THE ENVIRONMENTAL ATTITUDES, TRAVEL MOTIVATIONS AND EXPERIENCE EVALUATIONS OF TOURISTS IN CHINA

A Thesis in
Recreation, Park, and Tourism Management

by
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ABSTRACT

Researchers have argued that tourists who visit ecotourism destinations differ from tourists who visit non-ecotourism destinations in multiple ways, including their environmental attitudes, travel motivations, and evaluations of the destination. However, few have conducted studies with these two groups of tourists simultaneously. Thus, the purpose of this study was to contrast the environmental attitudes, travel motivations and evaluations of tourists visiting one ecotourism destination—Cangshanerhai Natural Reserve (CNR) in Dali, China—with those of tourists visiting one of three non-ecotourism destinations in China. An on-site survey and follow-up interviews were used to address the study purpose. The results revealed that tourists visiting ecotourism destinations are fairly similar to tourists visiting non-ecotourism destinations in terms of their environmental attitudes and ecotourism travel motivations. Tourists visiting ecotourism destinations do not universally possess favorable environmental attitudes and their travel motivations are diverse, including both ecotourism travel motivations and non-ecotourism travel motivations. In addition, they have favorable and unfavorable evaluations of the ecotourism destination. Local ecotourism operators should respond to these results by making more of an effort to protect the environment and culture associated with their destination, provide more environmental education to enhance tourists’ environmental attitudes, and provide a number of different ecotourism programs to arouse tourists’ ecotourism travel motivations.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES.........................................................................................................................VI

LIST OF FIGURES.........................................................................................................................VII

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ...................................................................................................................VIII

CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM ............................1

INTRODUCTION .............................................................................................................................1

Ecotourism ..................................................................................................................................1

Ecotourists ..................................................................................................................................3

Ecotourism and ecotourists in China .........................................................................................4

STUDY PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS ....................................................................4

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH ......................................................................................5

CHAPTER TWO. LITERATURE REVIEW ..................................................................................7

ECOTOURISM ...............................................................................................................................7

Debate related to ecotourism ..................................................................................................9

Ecotourism assessment ........................................................................................................10

ECOTOURISTS ............................................................................................................................13

TOURISTS’ ENVIRONMENTAL ATTITUDES AS THEY RELATE TO ECOTOURISM ........17

TOURISTS’ TRAVEL MOTIVATION AS IT RELATES TO ECOTOURISM ...............................21

Travel motivations ..................................................................................................................21

Ecotourism travel motivations ............................................................................................22

CHAPTER THREE. METHODOLOGY ..................................................................................27

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY SITES ..................................................................................27

The focal study site: CNR, Dali, China .................................................................................27

The three comparison sites ..................................................................................................30

RESEARCH DESIGN: A MIXED-METHOD APPROACH .....................................................34

The survey ............................................................................................................................35

Survey design .......................................................................................................................35

Survey data collection .........................................................................................................38

Statistical analysis of survey data ......................................................................................38

The interview ........................................................................................................................39

Interview design ..................................................................................................................39

Interview data collection ......................................................................................................40

Textual analysis of the interview data ................................................................................40
### CHAPTER FOUR. RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quantitative Research Results</strong></td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants’ profile</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental attitudes, ecotourism travel motivations and evaluation of the destination visited</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A multidimensional view of environmental attitude and ecotourism travel motivations</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANOVAs and Post-hoc tests with four groups of tourists</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of ecotourism characteristics</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interview Analysis Results</strong></td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewees’ profile</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourists’ environmental attitude</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourists’ travel motivations</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourists’ evaluation</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### CHAPTER FIVE. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The results</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Implications</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial Implications</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Research</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### REFERENCES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### APPENDIX. SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE AND SOURCES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part 1: Environmental attitude</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 2: Ecotourism travel motivation</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 3: Evaluation</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 4: Demographic characteristics</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables

Table 1. Participants’ Demographic Information ........................................ 42
Table 2. Individuals’ Response to Environmental Attitudes ............................ 44
Table 3. Individuals’ Response to Ecotourism Travel Motivations ..................... 45
Table 4. Individuals’ Response to Evaluation Statements ............................... 47
Table 5. Environmental Attitude Factors .................................................. 49
Table 6. Ecotourism Travel Motivation Factors .......................................... 50
Table 7. Differences in Response to the Environmental Attitude Factors, Ecotourism Motivation Factors, and Evaluation Statements Based on Destination Visited .... 53
Table 8. The Profile of the 30 Individuals Interviewed ....................................... 54
List of Figures

FIGURE 1. THE LOCATION OF YUNNAN PROVINCE AND DALI IN CHINA ................... 28

FIGURE 2. THE LOCATION OF CNR IN DALI BAI NATIONALITY AUTONOMOUS
PREFECTURE (THE AREA INSIDE THE LINE IS CNR) ........................................... 30
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

As an alternative to mass tourism, stakeholders have invested in ecotourism, a more sustainable form of tourism (R. Buckley, 2004). These stakeholders include, but are not limited to, governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), even the growing population of tourists who are concerned about the environment and are interested in environmental issues such as ecology, biodiversity and organically produced products (Holden & Sparrowhawk, 2002; Shemshad & Malek Mohammadi, 2012). Stakeholders have invested in rain forests in Costa Rica, the Galapagos Islands in Ecuador, natural and wildlife reserves in Kenya, and many other sites around the world (Fennell & Eagles, 1990; Ogutu, 2002; Taylor et al., 2003). Managers of these sites focus on ecological conservation, improving tourists’ environmental attitudes and behaviors, enhancing respect for the culture, empowering local communities, and more.

Ecotourism

The concept of ecotourism, which was first introduced by Mexican architect Hector Ceballos-Lascurain (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1987), has evolved into two schools of thought (Higham, 2007). One school of thought considers ecotourism to be an alternative form of mass tourism; a potential strategy for conservation; a positive contributor to the economy; and a form of regional development, local community empowerment, employment, education, and conservation (Butler & Hinch, 2007; Ceballos-Lascurain, 1987). The second school of thought views ecotourism as a shield (Wheeller, 1991) that brings as many negative impacts to destinations as
conventional mass tourism (Hall, Cater, & Lowman, 1994; Hinch, 2001; Lusseau & Higham, 2004; Weaver, 2002).

In addition to the two schools of thought, scholars have proposed multiple definitions of ecotourism (Fennell, 2001), leading to little consensus about what it is, how to differentiate it from mass tourism (Higham & Carr, 2003) and, salient to this study, the criteria that should be used for its assessment. In 1992 Butler presented a detailed checklist of principles and characteristics of ecotourism that he believed covered most aspects of ecotourism. However, his checklist has been referred to as lofty and impossible to fulfill (Orams, 1995). Blamey (1997) proposed viewing ecotourism as a form of tourism that must involve nature-based tourism attractions, education-oriented travel experiences, and ecological, socio-cultural and economic sustainability. His criteria were criticized for leaving too much room for interpretation and not establishing appropriate parameters (Higham, 2007). To address these types of concerns, tourism suppliers have created assessment tools. For example, Australia created the EcoCertification Program to assure that the country’s ecotourism projects comply with specific standards. Despite such efforts it is still a challenge to assess ecotourism thoroughly using all potential indicators (Wall, 1996). As a result, some tourism suppliers rely on tourists’ evaluations of their ecotourism experiences, the results of which are often linked to destination image, destination choice, consumption of products, marketing strategy, even the performance of tourism products (Meng, Tepanon, & Uysal, 2008).

Tourism suppliers wanting to document tourists’ response to their products must assess their attitudes and motivations as well as other factors (Luo & Deng, 2007). Tourists with positive environmental attitudes have been found to be strongly attracted to ecotourism, and to contribute to the positive outcomes of ecological
conservation in ecotourism destinations (Ardoin, Wheaton, Bower, Hunt, & Durham, 2015; Higham, 2007). In addition, tourists’ travel motivations tend to be linked to the attributes of tourism destinations (Kim Lian Chan & Baum, 2007) and influence the quality of ecotourism development. For example, Duffus and Dearden (1990) created a typology of tourists based on their motivational and behavioral characteristics. They identified “Specialists” and “Experts,” both of whom have a genuine interest in the subject of tours, require few, and have little to no negative impact on the site. “Generalists” and “novices,” on the other hand, tend to follow Specialists to natural areas, primarily seeking entertainment rather than nature. Tour operators have used this type of information to create experiences tourists desire, ignoring the impacts associated with their tours (Scarpaci, Dayanthi, & Corkeron, 2003).

**Ecotourists**

Similar to the problems associated with conceptualizing “ecotourism,” there is no widely accepted definition of “ecotourists” (Higham, 2007). Ecotourists have been defined based on various factors such as travel destination, activities, motivations, and environmental ethics (Kerstetter, Hou, & Lin, 2004; Lemelin, Fennell, & Smale, 2008; Weaver & Lawton, 2002). Although there is no consensus regarding the definition of an ecotourist, scholars have widely accepted the notion that tourists who visit ecotourism destinations universally possess favorable environmental attitudes and ecotourism travel motivations (Dodds, Graci & Holmes, Weaver & Lawton, 2002; 2010, Wight, 2001; Zografos & Allcroft, 2007). When this is not the case, it is probably because the attributes of the ecotourism destination are not as eco-focused as expected (Lemelin et al., 2008).
Ecotourism and ecotourists in China

The idea of ecotourism filtered into China in the 1980s, eventually becoming an important subsector of China’s tourism industry (Zhong, Buckley, & Xie, 2007). It continues to grow in popularity today (Han & Ren, 2001). Owing to the severe pollution and fast expansion of urbanization, a large number of residents want to escape from urban areas by visiting natural areas or wilderness. In addition, the increasingly severe pollution caused by tourism development has forced the Chinese National Tourism Administration (CNTA) to develop and promote alternative forms of tourism. The CNTA has turned to ecotourism as a means of speeding up national and regional development that follows sustainable goals. One example of this form of development took place in 2009 when the CNTA designated the year “China Ecotourism Year” with the theme of “approaching green tourism and experiencing eco-civilization.” Despite this push by the CNTA, ecotourism continues to be a relatively new concept for many Chinese tourism suppliers who have responded by developing areas and referring to them as ecotourism destinations, despite the fact that they are not knowledgeable enough of or are even unaware of what constitutes ecotourism (Deng, Bauer, & Huang, 2003). As a result, some so-called ecotourism destinations or ecotourism products in China do not qualify for international ecotourism certification (Linsheng, Buckley, & Ting, 2007).

