an experience (Oliver, 1992, Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Management at the NangaMai has also realised the importance of having guests connect emotionally. A manager (M2) mentions, “it is important to get guests to feel sympathy for the cause or the issue you are talking about” (M2). Previous research also points to that a feeling of connection to nature is important in an eco-learning experience (Beaumont, 2001, Chan, 2010). On those lines, the manager (M2) continues, “for example, we could link the lions or tigers to tree harvest as the animals’ survival is dependent on the trees still being there. This has a much greater effect on our guests’ attention than to just mention that cutting down trees is bad” (M2). Thus, it seems to be of high importance to combine an emotional attachment for an animal with protection for nature (FN). Further, the manager (M2) mentions, “many guests often ask more about their ‘room animal’. They seem to be very interested and want to learn more about it. I usually get more questions about the animals than about low flow showers” (M2).

Interacting with animals is mentioned in previous theories as an important part of tourists learning about conservational issues (Ballantyne et al., 2011, Tisdell & Wilson 2005). During the interviews it was made obvious that all guests knew a lot about their “room animal”. They all spoke very passionately about it and seemed to prefer to discuss this topic rather than, for example grey-water. One example is through Li mentioning, “I have grown very fond of our room animal, the frog. I wish I could do more to help preserve the species”. Most respondents indicated that they were very interested in learning more about sustainability issues, but a high focus was on learning more about and interacting with animals. A frequent answer to the question, “what is the purpose of your stay?” was, “I want to see the animals” (Rani). Further, Jodie mentions, “I really enjoyed seeing and interacting with the animals. I

will remember this incredible experience for a very long time". Another topic that arose during the interviews was that there was no possibility to donate at the eco-lodge to each "room animal". Thus, during the interviews the researcher noticed that most of the respondents would readily take action to help protect their "room animal". One example is through Li staying in the corroboree-frog room; "I will gladly donate if I know that the money will really help the animals. I hope I can find an organisation to help save the frogs. If this lodge would have a 'save the frog fund', I would sponsor it". Further, Geoffrey staying in the sun-bear room mentions: "I have learnt a lot about sustainability activities and about my room animal. I stay in the bear room and I have downloaded the app to help spot illegal trade of the bears". Thus, it seems that it is important to relate causes to animals or interests that guests care about. During the interviews the respondents who spoke most passionately about taking action in lines with sustainability when they got back home, was either related to an animal or an interest. For example, Rani explains: "I want to adopt an animal when I get back home. I will give some money to save the tiger when I go back to India. I really hope to get to see one before it is too late". It seems to be of high importance to incorporate an emotional connection to the information, as this seems to appeal to guests. Thus, it is much easier to build an emotional connection to a dolphin rather than a soap dispenser or dual flush toilet.

Information can also be connected to a specific interest. Cate who was in the middle of building a new house explains this: "I want to try and incorporate sustainable practices as much as possible in our new home. Maybe I can learn how I can set up grey-water and if there is anything else I could do". Further, a passionate cook, Geoffrey, states: "As I am very interested in cooking, I have a tendency to focus on how to cook with the environment in mind and how to minimize food waste. I got some new ideas during my stay here for recipes and how to use the leftovers the next day. And I learned not to use palm oil for cooking!". Geoffrey even suggests to, "...have theme nights or weeks such as for me who is really interested in cooking. There could be an eco-food week". Thus, the analysis leads to the conclusion that it is important to connect information and education to emotions or interest. The respondents

who spoke most passionately during the interviews about changes or future focuses were the ones who could connect the information to an interest, such as cooking or to an animal they cared for. These respondents who could connect information to an emotion or an interest seemed to be the ones mostly interested in future actions they could take. Hence, there seems to be a need for appealing to emotions and interests when creating a learning experience.

### ***Previous Knowledge and Involvement in Eco-Issues***

Previous research points to that previous knowledge and attitudes towards sustainable issues affects customers' behaviour (Kim et al., 2012, Lee & Moscardo, 2005). Thus, customers who are aware of and are positive towards sustainable programs are more likely to choose eco-friendly accommodation (Chan, 2010, Kim et al., 2012, Lee & Moscardo, 2005). This was made visible by the interviewees and can be explained by Connie: "When we travel all the way to Australia we want to compensate for the long flight by staying for a longer time than we usually do". On those lines, the data collected also strengthens Swarbrooke and Horner's (2007) theory that eco-tourists have a desire to protect the environment, as well as feeling like they are making a difference. This was made visible during the interviews and one example is through Connie mentioning: "It feels good to be able to do something positive for the environment even during vacations. It enhances the whole experience. It makes me feel really good to know that the hotel is trying to preserve the environment and incorporates activities of sustainability".