Study Purpose and Research Questions

To date, there have been few practical assessments of ecotourism in China, particularly assessments that focus on tourists’ environmental attitudes, motivations and evaluations. Thus, the purpose of this study was to assess tourists’ environmental attitudes, travel motivations and evaluation of one ecotourism destination—
Cangshanerhai Natural Reserve (CNR) in Dali, China. To ensure that ecotourism destination visitors’ environmental attitudes and travel motivations are indeed different from those of non-ecotourism destination visitors, data were collected at three non-ecotourism destinations in China and compared to the data collected from CNR. The following research questions were addressed in this study:

RQ1. Do tourists’ environmental attitudes, ecotourism travel motivations and responses to evaluation statements differ significantly based on the type of destination (i.e., ecotourism vs. non-ecotourism) they visited?

RQ2. What themes are uncovered through analysis of CNR visitors’ responses to questions asked during a semi-structured interview?

RQ3. Do the themes uncovered through analysis of CNR visitors’ responses to questions asked during a semi-structured interview support the existing literature on ecotourists’ environmental attitudes and ecotourism travel motivations?

**Significance of the Research**

According to a review of the existing literature, tourists’ environmental attitudes, travel motivations and evaluations of specific destinations have generally been examined independent of other destinations. In addition, few researchers have assessed ecotourism by examining tourists’ environmental attitudes and travel motivations, which are considered to be crucial indicators of ecotourism’s success. This study will address tourists’ environmental attitudes, ecotourism travel motivations, and evaluations of the travel experiences simultaneously, leading to a potentially more valid profile and greater understanding of tourists who visit...
ecotourism and non-ecotourism destinations. This research also fills a gap in the existing research regarding ecotourism development in China. Based on the literature review that follows, most ecotourism studies have focused on ecotourism destinations in Latin America, Africa, Southeast Asia, New Zealand, and Australia (Higham, 2007; Weaver & Lawton, 2007). There are few manuscripts in English addressing Chinese ecotourism issues, despite ecotourism’s increasing popularity in China. Therefore, the current research will be valuable to ecotourism developers and managers in China who wish to better market and/or enhance their products and services.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter introduces the reader to definitions of ecotourism, competing perspectives of ecotourism, and ecotourism assessment criteria. It also introduces scholarly perspectives of ecotourists; research regarding the environmental attitudes of tourists who visit ecotourism destinations; and pertinent writings regarding ecotourism travel motivations.

Ecotourism

The term “ecotourism” can be traced back to the late 1980s. In 1987, the Brundtland Report from the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) argued that equal emphasis needs to be placed on environmental protection and the social benefits of economic development (Brundtland, 1987). According to Orams (1995), the term “ecotourism” partly resulted from the WCED’s recognition of the negative environmental and socio-cultural impacts caused by mass tourism.

The Brundtland Report also introduced sustainable development as a component of ecotourism. According to Hunter (1997), sustainable development mainly involves: 1) the role of economic growth in promoting human well-being, 2) recognition of the impacts caused by human activities, 3) recognition of environmental limits to growth and, 4) effective environmental management. Following the popularization of sustainable development, tourism specialists and conservationists began to recognize the importance of integrating tourism with conservation (Brandon & Wells, 1992). Ceballos-Lascurain, one of the first scholars to introduce the notion of “ecotourism,” stated that ecotourism is a form of tourism that “involves travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific object of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild
plants and animals” (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1987, p. 13). Later, Honey (1999) emphasized the tight relationship between ecotourism and sustainable development by stating that ecotourism is a critical endeavor to allow current use to ensure future use. Hence, ecotourism has become recognized and promoted as an environmentally, socially, and economically beneficial form of tourism (Brandon & Wells, 1992).

The early notions of ecotourism have evolved into a number of ecotourism definitions and principles. Fennell (2001) examined 85 definitions of ecotourism, most of which were cited in academic literature from 1970 to 1999 (a few definitions have no cited date). He noted that the definition of ecotourism frequently involves five variables—natural areas, conservation, culture, local benefits, and education. Donohoe and Needham (2006) collected and synthesized 30 academic definitions of ecotourism, all of which were published after 1990 and commonly referenced in the contemporary literature. Their review revealed six themes associated with the definitions of ecotourism: (1) nature-based, (2) preservation/conservation, (3) education, (4) sustainability, (5) distribution of benefits, and (6) ethics/responsibility/awareness.

To date, no widely accepted definition of ecotourism exists. The most cited contemporary definition of ecotourism was proposed by The International Ecotourism Society (TIES: 2015, p. 1): “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education.” In addition, TIES (2015, p. 2) outlined the responsibilities that ecotourism destinations, stakeholders and tourists have: “1) minimize impact, 2) build environmental and cultural awareness and respect, 3) provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts, 4) provide direct financial benefits for conservation, 5) provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people, and 6) raise sensitivity
to host countries’ political, environmental, and social climate.” TIES’ comprehensive definition and principles of ecotourism informed this study.

**Debate related to ecotourism**

For decades, the literature addressing the merits of ecotourism has been built around two schools of competing thoughts. One school of thought values ecotourism because of the environmental, socio-cultural, and economic benefits it may generate. Boyd and Hall (2005) noted that ecotourism provides opportunities for regional development and community empowerment in underdeveloped areas. Li (2004) pointed out that the revenue generated by ecotourism can greatly contribute to conservation projects. Ardoin et al. (2015) noted that ecotourism can enhance tourists’ environmental attitudes and environmental behaviors through conservation education. Higham and Carr (2003) stated that ecotourism can deliver high-quality visitor experiences, raise visitor environmental awareness, and support science and research programs.

The second school of thought is critical of ecotourism, stating that ecotourism is not the answer to the question of tourism sustainability but merely a ruse and marketing tool used to increase sales when mass tourism’s impacts are being criticized (e.g., Coria & Calfucura, 2012; Hall et al., 1994; He et al., 2008; Hinch, 1998; Wheeller, 1991). Proponents of this second school of thought suggest that ecotourism may generate as many negative impacts as mass tourism (Higham, 2007) and fail to deliver the expected benefits to local communities (Coria & Calfucura, 2012; He et al., 1994; Hinch, 1998). As Wheeller (1991, p. 96) argued, “the industry (ecotourism) is being provided with a shield with which it can both deflect valid criticism and improve its own image while in reality continuing its familiar short tourism commercial march.”
In addition to the two schools of thought, there is little consensus regarding a definition of ecotourism. The lack of a common definition hinders the effective and sustainable development of ecotourism because of uncertain policy, planning and development foundations (Higham & Carr, 2003). This is “diluting and compromising the coordinated and collective interests and activities of public/private, government/non-government groups and organizations, and visitors” (Higham, 2007, p. 5). The lack of consensus regarding a definition of ecotourism has resulted in ecotourism suppliers inadequately understanding the values, motivations, and expectations of visitors and misinforming them about their products (Higham, 2007). The lack of consensus may also be impacting tourists who could, based on a lack of or poorly constructed information, be misinformed about ecotourism.

**Ecotourism assessment**

Ecotourism assessment is important because it provides vital information about the quality of ecotourism products and services. There has been a plethora of literature that assesses the outcomes of ecotourism. However, consistent metrics for assessing the ecotourism are absent (Baral, Stern, & Hammett, 2012). Many scholars tend to assess ecotourism impacts or outcomes based on a framework of tourism resources, communities, administration and tourists interrelated with positive or negative economic, environmental and socio-cultural impacts caused by tourism (Kim, Kim, & Agrusa, 2008; Ross & Wall, 1999; Salum, 2009; Stronza & Gordillo, 2008; Tsaur, Lin, & Lin, 2006; Wallace & Pierce, 1996). In most cases, the tourist is an indispensable component of ecotourism outcome assessment (Baral et al., 2012; Lemelin et al., 2008). Many researchers tend to either investigate the views of tourists on certain characteristics of ecotourism (e.g. Baral et al., 2012) or examine specific characteristics of tourists themselves (e.g. Lemelin et al., 2008; Perkins & Brown,
2012). Understanding tourists’ evaluation of tourism outcomes underpins effective management of tourism projects (Moyle, Weiler, & Croy, 2013). Baral et al. (2012) argued that visitors’ evaluations are essential for ecotourism development and introduced five reasons for their viewpoint: 1) they inform ecotourism suppliers about the performance of the project from the perspective of a third party; 2) the appraisal of tourists’ demands facilitates marketing strategies; 3) a direct scale to measure ecotourism goals can be constructed according to visitors’ evaluation; 4) they directly indicate whether tourists’ expectations of the experiences are met or not; and 5) in order to get funding for protected areas, suppliers must understand and exhibit an understanding of visitors’ evaluation on ecotourism projects. However, scholars have assessed ecotourism impacts or outcomes by examining tourists’ evaluations of ecotourism destinations. A few examples follow. Baral et al. (2012) assessed ecotourism outcomes in Annapurna Conservation Area, Nepal by investigating 315 international visitors in terms of their evaluations of seven items reflecting the socio-economic and environmental impacts caused by ecotourism. Overall, the tourists favorably evaluated ecotourism outcomes in Annapurna Conservation Area. Moyle et al. (2013) explored the perceptions of tourists who visited two Australian islands about the impacts caused by tourism. Their results suggested that tourism activity generates positive impacts for local communities. Shi, Zhang, and You (2008) assessed tourism competitiveness of Jiuzhaigou Natural Reserve, a nature-based tourism destination in China, based on its visitors’ evaluations. Their research findings revealed that local tourism development had generated positive environmental and economic impacts and empowered local communities. Dioko, Harrill, and Son (2007) explored the perception of tourists who visited Zhangjiajie Natural Reserve, a famous forest park in China, by analyzing the comments made by
visitors on web-based travel blogs. The results indicated that these tourists were impressed by the beautiful natural scenery and satisfied with the nature-based attractions provided.

In addition to tourists’ evaluation of certain characteristics of ecotourism, tourists’ own characteristics can also reflect and affect their response to destinations (Lemelin et al., 2008). For example, Powell, Kellert, and Ham (2008) investigated tourists who visited Antarctica on their knowledge of the area, their environmental behaviors, and their future intentions. Lemelin et al. (2008) examined the environmental concerns and motivations of polar bear viewers visiting Churchill Wildlife Management Area in Canada. They found that only some of these tourists were strongly motivated by nature-oriented travel experiences. Liu, Ouyang and Miao (2010) investigated the environmental attitudes of tourists who visited the protected area of Jinyun Mountain in China. It was found that tourists differed significantly in terms of their environmental attitude, which was examined with NEP scales. Based on these results Liu et al. suggested that local tourism operators improve environmental education to enhance tourists’ environmental attitudes. Lu (1997) examined the travel motivations of visitors to Huangshan Mountain in China. He found that tourists were motivated to visit the mountain to appreciate the natural scenery and get close to nature. Therefore, they suggest that local tourism developers need to place more emphasis on the development of natural attractions.