During the interviews it also became obvious that the interviewees had previous knowledge of sustainability issues. One example is through Louis: "I think we need to really take good care of the environment if we want to be able to continue to travel and experience new places". A significant number of respondents also show that they are already involved in sustainable issues and engaged in preserving the environment. Thus, most of the respondents have stayed in eco-lodges before and almost all respondents mention that they try to eat organic food and recycle at home. Most respondents also mention that they try to

incorporate sustainability at home by composting, using low energy light bulbs, following water restrictions and saving energy. Further, some respondents also mention that they use solar power, geothermal heating, and low flow showers at home, as well as car pools and public transportation. Almost all respondents also mentioned that they have donated at least once to a conservation organisation, such as an animal protection organisation, some respondents even said that they donate frequently. Thus, this indicates that a significant amount of respondents are already involved in sustainability issues and think about how their actions harm the natural world. This was also made obvious through Toshiro mentioning: “Only by existing I know that I have a negative impact on the environment”. The respondents showed an understanding of the effects their presence and habits have on the environment. As an example, two respondents mention: “If we are going to keep living on this planet something needs to be done now. It means to incorporate it [sustainability] into every stage of your life, even into vacations” (Rani) and “Even if it is more expensive, I see it [staying in an eco-lodge] as an investment in our environment” (Aki).

Ballantyne et al. (2011), Beaumont (2001), Falk et al. (2011) and Lee and Moscardo (2005) state that a previous interest in the topic facilitates learning. Management and employees at NangaMai have noticed that it is much easier to speak about these issues with guests that are already involved in these topics. The manager (M1) mentions: “It is much easier to talk to guests who are already involved in sustainability, they are much more interested and receptive to this information. It can lead to very interesting discussions. It is much harder to engage people who have no knowledge whatsoever in sustainability”. This analysis concludes that respondents were involved and had previous knowledge of eco-issues. Further, it seems that having previous knowledge makes educating guests easier from a management and employee standpoint, as guests are more receptive to the educational information. There seems to be a need for guests to possess knowledge and for management to play on involvement to create an effective learning experience.

### ***Information and Interpretation Opportunities***

Previous theories, (Hill et al., 2007, Oram, 1997, Powell & Ham, 2008) state that interpretation material can enhance a tourist learning experience. Further, Kim et al. (2012) and Lee and Moscardo (2005) also state that there should be more interpretation material and information available to guests in an eco-experience and that accommodations should communicate environmental commitment as it is of importance to guests. This was made obvious through the interviews, guests were very interested in the information that was already provided, although most guests have a desire to get even more information. For example, Lucy indicated: “I wish there was more information to find”. However, an employee (E2) mentions that it is rather difficult to incorporate sustainability into conversations, such as: “You cannot just say to people, if you are going to buy new furniture, look for this type of timber, unless the guests ask about it” (E2). There seem to be a gap between what management believes is the right way to educate guests and how guests wish to be educated. Management believes that they are providing learning opportunities, while respondents indicate a desire to learn even more.

Thus, there is a learning gap; an explanation could be that NangaMai used to give out evaluation forms to check if guests’ eco-lodge experiences raised awareness for sustainability or conservation. However, most people participating in NangaMai’s former evaluation mentioned that “No, I was already aware” (M1). This supports Beaumont’s (2001) argument about the ceiling effect of eco-tourists and lead management to believe that guests were already educated enough. However, interviews with guests at NangaMai contradict management’s belief of the ceiling effect, as it points to that guests would like more information and opportunities to learn. For example, Robert mentions that, “I wish there was more DIY [Do It Yourself] tips that I could bring with me home. The lodge should try and help guests with these issues and how we can implement sustainability at home. It is an excellent opportunity to teach and learn”. Respondents were also asked to give suggestions on how NangaMai could improve, it was frequently mentioned that the eco-lodge should try and provide more learning opportunities for guests, for example: “The information provided

is really good and it makes me want to learn more about what they are doing here. I would have liked a tour around the facilities to know everything” (Connie). Further, Robert mentions: “I would suggest having more information about their sustainability actions and what I can do to make my house and daily life more sustainable”. The data collected points to that there is a need to develop better forms of learning and educating tourists at eco-lodges, and concludes that there is a learning gap. The analysis indicates that guests would have liked to see more opportunities to learn and be educated, than what is provided today.