In previous literature regarding tourists’ evaluation of destinations, the physical features of the tourism destinations have emerged as significant (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Tourists’ evaluation is inherently derived from facts or what is perceived by tourists in tourism destination (Bigne, Sanchez, & Sanchez, 2001). In addition, tourists’ evaluation can also indicate whether the interpretation and education
provided by ecotourism operators are successful. This is because visitors’ evaluation of destinations can be influenced by the interpretive or educational programs provided (Kim Lian Chan & Baum, 2007; Ormsby & Mannel, 2006; Tubb, 2003). For example, Weiler and Ham (2005), who worked with tourists in the Panama Canal Watershed, found that tourists in guided groups tended to make more positive evaluations than unguided tourists. Powell and Ham (2008) concluded that tourism interpretation can help mitigate the negative impacts caused by tourism. They also examined interpretation at Galapagos National Park and found that well-designed and delivered interpretation provided by ecotourism operators can generate more positive attitudes about tourism management issues.

**Ecotourists**

Isolating ecotourists as a distinct set of consumers is important to better understand them and to improve market segmentation (Weaver & Lawton, 2007). However, partly owing to a lack of consensus regarding the definition of ecotourism, a widely accepted definition of the ecotourist does not exist. Although there has been a proliferation of scholarly writings addressing how to define ecotourists, these studies have left a fuzzy boundary between the definitions of ecotourists and non-ecotourists (Weaver & Lawton, 2007).

Most definitions of ecotourists are formulated according to either the characteristics of the tourism destination or the tourists themselves. For example, Weaver and Lawton (2002) identified travel sites and accommodations as crucial factors for determining whether travelers are considered ecotourists. They pointed out that visitors to ecologdes in Austria are all regarded to be ecotourists, regardless of their motivational or personality characteristics. In a similar vein, Galley and Clifton (2004) proposed that tourists who visit ecotourism destinations should be considered
“ecotourists.” Eagles (1992), Mehmetoglu (2007), and Lemelin et al (2008) chose to define ecotourists based on their behavior. Eagles defined ecotourists as travelers who undertake nature-based travel experiences. Mehmetoglu (2007) defined ecotourists based on their degree of environmental responsibility, arguing that any environmentally responsible tourists can be identified as ecotourists regardless of their travel destination. And, Lemelin et al. (2008) identified ecotourists as those tourists whose travel behaviors and travel destinations are nature-based. Using a pre-trip perspective, Blamey and Braithwaite (1997) argued that ecotourists should be identified according to whether they are interested in visiting nature and learning about it through their travel experiences. Tao, Eagles and Smith (2004) investigated tourists who visit Taiwan’s Taroko National Park. They found that individuals who “self-defined” as ecotourists were generally interested in natural attractions and ecologically protected areas, and have a desire to learn about nature and participate in recreation activities. Li and Cai (2004) conducted an on-site investigation on Chinese ecotourists who visit ecotourism destinations in China. They concluded that ecotourists are generally environmentally friendly and nature-oriented.

Despite this proliferation of definitions, many scholars have questioned their accuracy and effectiveness (Higham, 2007). For example, Lemelin et al. (2008) concluded that tourists who participate in nature and wildlife tours exhibit different degrees of environmental attitudes and nature-based motivations, which challenges the definition of an ecotourist based on, for example, having only strong environmental ethics. Similarly, Weaver (2002, 2005) found that ecotourists are not unidimensional and can be separated in to “hard” and “soft” ecotourists. He argued that hard-core ecotourists show stronger beliefs in environmental sustainability, respond more immediately and frequently to environmental issues, support
ecotourism destinations and activities financially, patronize ecotourism developments, and exhibit more willingness to volunteer in environmental protection activities than “soft” ecotourists, who might visit natural areas and parks more in the interest of accompanying more enthusiastic friends or family members than of intrinsic pro-environmental motivations. Weaver’s findings challenge the definition of ecotourists based on environmental attitudes, travel motivation, and interest in nature.

In response to the confusion regarding a universal definition of the “ecotourist,” Ballantine and Eagles (1994) established guidelines for defining ecotourists based on three criteria: 1) they pursue undisturbed or wild areas; 2) they exhibit travel motivations such as learning about nature, wildlife, and ecological conservation; and 3) they spend at least one-third of their travel time being engaged in ecotourism. TIES (2015, p.2), on the other hand, proposed defining ecotourists as,

Travelers who choose ecotourism are responsible consumers [that are] interested in social, economic and environmental sustainability. Seeking authentic local experiences and opportunities to give back to the communities they visit, many eco-tourists participate in voluntourism activities.

Increasingly, eco-tourists are also seeking to minimize the carbon footprint of their travel, traveling with climate in mind by planning wisely and choosing consciously.

This definition involves motivational, ethical and behavioral components. Nowaczeck and Smale (2010) proposed adding education, culture, nature, specialization and contribution components as well.

However, many criticisms have emerged regarding the TIES (2015) definition of ecotourism, suggesting that it has been defined either too narrowly or broadly as to render the term meaningless (Higham, 2007). Higham and Carr (2003) argued that all
tourists who visit New Zealand can be identified as ecotourists if the term of 
ecotourist is simply defined as the tourists who visit ecotourism destinations. On the 
contrary, Blamey and Braithwaite (1997) argued that the majority of tourists who visit 
Australian tourism destinations may not qualify for the environmental values defined 
as associated with ecotourists despite their engagement in nature experiences.

Thus, scholars have questioned whether there are demographic characteristics 
that distinguish ecotourists from conventional tourists. Most explorations of 
demographic differences between mass tourists and ecotourists relate to their gender, 
age, educational level, and income. Some researchers have found that females account 
for a larger percentage of ecotourists than males (e.g., Galley & Clifton, 2004; 
Lemelin et al., 2008; Parsons et al., 2003) while others have found males account for 
a larger percentage than females (Fennell & Smale, 1992; Tao, Eagles, & Smith., 
2004; Rajasenan, Manaloor, & Abraham, 2012). Reports regarding the age of 
ecotourists also vary. Generally, either young (Daud & Rahman, 2011; Lee, Mjeld, 
Scott, & Kim, 2009; Van der Meer, 2007) or middle-aged tourists account for the 
largest group of ecotourists (Lemelin et al., 2008; Meric & Hunt, 1998; Nuva, 
Shamsudin, Radam, & Shuib, 2009; Parsons et al., 2003). There is less debate about 
ecotourists’ educational level and income. Researchers have reported that ecotourists 
have higher educational levels and income than mass tourists (e.g., Galley & Clifton, 
2004; Lee et al., 2009; Lemelin et al., 2008; Meric & Hunt, 1998; Parsons et al., 
2003).

Owing to the fact that a widely accepted definition of an ecotourist does not 
exist, the current research does not attempt to define the participants investigated as 
ecotourists or non-ecotourists. Instead, the current research names the participants as 
visitors to an ecotourism destinations and visitors to non-ecotourism destinations, and
examines whether there are differences between these three groups of tourists in terms of their environmental attitudes, ecotourism travel motivations, and evaluations of the tourism destinations they have visited.

**Tourists’ Environmental Attitudes as They Relate to Ecotourism**

Environmental attitude has been defined as a psychological tendency in terms of the cognitive and affective evaluation of environmentally-related issues (Beaumont, 2005). Researchers have extensively studied tourists’ environmental attitudes partly because ecotourism involves many issues closely tied to environmental ethics. Numerous researchers have examined tourists’ environmental attitudes using the New Ecological Paradigm (NEP), a scale developed by Dunlap and Van Liere (1978). The NEP consists of 12 items that measure people’s general attitudes on a balanced relationship between humans and the environment. Within the field of tourism, researchers that have utilized the NEP scale to measure tourists’ environmental attitudes have supported its validity and internal consistency (Kim, Borges, & Chon, 2006; Line & Costen, 2011; Lück, 2003; Luo & Deng, 2007). In addition to using the NEP, researchers have created scales to measure tourists’ environmental attitudes. For example, some researchers modified the NEP in order to adapt to a specific research context (e.g., Becken, 2004; Brown, Ham & Hughes, 2010; Lemelin et al., 2008; Uysal, Jurowski, Noe, & McDonald, 1994). Other researchers developed their own measures based on previously published research (e.g., Ballantyne, Packer, & Falk, 2011; Dodds et al., 2010; Powell & Ham, 2008). Chinese scholars also have used NEP scales to examine tourism stakeholders’ environmental attitudes. For example, Li and Cai (2004), who examined the characteristics of ecotourists, utilized the NEP scale to identify ecotourists and differentiate them from conventional tourists. Luo and Deng (2008) examined the relationship between environmental attitudes and
nature-based tourism motivations utilizing NEP scales. Their results indicated that those who have more favorable environmental attitudes generally possess a stronger desire to be close to nature, learn about nature, and escape from mundane.

Through a series of examinations of tourists’ environmental attitudes in ecotourism contexts, researchers found that ecotourism tends to attract visitors who have more favorable environmental attitudes than mass tourists (Kim & Weiler, 2013).

The most salient favorable environmental attitudes visitors possess follow:

1) Tourists who visit ecotourism destinations exhibit a stronger sense of environmental responsibility, including a sense of being responsible for protecting the environment and leaving a healthy environment for future generations; a passion for environmental protection and ecological conservation; an interest in learning about nature or environmental issues; and participating in environmental activities. Weaver and Lawton (2007) noted that tourists who visit ecotourism destinations are generally more environmentally passionate, friendly, and active than mass tourists. Wight (2001) found that tourists who visit ecotourism destinations exhibit stronger interest in learning about nature and environmental issues than mainstream tourists. In addition, such tourists are more supportive of pro-environmental activities such as joining environmental protection organizations or wildlife protection organizations (e.g., Hvenegaard & Dearden, 1998; Kerstetter et al., 2004; Meric & Hunt, 1998).

2) They are generally more willing to: contribute to environmental protection or other conservation issues, such as environmental organizations; donate to wildlife protection; and to pay a tax for environmental protection. Dodds et al. (2010) studied visitors to Koh Phi Phi and Gili Trawangan, two ecotourism
destinations in Indonesia. They found that the two groups of visitors supported paying a tax for local environmental protection and social well-being. Examining tourists’ behavioral intention to visit a wetland, Kerstetter et al. (2004) likewise discovered that the ecotourists identified in their study—individuals who visited coastal wetlands located in Taiwan—exhibited a willingness to respect ecological conservation rules, spend money in local areas, and perform more favorable environmental behaviors.

3) They generally exhibit more concerns about environmental issues, such as worries about environmental degradation and endangered species. For example, according to Wurzinger and Johansson’s (2006), tourists who are engaged in ecotourism or nature-based tourism express more environmental concerns and beliefs than conventional tourists.

4) They possess more favorable attitudes regarding the relationship between human beings and nature/environment. For example, the tourists who visit ecotourism destinations tend to possess a higher degree of belief in the equal status of all species, humans beings’ important roles in environmental protection, and the importance of ecological maintenance (e.g., Hughes & Saunders, 2005; Lee & Moscardo, 2005).

Tourists’ environmental attitudes can also be enhanced by ecotourism through experiences such as observing wildlife and learning natural history (Ardoin et al., 2015). In this process, ecotourism-related education serves important roles for conveying eco-messages to tourists and then transforming into their environmental attitudes (Ardoin et al. 2015). Wight (2001) maintained that ecotourism education should be emphasized among all parties involved in tourism delivery including governments, NGOs, industry operators, local communities, and tourists. Today, it is
widely accepted that education is one of ecotourism’s most significant products (Zanotti & Chernela, 2008). Ecotourism is effective at enhancing environmental education, especially for people who have not directly received such education (Jefferson, 1995). Ecotourism provides a wide range of opportunities for learning about the environment and its interrelationship with human beings (TIES, 2015), and through nature-based interpretation, ecotourism encourages people to become better stewards of the earth (Kimmel, 1999). In addition to environmental issues, ecotourism education teaches tourists about the cultural diversity and local development in destinations (Zanotti & Chernela, 2008).

Ardoin et al. (2015) reviewed articles regarding the influence of nature-based tourism on tourists’ environmental attitude, knowledge, and behavior published from 1995 to 2013. In 20 articles about tourists’ environmental attitude change, 14 (70%) reported positive changes for participants on their environmental attitudes caused by ecotourism education before or during the visit. Powell et al. (2008) found that visitors exhibited positive attitudes about resource management before they participated in their Antarctic cruise travel. They concluded that visitors had already received relevant environmental education provided by an ecotourism program before their visit. Powell and Ham (2008) found that visitors to Galapagos National Park exhibited increased support for all 10 items related to conservation of the Park after their visit. In addition, Ballantyne et al. (2011), in their investigation of visitors to wildlife tourism sites in Australia, found that their environmental attitudes were positively changed after their visit. In addition, Hughes, Packer, and Ballantyne (2011) reported a long-term (more than three months) change of environmental attitude among families visiting Mon Repos turtle rookery in Queensland, Australia.
Tourists’ Travel Motivation as it Relates to Ecotourism

Documenting tourists’ travel motivations helps tourism operators understand tourists’ destination choices and preferences (Bansal & Eiselt, 2004) and may help them to improve the experiences they provide tourists (Beh & Bruyere, 2007). Another reason is that tourists’ travel motivations can influence the creation of tourism products and services (Scarpaci et al., 2003). In this section, studies exploring tourists’ motivations, particularly tourists who visit ecotourism destinations, are reviewed.

**Travel motivations**

MacCannell (1976) suggested that people travel in the pursuit of authenticity, i.e. to appreciate the authentic culture and natural history of destinations that capture their imagination. Crompton (1979) elaborated on this notion by pointing out that tourists possess more diverse and complex motivations than simple authenticity. In his analysis of tourists’ motivations from both a socio-psychological and cultural perspective, he found that motivations also include escape, relaxation, self-improvement, enhancement of social and familial relationships, novelty, and education. Uysal and Jurowski (1994) argued that motivations could be conceptualized as either “push” or “pull” factors. Push factors refer to the internal factors motivating tourists to undertake travel experiences such as relaxation, prestige, escape, health and fitness, social interaction and adventure. Pull factors refer to external influences such as the tangible attractiveness of the destination and tourists’ expectation and perception of the destinations.

Wight (2001) argued that travel motivations may also vary owing to a series of factors such as tourists’ personal needs, location of residence, age, gender and educational level. For example, urban residents may have a stronger desire than rural
residents to visit rural areas. In addition, tourists’ motivations are strongly influenced by the attributes of tourism destinations (Kim Lian Chan & Baum, 2007). For example, tourists who travel to protected areas are less demanding in terms of accommodations, food or nightlife, but more demanding in terms of appreciation of local conditions and customs (Boo, 1990).

Travel motivations also influence ecotourism products and services to a great extent. Scarpaci et al. (2003) found that there are tourists who visit ecotourism destinations who are motivated by entertainment rather than a genuine interest in nature. In response ecotourism operators provide them entertainment, ignoring the potential negative impacts associated with doing so.

**Ecotourism travel motivations**

Researchers have revealed that tourists who visit ecotourism destinations have travel motivations that differ from mass tourists. Stankey (1985), among the earliest scholars who realized these motivational differences, noted that tourists who like to discover pristine natural areas are more “exploratory” and “adventurous” than mass tourists. Eagles (1992), one of the earliest researchers to differentiate travel motivations of visitors to ecotourism destinations from mass tourists, found significant differences between these two groups of tourists in terms of their travel motivations. The former (i.e., visitors to ecotourism destinations) are more interested in nature such as “wilderness and undisturbed nature,” “lakes and streams,” “mountains,” “national and provincial parks,” “rural areas,” and the “ocean side.”

Second, this same group of tourists is more motivated by personal development through participating in physical activities and experiencing novel and simple lifestyles. They are motivated to “be physically active,” “experience new lifestyles,” “be daring and adventurous,” “rediscover self,” and “participate in sports.” In addition,
they like to meet others with similar interests, in particular to share ecotourism experiences with them. And they look for financial and time efficiency in their travel. Eagles also reported that tourists who are engaged in ecotourism activities are much less interested than mass tourists in gambling, amusement parks, nightlife, big cities, watching sports, doing nothing, indoor sports, shopping, and resort areas.

Ballantine and Eagles (1994) investigated the motivations of 120 Canadian tourists who took part in nature tours in Kenya. Based on Eagles’ (1992) conclusions regarding the motivations of such tourists, Ballantine and Eagles (1994) formulated two motivational criteria – an “attraction travel” motivation, which refers to the motivation to visit wilderness or undisturbed natural areas, and a “social travel” motivation, which refers to the motivation to learn about nature. Their survey results confirmed that 84% of such tourists are motivated to visit undisturbed natural areas and to learn about nature.

Wight (2001) summarized the motivations that differentiate ecotourists from mass tourists. Ecotourists are motivated to: 1) visit uncrowded places; 2) visit remote, wilderness areas; 3) learn about wildlife and nature; 4) learn about natives and culture; 5) view plants and animals; and 6) experience physical challenge. Weaver and Lawton’s (2002) survey of ecolodge visitors in Australia found that they are highly motivated to stay in nature, escape urban life, be physically active, and experience novelty. Goeldner and Ritchie (2006) noted that such tourists are inquisitive and show a high degree of adventure and curiosity. Page and Dowling (2002) argued that ecotourists, when enjoying natural travel experiences, also seek personal development.

More recently, Kim Lian Chan, and Baum (2007) conducted in-depth interviews with 29 tourists who stayed in ecolodges in Sukao, Sabah, Malaysia. Their findings revealed that these tourists are primarily interested in visiting natural
attractions, observing wildlife, learning local life, and experiencing eco-activities, which they term pull factors. Meanwhile, they also found that these tourists are also pushed by a desire to escape from their daily life by visiting ecolodges. Their findings also indicate that tourists’ choices are strongly influenced by the attributes of the destination.

Kwan, Eagles, and Gebhardt (2008) had similar findings in their study of the motivations of tourists who stay in ecolodges in Belize. Based on conclusions made by Ballantine and Eagles (1994), their findings revealed that visiting tropical forests, wilderness, or undisturbed nature are rated the most important attraction motivations and learning about nature is rated the most important social motivation.

Kamri and Radam (2013) conducted an investigation of the motivations of visitors at Bako National Park, Sarawak, Malaysia. The researchers developed a motivation scale that included four categories of motivations—“challenge excursion,” “social trip,” “nature tour,” and “getaway outing.” The strongest motivation revealed by the survey was “challenge excursion,” which included the items, “to develop my skills,” “to challenge my skills and abilities,” “to feel independent,” “to challenge nature,” and “to feel free from society’s restrictions.” This finding suggests that visitors desire to take part in ecotourism activities to develop their skills and to challenge nature.

In China, some scholars have attempted to identify the specific travel motivations of tourists who have visited nature-based tourism destinations. For example, Wei, Li, and Wang (2006) explored the motivations of tourists visiting Zhangjiajie and Qiandaohu National Forest Parks. They found that approximately 90% were motivated to visit because of the Parks’ natural scenery. The fresh air in natural
areas has also been found to motivate tourists (Wu & Wu, 1998) as has cultural history (Buckley, Cater, Linsheng, & Chen, 2008).

Based on the aforementioned findings, the main types of ecotourism travel motivations are as follows:

1) Seeking nature-oriented experiences, such as visiting undisturbed natural areas, viewing plants and wild animals (Ballantine & Eagles, 1994; Eagles, 1992; Kamri & Radam, 2013; Kwan et al., 2008; Wight, 2001).

2) Experiencing challenges and novelty, such as participating in physical exercise, experiencing new lifestyles, being adventurous, and exploring novel things (Ballantine & Eagles, 1994; Eagles, 1992; Goeldner & Ritchie; Kwan et al., 2008; Page & Dowling, 2002; Wight, 2001).

3) Learning, such as learning about nature, wildlife and local culture and history (Ballantine & Eagles, 1994; Kim et al., 2007; Kwan et al., 2008; Wight, 2001).

4) Participating in environmentally-based activities (Kim et al., 2007).

5) Escaping the mundane, such as being far away from daily life, feeling free from society’s restrictions, and staying with people who have the same interests or values (Eagles, 1992; Kamri & Radam, 2013; Weaver & Lawton, 2002).

In summary, there is a great deal of discrepancy in the literature regarding definitions of ecotourism, the merits of ecotourism, assessments of ecotourism outcomes, the environmental attitudes of the tourists who visit ecotourism destinations, and the travel motivations of such tourists. In response to these discrepancies and the limitations of existing ecotourism research, the purpose of this study was to assess tourists’ environmental attitudes, travel motivations and
evaluation of an ecotourism destination—Cangshanerhai Natural Reserve (CNR) in Dali, China. Further, to ensure that ecotourism destination visitors’ environmental attitudes and travel motivations are indeed different from those of visitors to non-ecotourism destinations, data were collected at three non-ecotourism destinations in China.
CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, study sites, the survey instrument, interview questions, sampling, and data analysis procedures used to address the purpose of this study are described.