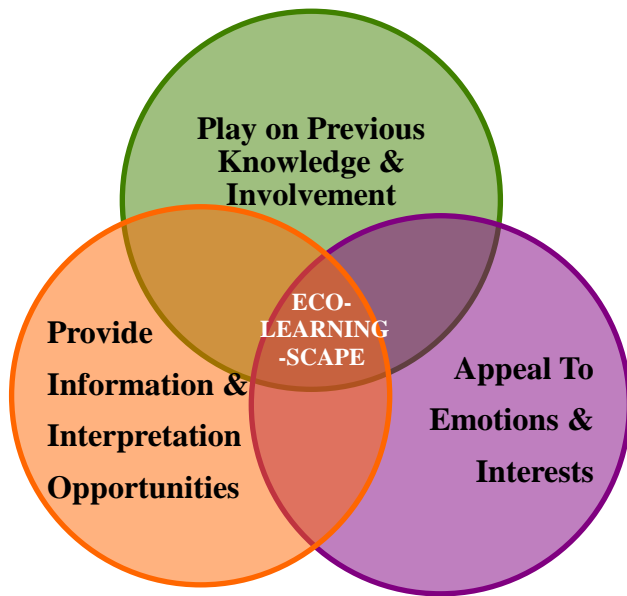
### *A Learning-Scape for Eco-Tourism*

The findings from this article show that there is a gap between guests’ aspirations of the learning experience and the lodge’s learning opportunities in the form of learning points, as well as management’s and employees’ attempts to educate guests. The analysis shows that guests are educated at NangaMai during their stay and that the eco-lodge aims to communicate information. However, this exploratory study shows that there is a learning gap since consumers would have liked more opportunities to learn.

Previous theories point to the importance of appealing to emotions in a tourism learning experience (Tisdell & Wilson, 2005, Weiler & Ham, 2001), and to the importance of previous knowledge and involvement (Beaumont, 2001, Lee & Moscardo, 2005). Previous research also points to that more interpretation material should be available (Kim et al., 2012, Lee & Moscardo, 2005) and that information can in fact enhance a learning experience (Hill et al., 2007, Oram, 1997, Powell & Ham, 2008). These emotional and educational aspects were also highlighted through the analysis of the empirical material collected for this article. All respondents spoke passionately about the emotional connection to the animal experience, as well as to the room animal they were assigned to. Some respondents also showed a greater enthusiasm for certain areas of interest. Thus, this shows that an emotional engagement or an interest can create a greater curiosity and attachment to sustainability issues, respectively. The analysis points to that guests who choose this type of accommodation are already involved and engaged in these issues. All respondents

participated in some kind of preservation or environmental conscious behaviour at home and were therefore highly involved in the discussions. Management also mention that it is much easier to communicate information to guests who are already involved or knowledgeable. This points to the importance of playing on previous knowledge and creating involvement in sustainability issues to make the learning process more effective. The analysis also shows that the educational aspect in the eco-lodge experience seemed to be of high importance. Respondents frequently mentioned a desire for more information and opportunities to learn.

To create a more effective learning experience, different aspects seem to be of importance. Ballantyne et al. (2011), Orams (1997), and Tisdell and Wilson (2005), mention that the educational aspect in combination with an emotional connection can facilitate a change in behaviour and attitudes of conservation. However, the findings in this article found that three aspects, such as, to appeal to emotions and interests, play on previous knowledge and involvement, and provide more information and interpretation opportunities are important. The analysis concludes that these aspects need to be combined in order to enhance a learning experience. Together these aspects create a good platform or scape to facilitate a learning experience that could create a change in attitudes towards more conservational and environmentally conscious behaviour. In order to illustrate this, a learning-scape (See Figure 1) is proposed. Building on previous scape-theories such as O’Dell and Billing’s (2005) experience-scape, this analysis culminates in a learning-scape aimed to enhance the learning in an eco-tourism experience.

**Figure 1 Eco-Learning-Scape**

The proposed learning-scape is a framework for increasing the possibility of creating an enhanced learning experience for consumers at an eco-lodge. Firstly, a learning-scape involves connecting learning to emotions or interests. This can be achieved by creating a feeling of empathy for an animal or to play on already existing interests, such as a passion for food or a plan to build a new house. Secondly, previous knowledge and involvement play an important role in facilitating the learning experience. Thus, it seems to be of importance that guests already possess knowledge of sustainability or for the eco-lodge to further involve guests in these issues and translate this knowledge into a change in behaviour. This could be accomplished by for example, engaging guests prior to arrival about the sustainability actions taken at the eco-lodge. Lastly, a learning-scape involves creating many opportunities for guests to learn. This could be accomplished by for example, providing an optional guided tour of the facilities to show every aspect of the eco-lodge's sustainability actions. To sum up, guests want to have more opportunities to learn than what is provided today. Thus, there is a learning gap. To close this gap and to enhance the learning experience of consumers a learning-scape should be implemented. To create an enhanced learning experience a learning-scape should combine aspects of emotions and interests, previous knowledge and involvement and provide more information and interpretation opportunities.

## Conclusion

This study aims to contribute to a better understanding of the consumer learning experience that takes place at eco-lodges. In conclusion, although management aims to educate guests during their stay, there is a learning gap since consumers desire more learning opportunities throughout the eco-lodge. The findings point to the importance of appealing to emotions and interests, playing on previous knowledge and involvement, and providing information and interpretation opportunities in guests' eco-lodge learning experiences. The findings build on previous research regarding learning experiences in eco-experiences (Beaumont, 2001, Hill et al., 2007, Lee & Moscardo, 2005, Orams, 1997, Powell & Ham, 2008, Tisdell & Wilson, 2005, Weiler & Ham, 2001) and contribute with an understanding regarding learning experiences in an eco-lodge accommodation context. The findings show that previously mentioned aspects can also be applied to eco-accommodation.

More importantly, it became evident in this article that the abovementioned aspects should be integrated in order to enhance a tourist learning experience. To illustrate this, a learning-scape is proposed. A learning-scape can be used in eco-tourism experiences as a tool to increase travellers' environmental awareness and to teach tourists how to take a global, environmental responsibility when travelling. A learning-scape will facilitate this education and managers should incorporate a learning-scape in order to provide guests with a greater possibility to learn. A learning-scape can also be used to evaluate eco-tourism learning experiences, to see how well these three aspects are incorporated at different organisations. Other actors in the tourism industry who wish to promote and contribute to learning in sustainable tourism can also apply a learning-scape. However, this learning-scape model needs to be tested in future research on eco-tourism experiences to see if it is valid. It could also be interesting for future research to look into a better follow-up after an eco-learning experience to see whether or not intended changed behaviour actually translate into a changed behaviour at home. It could also be interesting to look into how to engage travellers who do not choose to stay at eco-lodges. As, for tourism to be able to continue, mass-tourism must



make a change towards more sustainable options. To conclude, if we want our children and grandchildren to be able to experience nature and see the tigers, elephants and turtles we must make sure that tourism fosters a “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland Commission, 1987).

## Managerial Implications

This section covers the managerial implications for eco-lodge managers, but possibly also for other actors promoting sustainable tourism. Based on the analysis, following are some recommendations to incorporate, in order to facilitate an enhanced learning-scape for tourists:

***Provide more information and interpretation opportunities.*** These learning points should, of course, be voluntary but offered to all guests. Some options are to:

- *have a grand tour of the lodge available.* The tour is a great starting point to engage guests in sustainability issues, and present information about the actions the lodge is taking, while also showing them around the lodge.
- *put up little signs around the premises that guests can stumble upon.* For example, little signs can be put on the tables to tell a story of where and how it is made and how purchasing this table would benefit the environment. Signs could also be put up around the bathrooms to explain what difference a shorter shower can make and how guests and the environment can benefit from installing a grey-water system.
- *provide statistics of a normal hotel vs. statistics from an eco-lodge.* For example, “in a normal hotel you would use this much water, by staying here you have saved this much instead”. Further, show what implications this has for the environment and what positive effects it would generate. By showing guests how they make a difference by choosing to stay in an eco-lodge it could lead to a stronger desire to stay in an eco-lodge again.
- *provide DIY tips,* for example through a booklet with tips to use at home. Emailing the booklet as a PDF is more environmental friendly rather than printing it.

- *make employees more involved and passionate about the causes they are presenting.* To accomplish this, employees can give examples and make connections to everyday life, such as what guests could do at home. Further, to create an environment where it is ok for guests to ask questions and give their opinions.