Description of the Study Sites

This section describes the rationale for the choice of study sites as well as the characteristics of tourism development in each site. The focal (i.e., ecotourism) study site was Cangshanerhai Natural Reserve (CNR) in Dali, China. The three comparison (i.e., non-ecotourism) study sites were The Forbidden City in Beijing (FCB), Jinli Alley in Chengdu (JAC) and Hongyadong Scenic Spot (HSS) in Chongqing.

The focal study site: CNR, Dali, China

Dali (29459 km²), whose official name is Dali Bai Nationality Autonomous Prefecture, is located in the northwest of Yunnan province of China, neighboring Burma, Vietnam and Laos. Owing to a complex climate, Yunnan province contains the richest expanse of forests and the largest variety of wild animal species, flora, and fauna in China. A large number of tourism destinations are located in Yunnan province, including but not limited to Dali, Kunming, Lijiang, Lugu Lake, and “Shangri-la” (see Figure 1).

Dali is among the most popular tourism destinations in China. With its abundant tourism resources, Dali initiated its tourism industry development in the early 1980s and, as a result, is among the earliest international tourism destinations in China (Dai & Bao, 1996). Tourists are attracted by its pleasant weather, fresh air, primitive forests, snow-peaked mountains, serene lakes and rivers, year-round green farmland, and numerous historic sites. In addition, because it is home to more than 20 ethnic
groups, it is considered to be an attractive destination. According to the statistics released by the Dali Government Office (DGO, 2015), the population of Dali is 3.5 million, including the Bai ethnic group, which accounts for 1/3 of the population. The culture of the Bai ethnic group, including their folklife, art work, and food, are representative of the outstanding characteristics of this area.

Figure 1. The location of Yunnan Province and Dali in China

Despite its affluent tourism resources and established tourism industry, the area remains one of the most economically underdeveloped areas in China (Li, Luo, Deng, Jacoby, & De Klerk, 2007). According to the Department of Statistics of Dali Bai Nationality Autonomous Prefecture (2015), in 2014, the per capita GDP of Dali was 3,886 dollars, much lower than the average per capita GDP of China, which was 7,575 dollars in 2014 (Zhou, 2015). As early as the 1980s, the local government formulated regional environmental regulations to protect tourism resources. In the 1990s, the local government launched an ecological conservation project, which included ecotourism and was regarded to be an important development strategy with the aim of promoting economic growth and balancing environmental impacts (Yi, 2014). This project resulted in the conservation of 8 lake areas, 5 national forest parks,
18 natural reserves, over 3,000 plant species, and more than 40 endangered animal species. A large number of forests, natural reserves, lakes, wetlands, and sightseeing plantations were marked as ecotourism scenic spots. This initiative led to Dali being given the title, “International Ecological City” in 2011. The designation was awarded by Sister Cities International (SCI), the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), and the World Cities Scientific Development Alliance (WCSDF.ORG). On August, 2013, Dali was designated “The Best Green Ecotourism Destination in China” and awarded the 19th Golden Travel Award of Asian Tourism (Lan, 2013). Dali’s government has been promoting its local tourism as “the greenest ecotourism” in China (Dali Government, 2015).

CNR is one of a variety of ecotourism destinations in Dali. It was established in 1981 and approved as a national natural reserve in 1993. Located in the middle of Dali, it covers a total area of 797 square kilometers and mainly consists of Cangshan Mountain and Erhai Lake. Cangshan Mountain and Erhai Lake are hosts to 2,800 plant species, including 26 rare and endangered plant species such as *Abies* and *Sabina Recurva*, 250 bird species, 80 mammal species, and some rare fish species like *Sinamia* and *Schizothorax*. CNR has also become famous for a large number of historic sites such as Dali Ancient Town, Chongsheng Temple, and Three Pagodas, all of which were developed during the Tang Dynasty (around 1,200 years ago). In addition, this area is also home to the Bai ethnic minority group. The scenery, historic sites and unique features of this ethnic minority group attract many tourists each year. The number of tourists has increased from 4 million in 1998 to 15.4 million in 2011, and tourism revenues grew from 1.09 billion yuan (136.25 million dollars) in 1998 to 13.84 billion yuan (2.13 billion dollars) in 2011 (Bai, 2007). However, the sustainable goals established by the local government have not been fully achieved. This is
problematic as the environmental problems caused by tourism development are extraordinarily serious. It has been reported, for example, that the unique species in CNR are disappearing faster than anywhere else in China (Peng & Wang, 2005). Therefore, the assessment of ecotourism is especially important for CNR.

Figure 2. The location of CNR in Dali Bai Nationality Autonomous Prefecture (the area inside the line is CNR)

The three comparison sites

Previous research regarding the assessment of ecotourism has employed case studies of specific ecotourism destinations (e.g., Galley & Clifton, 2004; Kim Lian Chan, & Baum, 2007; Lee et al., 2009; Lemelin et al., 2008). In order to reveal whether there are different characteristics between ecotourism destination visitors and non-ecotourism destination visitors, it is necessary to employ a multiple-site comparison method. With an aim of revealing whether ecotourism destination visitors differ from non-ecotourism destination visitors in their travel motivations, Eagles (1992) conducted research on two groups of tourists based on the places they visited: tourists who had traveled to ecotourism destinations and tourists who had travel to non-ecotourism destinations. The research findings indicated that the former had
stronger motivations to visit natural places and experience novelty and challenge than
the latter.

Three non-ecotourism destinations were chosen as the comparison sites—
Forbidden City in Beijing (FCB), Jinli Alley in Chengdu (JAC) and Hongyadong
Scenic Spot in Chongqing (HSS). These three tourism destinations have unique
characteristics that are different from ecotourism destinations—FCB attracts visitors
because of its outstanding historic site; JAC is representative of leisure tourism; HSS
provides tourists with opportunities to appreciate a huge metropolis as well as a
unique landscape.

The Forbidden City, Beijing (FCB). Beijing, the capital, municipality,
economic, political and cultural center as well as the international communication
center of China, is located in northeast China. In addition to its reputation as a modern,
international city, Beijing is also well known for its 3,000-year-old history, which has
left the city numerous historic relics and cultural sites. As one of the oldest cities in
the world, Beijing has six world heritage relics, including the Great Wall, Forbidden
City, Summer Palace, Temple of Heaven, the Ming Tombs and Zhoukoudian Site;
and 7,300 historic relics such as Shichahai, Yuanmingyuan, Liulichang, Panjiayuan
and Gongwangfu. The culture and history of Beijing attracts a huge number of
international and domestic visitors annually. According to the statistics released by
the Beijing Municipal Commission of Tourism Development (2014), in 2013 Beijing
received 252 million international and domestic tourists and the tourism revenue
reached 396.32 billion yuan (60.05 billion dollars).

FCB was established in 1420 and was once the palace of 24 Chinese emperors.
Covering a total area of 720,000 square meters, it is the largest ancient architectural
complex in the world. FCB is also the largest and best-preserved ancient culture and
art museum in China. The museum exhibits 980 imperial palace buildings, which absorb the prime elements from Chinese ancient architectures. In addition, FCB holds 1.8 million imperial artifacts, including 600,000 ancient documents, 140,000 calligraphies and paintings, 350,000 pieces of porcelains, 15,000 bronze wears, 28,000 jade wears, thousands of pieces of jewelry, furniture, watches and clocks, monuments and sculptures, all of which are exhibited in its calligraphy and painting museum, porcelain museum, jade ware museum, gold and silver ware museum, bronze ware museum, clock museum, and treasure hall respectively.

**Jinli Alley, Chengdu (JAC)**. JAC is located in the downtown area of Chengdu City. Being one of the most important cities in southwest China, Chengdu is the economic, political and cultural center of Sichuan Province, China. For over 2,000 years, Chengdu has been considered “a land of abundance” owing to its sufficient rainfall, pleasant climate, and rich harvest of agriculture products. The wealth of this region has helped to form a slow and relaxed lifestyle. Chengdu people have been described in ancient Chinese literature as “enjoying all kinds of fine food, fragrance and amusement.” And, a few Chinese proverbs describe Chengdu as a place that “young people should not enter” because its laid-back lifestyle would paralyze their hard-working spirit. In the City there are many tea houses, karaoke houses, amusement parks, bars, and featured marketplaces, which provide local people and visitors with all sorts of leisure activities. Owing to the abundant leisure resources, the government of Chengdu has been following a tourism strategy to develop a “city of leisure,” and leisure tourism has been widely popularized and recognized throughout the whole nation (He & Chen, 2012).

Established in 2004 and with a total area of 30,000 square meters, Jinli Alley is a commercial street representing the essence of the unique leisure culture of Chengdu.
All construction is built in the ancient Chinese style. A number of leisure-themed restaurants, clubhouses, tea houses, guesthouses, bars, shops and theatres are located along the street. Traditional concerts, operas and shows are performed and Chinese festivals are celebrated regularly. In addition, there are courtyards, gardens, lotus ponds, stone roads, bridges and corridors scattered among the buildings. Jinli Alley is well-known for successfully providing visitors a relaxed lifestyle and exposing them to the unique leisure culture of Chengdu.

Hongyadong Scenic Spot, Chongqing (HSS). Neighboring Chengdu, Chongqing is located in southwest China. After being identified as one of the four municipalities directly under the control of the central government, Chongqing has become the largest city in China with a total area of 82,000 square kilometers and a population of 32.5 million. As the youngest and largest metropolis in China, the city is being developed fast with the GDP increase ranking it first in China in 2015. The city is also the economic center of west China, drawing on an image of a young, energetic and fashionable lifestyle. In addition, the city has a unique landscape. Different from most Chinese cities, which have been historically developed from the densely populated areas on plains for the convenience of farming, transportation and construction, Chongqing is built on a heavy mountain chain. Being surrounded by two big rivers, Jialing River and Yangtze River, a magnificent view of the city is formed including modern buildings, high mountains, big rivers, huge bridges, long tunnels, unique transportation means such as cable cars and elevated trains suspending over the rivers.

For two decades, the local tourism industry has developed at a fast speed, employing the famous brand, “mountain, river and metropolis tour” (Chen, 2015). Many tourists visit Chongqing in order to appreciate its unique landscape and
experience its fashionable metropolis life (Chen, 2015). In 2014, the city received 191 million international and domestic tourists and tourism revenue reached 107.5 billion yuan (17.06 billion dollars) (Chen, 2015).