***Appeal to emotions and interests, and to play on previous knowledge and create involvement.*** This can be accomplished by:

- *connecting information to an animal.* Guests seem to be more willing to take action if it would help an animal. Guests are also more likely to recycle the next water bottle if they, for example, remember getting information about how many dolphins that get harmed if we do not recycle. This information will have a greater impact on the guests and make them remember to take action rather than providing how many tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> recycling would save.
- *providing a possibility to donate to endangered species.* It is of importance to show where the money is going and that it actually makes a difference for the animals. This information could be shown through pictures and informational signs of what effects it has on, for example the koalas if you donate this much.
- *offering themed weeks or trips.* There are endless of possibilities to create different themes that guests are already passionate and have knowledge about, such as a cooking theme, sustainable wine, animal encounters, health, or DIY tips for your home. This is also a great way to involve non eco-tourists into responsible travelling.
- *engaging guests prior to arrival about the sustainability actions taken at the eco-lodge,* through, for example a PDF booklet or a YouTube video.
- *sending a newsletter to all previous guests with new or improved sustainability actions that are taken at the eco-lodge and tips to do at home.* The newsletter can be sent out through email, for example every three months to continue to create involvement.

In conclusion, it is suggested that managers try to engage guests and further involve them in sustainability by offering more voluntary opportunities for guests to learn. Also, to try and incorporate an appeal to emotions through, for example animals or guests’ interests.

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## Appendix A

### 1. Questions for guests

#### 1.1 Introduction

Name?

Where are you from?

#### 1.2 Travel information

How did you get here?

How much do you travel in a year?

What other places are you visiting during this vacation?

How many times have you stayed in an eco-lodge before?

What expectations did / do you have on this eco-lodge accommodation experience?

What have you got planned for your stay? – emotions

What is the purpose of your stay?

What made you choose this specific lodge?

How did you find out about this eco-lodge?

#### 1.3 Sustainability and this lodge

How much did you know about this lodge's sustainability work before you arrived?

How do you perceive the work towards sustainability at this lodge?

Are you interested in learning about environmental and sustainability issues?

What would you say you have learnt during this stay, in terms of sustainability?

What knowledge do you expect to bring with you home from here?

What have you, as a guest, noticed?

How much information did you notice about sustainability during your stay? - employees

Have you seen...? (show brochures or pictures)

- Same towel

- Sort waste

- Save energy, water, heating, or electricity

- Quality of tap water

- Room animals

How has this stay affected your concerns or knowledge about sustainability?

- Future choices

How has your stay affected your reflection of your own sustainability actions?

What changes will you make in your daily routines?

What did you enjoy most about your experience here?

How would you describe this experience in comparison with earlier eco-lodge experiences?

#### 1.4 Sustainability - General knowledge

What does sustainability mean to you?

What do you do at home in terms of sustainability?

What type of food do you eat at home?

Do you donate to a nature or conservation organisation?

How often do you think about if your actions harm the natural world?

How do you feel towards regular accommodation?

How would you suggest that this eco-lodge can improve sustainability?

What do you, as a guest, believe that the term eco-lodge should mean?

#### 1.5 Background questions

Gender?

Age?

Annual income level? (in AU\$)