HSS is located in the central business area of Chongqing City and covers an area of 460,000 square meters. The construction in this area is modeled after local suspending houses, a type of red-brick or wood-frame house built on the cliff of the mountains. The colored buildings of HSS are built down the hillside and face the two big rivers, Jialing and Yangtze. A large number of modern skyscrapers are built on the top of the cliff. With the main body of the construction being a huge shopping mall, HSS also provides areas for visitors to appreciate the magnificent view of the city. Since 2005, when HSS was established, it has been well-known as “the balcony of the city.” Neighboring the central business area of the city and being at the foot of modern skyscrapers, HSS provides tourists a place to experience metropolis life and appreciate the unique landscape of the city.


A mixed-method approach, including both a survey and a semi-structured interview, was used in this study. Survey research allows for the collection of sample characteristics (Secor, 2010). It is also a good approach to use when asking a series of questions to be answered on a Likert scale (Bernard, 2013). Survey research can also minimize response effects and interviewer bias (Bernard, 2013). In addition, it is more likely than an interview to get accurate answers for socially and psychologically undesirable intentions and behaviors (Bernard, 2013). However, the disadvantages of survey research should also be acknowledged. For example, extension or emergence of explanations or narratives cannot be provided through surveys (Secor, 2010). Survey questions can also be misinterpreted by participants (Bernard, 2013).
Compared with a survey, interviews provide researchers with an opportunity to probe for more complete responses. Interviews allow interviewees to describe things in their own words and to generate more accurate answers (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The researcher can explore topics in depth and yield rich data, details, and new insights (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). However, interviews are much more time-consuming than surveys (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The data analysis results of interviews are more subjective and more likely to be affected by interviewer bias (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). And, when studying undesirable intentions or behaviors, it is difficult to obtain accurate answers from interviewees (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Owing to the fact that surveys and interviews make up for the shortcomings of each other, the current research adopts both methods in order to produce more comprehensive and accurate research results.

**The survey**

A self-administered survey was used to collect information about environmental attitudes, ecotourism travel motivations, and tourists’ evaluations of the study sites. A self-administered survey was used to collect data since it is a good way to gather information from a large population of respondents (Bernard, 2013).

**Survey design**

The survey consisted of four sections—environmental attitudes, ecotourism travel motivations, evaluation of ecotourism characteristics, and participants’ demographic characteristics. Individuals were asked to respond to the questions in the first three sections of the questionnaire using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*. Leedy and Ormrod (2010) suggest that Likert scales are effective instruments for assessing emotions, behaviors, and perceptions.
To assess environmental attitudes individuals were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with 16 statements. Although the New Ecological Paradigm (NEP) scale has been widely used by scholars examining environmental attitudes, it was not utilized in this study primarily because it is difficult to adapt to a Chinese context (Wu, 2012; Wu et al., 2012). One-half of the environmental attitude statements were drawn from an environmental survey released by the China Environmental Awareness Program (CEAP, 2007); they included, “Environmental degradation is the necessary cost for economic development,” “Environmental protection relies on science and technology development more than individuals’ behaviors,” “Nature has the ability to fix the environment by itself,” “The natural resources will never exhaust,” “Environmental protection measures can slow down the exhaustion of natural resources rather than stop it,” “The current environmental degradation is a great threat to our future development,” “Environmental protection is the mission of the government rather than individuals,” and “Individuals’ contribution to environmental protection is negligible.” The remaining eight statements were drawn from the literature: “I would choose to drive only when it is absolutely necessary” (Kaiser, 1996); “I will definitely be a member of an environmental organization if I have the chance” (Hvenegaard & Dearden, 1998; Meric & Hunt, 1998); “I feel passionate about conservation issues” (Wurzinger & Johansson, 2006); “I am interested in learning about environmental issues” (Wight, 2001); “It is our responsibility to leave a healthy ecosystem for other people and our future generations” (Wurzinger & Johansson, 2006); “I am willing to pay for an extra carbon travel tax according to the transportation means and travel distance” (Dodds et al., 2010); “Donating to environmental organizations helps the environmental protection” (Dodds et al., 2010); and “I am concerned about wildlife” (Eagles, 1992; Wurzinger & Johansson, 2006).
To assess ecotourism travel motivations, individuals were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with 11 statements, 8 of which were obtained from the work of Ballantine and Eagles (1994), i.e. “Seek nature-oriented experiences,” “Explore a new perspective of life,” “Observe wildlife,” “Be physically active,” “Learn about nature,” “Learn about wildlife,” “Learn about ecological conservation,” and “Help preserve the natural environment.” The remaining three statements were derived from the work of Eagles (1992), Kamri and Radam (2013), and Weaver and Lawton (2002): “Experience novelty and challenge,” “Be independent,” and “Be with other people who have the same interest or values with me.”

The third section, which focused on tourists’ evaluations of ecotourism characteristics, consisted of five statements: “Tourism development has contributed to the well-being of the local communities,” “Tourism has exacerbated the environmental deterioration in this area,” “Local culture, custom and tradition win sufficient respect and have not been affected by tourism,” “The accommodations are highly advanced and can fully satisfy all levels of demands of tourists,” and “The trip has improved my understanding of the natural environment, wildlife, and the culture of local communities.” These statements were selected to represent the principles of ecotourism proposed by TIES (2015). The last section of the survey included questions about participants’ demographic characteristics, including gender, age, educational level and annual household income.

The survey was generated first in English and then translated into Chinese. To ensure the accuracy of the translation, a native Chinese assistant who is proficient in both English and Chinese examined the questionnaire. Then, the researcher and her assistant had a discussion to determine modifications that should be made. A copy of the questionnaire is located in Appendix A.
Survey data collection

Since the survey involved tourists’ evaluation of the study sites, it was necessary to recruit tourists who had already visited the study sites. Convenience sampling was used to recruit the tourist sample. This approach was used because it is an inexpensive and easy way to recruit a large population of participants in a short period of time (Bernard, 2013). The researcher and her assistants were stationed at the exits of the research sites from 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. each day. They approached tourists who had already visited and invited them to participate in the investigation. Owing to the fact that the researcher, who is a student at an American university, had only two months to conduct the on-site investigation during the summer of 2014, the investigation lasted only two weeks at each site from the end of June to the beginning of August, 2014.

According to the Central Limit Theorem, a sample size of over 30 is appropriate to ensure a normal distribution (Ott & Longnecker, 2010). As the sample size becomes larger, the responses become closer to a normal distribution (Ott & Longnecker, 2010). However, researchers generally have to tailor their sample size due to: (a) their desire for a representative sample, (b) the statistical techniques they plan to use, (c) and because of their limited research time and funds. Based on this, the researcher and her assistants planned to invite a minimum of 30 participants to take part in the survey at each study site.

Statistical analysis of survey data

All statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS 22, with a p-value set at .05. First, the researcher computed descriptive statistics for all participants. Then, to address the research questions which focused on tourists’ environmental attitudes and ecotourism travel motivations, factor analysis was employed. This statistical approach
was adopted because (a) existing scales were not used to measure environmental attitude and ecotourism travel motivation, and (b) the researcher needed to determine if the statements within each scale were interrelated and could be combined in to a smaller number of latent dimensions thereby attaining scientific parsimony (Tinsley & Kass, 1979). Cronbach’s alpha tests were run to examine the reliability of the resulting dimensions identified through factor analysis. To address whether environmental attitudes, travel motivations and evaluations of the site differed based on site visited, ANOVAs with Bonferroni post-hoc tests were performed. Bonferroni post-hoc tests are used to determine which means are significantly different when sample sizes of groups are unequal (Kutner, Nachtsheim, Neter, & William, 2013).

The interview

Interview design

During the semi-structured interview, a few questions were raised in order to investigate interviewees’ environmental attitudes, travel motivations and experience evaluations. For example, questions like “Why did you choose Dali\(^1\) as your travel destination” and “What activities did you participate in during your trip to Dali?” were raised with the purpose of investigating the motivations of the interviewees. In addition, interviewees were asked to evaluate the Dali through questions like: “How did you like Dali?” and “What did you think about the current trip?” However, the researcher did not ask any questions directly related to interviewees’ environmental attitudes due to the sensitivity of expressing unfavorable environmental attitudes during a face-to-face conversation. Other questions such as “In your opinion, what is ecotourism?” “What are your favorite things about travel (and why)?” “What are your least favorite things about travel (and why)?” “Where did you travel to within the last

\(^1\)Tourists habitually referred to “Dali” rather than “CNR” when discussing the area. Thus, the interviewer adopted the same approach.
“Why did you choose these destinations?” and “Where do you plan to travel next (and why)?” were also asked of interviewees. Responses to these questions were expected to directly or indirectly reflect the interviewees’ environmental attitudes.

**Interview data collection**

The researcher recruited interview participants at the exit of CNR and at a local guesthouse. First, the researcher approached potential participants and invited them to take part in an interview. After obtaining consent, the researcher asked how old they were and whether they had visited CNR. Thirty visitors who had already visited CNR were selected to participate in the interview.

**Textual analysis of the interview data**

Textual analysis of the interview data was employed to address CNR visitors’ environmental attitudes, ecotourism travel motivations and evaluations of CNR’s ecotourism characteristics. First, the responses to the interview questions were recorded and transcribed verbatim in Chinese. Second, the text was thematically coded based on the three variables addressed in the survey, i.e. environmental attitudes, ecotourism travel motivations and evaluations of CNR, and then translated into English. The results of the textual analysis were expected to provide supplementary insight to and strengthen the results of the survey data analysis (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Quantitative Research Results

Approximately 800 surveys were distributed. A total of 496 were returned, but 38 were incomplete, resulting in a total of 458 (114 from CNR, 116 from FCB, 126 from JAC, 102 from HSS) valid surveys and a response rate of 57%. In terms of the interviews, the researcher invited 70 individuals to participate in an interview. After screening them based on the sampling criteria (i.e., age, gender, and previous visitation to CNR) a total of 30 individuals were selected to participate in the interviews.

Participants’ profile

Some participants did not answer the demographic questions in order to protect their privacy; therefore, the number of responses does not equal the number of study participants (Table 1).

The average age of participants was 35. The researcher divided the participants into three age groups— young (18-34), middle-aged (35-59) and old (60 and above) according to the age categories used by the National Bureau of Statistics of the People’s Republic of China. At three of the four destinations, young tourists accounted for two-thirds or more of the respondents. Also, more females than males participated in the survey. Two-thirds of the participants (63%) reported having at least a four-year university degree, with participants from FCB and HSS reporting the highest levels of education. Most of the participants’ (86%) annual household income is 180,000 yuan (30,000 dollars) or less per year. Yet, more than one-third of the participants (37%) reported that their annual household income is from 60,000 yuan.
(10,000 dollars) to 120,000 yuan (20,000 dollars), which is in accordance with the average annual household income of middle-class families in China.