0-25 000

25 000 – 50 000

50 000 – 75 000

75 000 – 100 000

> 100 000

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

#### 1.6 Final questions

*Anything you would like to add?*

*If you could describe this experience with one word, what would it be?*

## Appendix B

<b>2. Management questions</b>	<b>2.4.2 Guests</b>
<b>2.1 Sustainability at the lodge</b>	Do you encourage guests to use the same towel?
How are you working with sustainability?	Do you encourage guests to sort waste?
What sustainability philosophy does this lodge have?	Do you encourage guests to save energy, water, heating, electricity?
Do you have an environmental and social responsible tourism statement?	Do you encourage guests to drink tap water / provide information of the quality of tap water?
How is it communicated to employees, guests, etc.?	Do you inform guests about the company's sustainability actions?
How is your sustainability work different from competitors?	Do you inform guests about company's policy on environmental issues and sustainability and how they can support this issue?
How do you review your environmental impact?	How does education affect guests' stay?
When it comes to environmental issues and sustainability, do you check guests' expectations and satisfaction with the services provided?	How do you think your sustainability actions affect customers' satisfaction?
In what way do you work to improve the local community / environment?	Are guests provided any information or tips to bring home?
Do you involve the employees? If so, how?	
Do you involve the community? If so, how?	<b>2.4.3 Reflections</b>
<b>2.2 Communication</b>	Who is learning?
How do you think most customers find out about your lodge?	When are guests learning?
How do you market yourself?	Where are guests learning?
How do you communicate what tourists can expect?	Why are guests learning?
	How do guests learn?
<b>2.3 Eco-Tourism Australia</b>	Do guests learn?
How do you work with <i>Eco-Tourism Australia</i> ?	What do you think the tourists get out of the eco-lodge experience?
Does <i>Eco-Tourism Australia</i> check your work?	How do you think consumers learn at this lodge?
Does <i>Eco-Tourism Australia</i> ask anything from you?	What do you think consumers bring with them after a stay here?
	What would you like consumers to learn while they are here?
<b>2.4 Educating</b>	Do you believe you succeed in raising customers' awareness?
<b>2.4.1 Learning Experience</b>	<b>2.5 Points</b>
How do you communicate sustainability to guests?	<b>2.5.1 Facilities</b>
What information do you provide to customers?	Construction methods and materials?
How do you educate tourists at the lodge?	Water?
What role does educating guests play in your daily work?	Waste?
What type of learning experiences exists at this lodge?	Energy?
How do you provide opportunities for visitors to learn about sustainability?	Lighting?
Do you invite customers to learn more?	Air quality and pollution?
How do you work to help tourists become more responsible tourists?	Food?
How do you involve your guests to engage in your sustainability actions?	Left over food?
	Chemicals?
	Cleaning?
	Towel arrangements?
	Recycling?
	Cooling / heating?

Pool?
Switch off lighting or equipment that are not in use?

<b>2.5.2 Transportation</b>
Eco-travel by employees / transportation?
Electric cars?
Group transportation?
What does the hotel think about customer's flights or transportation to the lodge?
Are any actions taken to affect customer's decision regarding transportation to and from the lodge?

<b>2.5.3 Nature involvement</b>
Is the lodge involved in any programs around the eco-lodge?
Do you have a program to encourage native wildlife?
Do you support or participate in environmental research?
Do you support nongovernmental nature preservation organisations?
How do you support education on nature conservation?

<b>2.5.4 Community involvement</b>
Do you focus on local employment?
How do you work with social issues?
How do you work with the community?
Do you give away, sell or reuse goods when they have reached the end of their usefulness to the company?
Do you support sport clubs, natural conservation associations, charity organisations?
Do you make donations?

<b>2.5.5 Activities</b>
What tours are provided?
How do you consider tours or activities effect on the nature?
How do you work with guides and employees to be able to provide accurate information to customers?
Do you offer training courses in sustainable tourism?

<b>2.6 Future</b>
What are your next actions or steps in terms of sustainability?
Do you perceive yourself as leading or following?
What is the future goal concerning sustainability?

## Appendix C

<b>3. Observation</b>
<b>3.2 Accommodating observation</b>
To gain increased knowledge by participating as a guest:
Water?
Waste?
Energy?
Lighting?
Air quality and pollution?
Food?
Chemicals?
Cleaning?
Towel arrangements?
Community?
Recycling?
Construction methods and materials?
Location?
Packaging?
Installed water saving?
Group transportation?
What tours are provided?
What food is provided?
Buffet?
ISO standards?
Do they offer tap water rather than bottled water?
Do they encourage guests to drink tap water / provide information of the quality of tap water?
Do they encourage guests to use the same towel?
Do they encourage guests to sort waste?
Do they encourage guests to save energy, water, heating, and electricity?
Do they inform guests about company's sustainability actions?
Do they inform guests about company's policy on environmental issues and sustainability and how they can support this issue?

<b>3.2 Grand tour observations</b>
To get an overview of the premises and the service-scape:
What do I see?
Signs?
What information is available?
What activities are available?
Are there any learning points?
What information is communicated?
Do employees communicate sustainability?
Do employees invite customers to learn?
Is there a declaration of sustainable tourism?
Is there a vision of sustainable tourism?
Is there a strategy for employees?

<b>3.3 Consumer observation</b>
To get a better picture of the learning experience of consumers:
What is the lodge doing?
Who is learning?
When are guests learning?
Where are guests learning?
Why are they learning?
How do guests learn?
Do tourists learn?
How does this affect guests' stay?

<b>3.4 Follow-up observation</b>
Do a follow-up of already made observations of the site and service-scape.