Table 1. Participants’ Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CNR</th>
<th>FCB</th>
<th>JAC</th>
<th>HSS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age Range</strong></td>
<td>N=111</td>
<td>N=115</td>
<td>N=124</td>
<td>N=102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years</td>
<td>18-82</td>
<td>18-74</td>
<td>17-68</td>
<td>18-76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age group</strong></td>
<td>N=111</td>
<td>N=115</td>
<td>N=124</td>
<td>N=102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young (18-34)</td>
<td>70, 63.1%</td>
<td>67, 58.3%</td>
<td>82, 66.1%</td>
<td>70, 68.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle-aged (35-59)</td>
<td>24, 21.6%</td>
<td>30, 26.1%</td>
<td>26, 21.0%</td>
<td>29, 28.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old (60 and older)</td>
<td>17, 15.3%</td>
<td>18, 15.7%</td>
<td>16, 12.9%</td>
<td>3, 2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td>N=114</td>
<td>N=116</td>
<td>N=126</td>
<td>N=102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>N=66, 58%</td>
<td>N=54, 47%</td>
<td>N=81, 64%</td>
<td>N=54, 53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>N=48, 42%</td>
<td>N=62, 53%</td>
<td>N=45, 36%</td>
<td>N=48, 47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Educational level</strong></td>
<td>N=111</td>
<td>N=115</td>
<td>N=125</td>
<td>N=102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle/elementary school</td>
<td>N=4, 4%</td>
<td>N=4, 3%</td>
<td>N=8, 6%</td>
<td>N=4, 4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school/technical</td>
<td>N=23, 21%</td>
<td>N=14, 12%</td>
<td>N=26, 21%</td>
<td>N=14, 14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or three year college</td>
<td>N=20, 18%</td>
<td>N=17, 15%</td>
<td>N=21, 17%</td>
<td>N=15, 15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year university</td>
<td>N=57, 51%</td>
<td>N=52, 45%</td>
<td>N=59, 47%</td>
<td>N=55, 54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
<td>N=7, 6%</td>
<td>N=26, 23%</td>
<td>N=10, 8%</td>
<td>N=12, 12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral degree</td>
<td>N=0, 0%</td>
<td>N=2, 2%</td>
<td>N=1, 1%</td>
<td>N=2, 2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Estimated annual household income (yuan)</strong></td>
<td>N=103</td>
<td>N=115</td>
<td>N=113</td>
<td>N=94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;60,000</td>
<td>N=35, 34%</td>
<td>N=31, 27%</td>
<td>N=44, 39%</td>
<td>N=31, 33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60,000-120,000</td>
<td>N=32, 31%</td>
<td>N=48, 42%</td>
<td>N=36, 32%</td>
<td>N=41, 44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>120,000-180,000</td>
<td>N=20, 19%</td>
<td>N=12, 10%</td>
<td>N=18, 16%</td>
<td>N=15, 16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>180,000-240,000</td>
<td>N=9, 9%</td>
<td>N=5, 4%</td>
<td>N=7, 6%</td>
<td>N=5, 5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>240,000-300,000</td>
<td>N=1, 1%</td>
<td>N=6, 5%</td>
<td>N=1, 1%</td>
<td>N=1, 1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300,000 or more</td>
<td>N=6, 6%</td>
<td>N=13, 11%</td>
<td>N=7, 6%</td>
<td>N=1, 1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Environmental attitudes, ecotourism travel motivations and evaluation of the destination visited

The first part of the questionnaire investigated participants’ environmental attitudes. Participants showed a strong tendency to agree with some items such as item 13 “It is our responsibility to leave a healthy ecosystem for other people and our future generation” (grand mean=6.28; standard deviation=1.16) and item 6 “The current environmental degradation is a great threat to our future development” (grand mean=5.88; standard deviation=1.44). Participants tended to disagree with some items such as item 4 “The natural resources will never exhaust” (grand mean=1.82; standard deviation=1.20), item 7 “Environmental protection is the mission of the government rather than individuals” (grand mean=2.22; standard deviation=1.40), and item 8 “Individuals’ contribution to environmental protection is negligible” (grand mean=2.30; standard deviation=1.40). Their responses are close to neutral for some items such as item 3 “Nature has the ability to fix the environmental by itself” (grand mean=4.23; standard deviation=1.61), item 9 “I would choose to drive only when it is absolutely necessary” (grand mean=4.22; standard deviation=1.59), item 14 “I am willing to pay for an extra carbon travel tax according to the transportation means and travel distance” (grand mean=4.20; standard deviation=1.58) and item 15 “Donating to environmental organizations helps environmental protection” (grand mean=4.14; standard deviation=1.51). Individuals’ responses to all of the environmental attitude statements are presented in Table 2.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>CNR N=114</th>
<th>FCB N=116</th>
<th>JAC N=126</th>
<th>HSS N=102</th>
<th>Overall N=458</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Environmental degradation is the necessary cost for economic development.</td>
<td>3.87 1.86</td>
<td>4.07 1.74</td>
<td>3.67 1.88</td>
<td>3.80 1.88</td>
<td>3.85 1.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Environmental protection relies on science and technology development more than individuals' behaviors.</td>
<td>2.94 1.65</td>
<td>3.42 1.72</td>
<td>2.83 1.66</td>
<td>2.79 1.42</td>
<td>3.00 1.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Nature has the ability to fix the environment by itself.</td>
<td>4.28 1.68</td>
<td>4.57 1.42</td>
<td>3.90 1.64</td>
<td>4.22 1.62</td>
<td>4.23 1.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The natural resources will never exhaust.</td>
<td>1.89 1.20</td>
<td>2.10 1.35</td>
<td>1.62 1.03</td>
<td>1.68 1.17</td>
<td>1.82 1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Environmental protection measures can slow down the exhaustion of natural resources rather than stop it.</td>
<td>4.83 1.54</td>
<td>4.77 1.52</td>
<td>4.79 1.61</td>
<td>4.81 1.65</td>
<td>4.80 1.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The current environmental degradation is a great threat to our future development.</td>
<td>5.97 1.37</td>
<td>5.71 1.53</td>
<td>6.02 1.36</td>
<td>5.81 1.44</td>
<td>5.88 1.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Environmental protection is the mission of the government rather than individuals.</td>
<td>2.18 1.41</td>
<td>2.36 1.37</td>
<td>2.20 1.42</td>
<td>2.15 1.40</td>
<td>2.22 1.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Individuals' contribution to environmental protection is negligible.</td>
<td>2.28 1.43</td>
<td>2.45 1.43</td>
<td>2.37 1.56</td>
<td>2.09 1.05</td>
<td>2.30 1.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I would choose to drive only when it is absolutely necessary (i.e. other transportation means are unavailable).</td>
<td>4.29 1.60</td>
<td>4.16 1.56</td>
<td>4.14 1.63</td>
<td>4.31 1.60</td>
<td>4.22 1.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I will definitely be a member of an environmental organization if I have the chance.</td>
<td>5.43 1.19</td>
<td>5.11 1.24</td>
<td>5.37 1.20</td>
<td>5.23 1.22</td>
<td>5.29 1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I feel passionate about conservation issue.</td>
<td>5.16 1.18</td>
<td>5.02 1.19</td>
<td>5.22 1.06</td>
<td>5.12 1.19</td>
<td>5.13 1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I am interested in learning about environmental issues.</td>
<td>5.24 1.29</td>
<td>5.46 1.06</td>
<td>5.40 1.12</td>
<td>5.06 1.18</td>
<td>5.30 1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. It is our responsibility to leave a healthy ecosystem for other people and our future generations.</td>
<td>6.22 1.21</td>
<td>6.18 1.24</td>
<td>6.43 1.01</td>
<td>6.26 1.19</td>
<td>6.28 1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. I am willing to pay for an extra carbon travel tax according to the transportation means and travel distance.</td>
<td>4.47 1.43</td>
<td>4.06 1.57</td>
<td>4.21 1.63</td>
<td>4.03 1.67</td>
<td>4.20 1.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Donating to environmental organizations helps environmental protection.</td>
<td>4.32 1.49</td>
<td>4.13 1.51</td>
<td>4.15 1.53</td>
<td>3.91 1.52</td>
<td>4.14 1.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. I am concerned about wildlife.</td>
<td>5.62 1.22</td>
<td>5.41 1.26</td>
<td>5.60 1.01</td>
<td>5.44 1.18</td>
<td>5.52 1.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The items with reversed meaning are in italics.
The second part of the questionnaire investigated participants’ ecotourism travel motivations. Participants tended to agree with all of the motivation items. However, they were most inclined to agree with item 1 “Seek nature-oriented experiences” (grand mean=5.83; standard deviation=1.09) and item 2 “Explore a new perspective of life” (grand mean=5.62; standard deviation=1.18). Individuals’ response to the ecotourism travel motivation statements is presented in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>CNR N=114</th>
<th>FCB N=116</th>
<th>JAC N=126</th>
<th>HSS N=102</th>
<th>Overall N=458</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>S.D.</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>S.D.</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>S.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Seek nature-oriented experiences</td>
<td>6.09</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>5.45</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>5.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Explore a new perspective of life</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>5.37</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>5.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Observe wildlife</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>4.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Be physically active</td>
<td>5.01</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>5.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Learn about nature</td>
<td>5.12</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>4.84</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>5.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Learn about wildlife</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>4.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Learn about ecological conservation</td>
<td>5.01</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>4.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Help preserve the natural environment</td>
<td>4.91</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>4.64</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>5.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Experience novelty and challenge</td>
<td>5.17</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>5.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Be independent</td>
<td>5.34</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>5.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Be with other people who have the same interests or values with me.</td>
<td>5.40</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>4.93</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>5.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The third part of the questionnaire focused on participants’ evaluation of the destination. Participants showed a fairly strong tendency to agree with some items such as item 1 “Tourism development has been contributing to the well-being of the local communities” (grand mean=5.02; standard deviation=1.23), item 2 “Tourism has exacerbated the environmental deterioration in this area” (grand mean=4.59; standard deviation=1.25) and item 5 “The trip has improved my understanding of natural environment, wildlife or the culture of local communities” (grand mean=4.72; standard deviation=1.27). Participants’ responses were close to neutral for item 3 “Local culture, custom and tradition win sufficient respect and have not been affected by tourism” (grand mean=4.08; standard deviation=1.36) and item 4 “The accommodations are highly advanced and can fully satisfy all levels of demands of tourists” (grand mean=4.13; standard deviation=1.27). Individuals’ response to all of the evaluation statements is presented in Table 4.
Table 4. Individuals’ Response to Evaluation Statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>CNR Mean</th>
<th>CNR S.D.</th>
<th>FCB Mean</th>
<th>FCB S.D.</th>
<th>JAC Mean</th>
<th>JAC S.D.</th>
<th>HSS Mean</th>
<th>HSS S.D.</th>
<th>Overall Mean</th>
<th>Overall S.D.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Tourism development has been contributing to the well-being of the local communities.</td>
<td>5.19</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>5.15</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>5.02</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Tourism has exacerbated the environmental deterioration in this area.</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Local culture, custom and tradition win sufficient respect and have not been affected by tourism.</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The accommodations are highly advanced and can fully satisfy all levels of demands of tourists.</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The trip has improved my understanding of natural environment, wildlife or the culture of local communities.</td>
<td>4.93</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>4.61</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>4.87</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Items with reversed meaning are in italics

A multidimensional view of environmental attitude and ecotourism travel motivations

Factor analysis with a varimax rotation was conducted on both the environmental attitude and ecotourism travel motivation statements. Factor analysis was used because the researcher needed to determine if the statements that comprised each variable (i.e., environmental attitude and ecotourism travel motivations) were
interrelated and could be combined into a smaller number of latent dimensions (Tinsley & Kass, 1979). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin statistic for both analyses was above .80, indicating that factor analysis was appropriate. Further, eigenvalues of 1.00 and factor loadings of .40 were used as cut off points for identifying factors and the statements that loaded on them (Nunnally, 1978).

With respect to environmental attitudes, four factors with eigenvalues of 1.00 or greater were initially identified. However, after assessing the reliability loadings, only two factors were retained (Table 5). According to Nunnally (1978), a reliability of .70 or higher is acceptable. Only two factors—labeled by the author as “Affinity for the environment” and “Attribution of responsibility”—had this level of reliability. The final two factors, which accounted for 33.8% of the variance explained, included 9 of the 16 statements. The statements that were dropped from the factor analysis were: “I am willing to pay for an extra carbon travel tax according to the transportation means and travel distance,” “Donating to environmental organizations helps environmental protection,” “Environmental protection measures can slow down the exhaustion of natural resources rather than stop it,” and “The current environmental degradation is a great threat to our future development.”

The two factors were named based on the types of statements that loaded on them. For example, the first factor (Eigenvalue = 3.78, Chronbach’s Alpha = .83) was named “Affinity for the environment” because it included the following statements: “I will definitely be a member of an environmental organization if I have the chance,” “I feel passionate about conservation issues,” “I am interested in learning about environmental issues,” “It is our responsibility to leave a healthy ecosystem for other people and our future generations,” and “I am concerned about wildlife.” The grand mean for this factor was 5.50, suggesting that respondents agreed fairly strongly that
they bear some responsibility for their environment. The second environmental attitude factor was titled, “Attribution of responsibility” (Eigenvalue = 2.17, Chronbach’s Alpha = .71). The four statements that loaded on this factor (see Table 5) were linked to individuals’ role in environmental protection and the relationship between human beings and nature/environment. The grand mean on this factor was 2.34, suggesting that individuals were likely to agree that environmental protection is the responsibility of various entities (e.g., government, scientists, and individuals).

Table 5. Environmental Attitude Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environmental attitude item</th>
<th>Factor 1 Affinity for the environment</th>
<th>Factor 2 Attribution of responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I will definitely be a member of an environmental organization if I have the chance</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel passionate about conservation issues</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am interested in learning about environmental issues</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is our responsibility to leave a healthy ecosystem for other people and our future generations</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>-.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am concerned about wildlife</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>-.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental protection relies on science and technology development more than individuals’ behaviors</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The natural resources will never exhaust</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental protection is the mission of the government rather than individuals</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals’ contribution to environmental protection is negligible</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigenvalue</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>2.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cronbach’s Alpha</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance explained</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumulative variance explained</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
<td>33.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand mean of factor</td>
<td>5.50</td>
<td>2.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin statistic = .80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Items with reversed meaning are in italics
Table 6. Ecotourism Travel Motivation Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ecotourism travel motivation item</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-improvement through nature</td>
<td>Nature and novelty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explore a new perspective of life</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observe wildlife</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be physically active</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn about nature</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn about wildlife</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn about ecological conservation</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek nature-oriented experiences</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help preserve the natural environment</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience novelty and challenge</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigenvalue</td>
<td>5.38</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cronbach’s Alpha</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance explained</td>
<td>37.1%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumulative variance explained</td>
<td>37.1%</td>
<td>55.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand mean of factor</td>
<td>4.81</td>
<td>5.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin statistic =.89</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ANOVAs and Post-hoc tests with four groups of tourists**

ANOVAs with Bonferroni post-hoc tests were performed to determine whether the environmental attitudes, ecotourism travel motivations, and evaluations of respondents significantly differed based on the type of destination visited. Before conducting ANOVAs, however, the researcher assessed whether the four independent variables—“age group,” “gender,” “educational level,” and “annual household income” differed based upon study site. According to Field (2013), significant differences may influence the ANOVA outcomes if their effects are not controlled.

The four study sites did not differ significantly in terms of age (Pearson Chi-Square=12.20, p=.06). However, they did significantly differ in terms of gender
(Pearson Chi-Square=8.24, p=.04), educational level (Pearson Chi-Square=25.03, p=.05), and annual household income (Pearson Chi-Square=26.46, p=.03). Therefore, when ANOVA tests were conducted, the effects of the three independent variables were controlled.

When addressing environmental attitude, the results of the ANOVA tests indicated that there were no significant differences with the first factor, “Affinity for the environment.” However, there was a significant difference (F= 6.35, p=.00) between the two of the four groups of visitors with respect to their “Attribution of responsibility.” Visitors to FCB were more likely to agree with the statements that comprise this factor than visitors to CNR.

In terms of ecotourism travel motivations, there were no significant differences between the four groups of visitors on the first factor, “Self-improvement through nature.” There were significant differences (F=4.72, P= 0.003), however, with the second factor, “Nature and novelty.” Visitors to CNR were significantly more likely to agree that they were motivated by nature and the novelty of such destinations than visitors to FCB (Table 7).

In terms of evaluation of the destination visited, there was no a-priori expectation that the evaluation items would load together; thus, ANOVA was employed rather than factor analysis. There was a significant difference (F=2.69, P=.046) with the first evaluation item, “Tourism development has contributed to the well-being of the local communities.” Visitors to CNR were significantly more likely to agree with this item than visitors to FCB (Table 7). There were also significant differences (F=4.16, P= 0.006) with the second evaluation item, “Tourism has exacerbated the environmental deterioration in this area.” Visitors to CNR were significantly more likely to agree that tourism has led to more severe environmental deterioration in the tourism
destination than visitors to JAC and HSS (Table 7). There were no significant differences among the four groups of visitors on the third item, “Local culture, custom and tradition win sufficient respect and have not been affected by tourism” or the fourth item “The accommodations are highly advanced and can fully satisfy all levels of demands of tourists.” However, there were significant differences (F=3.82, P=0.010) with the fifth evaluation item, “The trip has improved my understanding of the natural environment, wildlife and the culture of local communities.” Visitors to CNR were significantly more likely to agree with this item than visitors to HSS (Table 7).
Table 7. Differences in Response to the Environmental Attitude Factors, Ecotourism Motivation Factors, and Evaluation Statements Based on Destination Visited

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CNR</th>
<th>FCB</th>
<th>JAC</th>
<th>HSS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>Bonferroni Post-hoc</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environmental attitude: Affinity for the environment</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>5.47</td>
<td>5.59</td>
<td>5.46</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.635</td>
<td>No significant difference exists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental attitude: Attribution of responsibility</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>6.35***</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>FCB&gt;CNR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecotourism travel motivation: Self-improvement through nature</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>4.80</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>.672</td>
<td>No significant difference exists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecotourism travel motivation: Nature and novelty</td>
<td>5.47</td>
<td>4.94</td>
<td>5.18</td>
<td>5.16</td>
<td>4.72**</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>CNR&gt;FCB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of ecotourism characteristics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism development has contributed to the well-being of the local communities</td>
<td>5.24</td>
<td>4.81</td>
<td>5.16</td>
<td>5.01</td>
<td>2.69*</td>
<td>.046</td>
<td>CNR&gt;FCB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism has exacerbated the environmental deterioration in this area</td>
<td>4.87</td>
<td>4.64</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>4.16**</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>CNR&gt;JAC, CNR&gt;HSS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local culture, custom and tradition win sufficient respect and have not been affected by tourism</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>.411</td>
<td>No significant difference exists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The accommodations are highly advanced and can fully satisfy all levels of demands of tourists;</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>.277</td>
<td>No significant difference exists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The trip has improved my understanding of natural environment, wildlife and the culture of local communities.</td>
<td>4.90</td>
<td>4.76</td>
<td>4.83</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>3.82*</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>CNR&gt;HSS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *significance <0.05
**significance<0.01
***significance<0.001
Interview Analysis Results

Interviewees’ profile

Thirty CNR visitors took part in a semi-structured interview. The sample included five senior females and five senior males, five middle-aged females and five middle-aged males, and five young males and five young females. The names of the interviewees were coded in order to protect their privacy. Their name codes, gender and age are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. A Profile of the 30 Individuals Interviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name code</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Name code</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Name code</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CS</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>WL</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>ZZ</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JG</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>DY</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>CT</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JS</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>HY</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>SH</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CB</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>HL</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>GN</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SY</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>ZY</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>SW</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BM</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>SP</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KJ</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>HE</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>WW</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CM</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>SN</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>ZJ</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LN</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>SL</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>ZYF</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZN</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>HYF</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>NZ</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tourists’ environmental attitude

The interview data were thematically coded based on the three variables addressed in the survey — environmental attitudes, ecotourism travel motivations, and evaluations of CNR’s ecotourism characteristics. No questions directly related to environmental attitude were asked of interviewees. Instead, the relevant information
was extracted from interviewees’ responses to questions seemingly unrelated to environmental attitudes, such as “In your opinion, what is ecotourism?” “What are your favorite things about travel (and why)?” “What are your least favorite things about travel (and why)?” “Where did you travel to within the last five years?” “Why did you choose these destinations?” and “Where do you plan to travel next (and why)?”" The reason for adopting this approach was that, generally speaking, people tend to conceal their unfavorable environmental attitudes and show more favorable ones. According to Bernard (2013), researchers are less likely to get accurate answers for socially and psychologically undesirable intentions and behaviors through a qualitative method like an interview. Interviewees’ responses revealed that they possess both favorable and unfavorable environmental attitudes. A total of 27 (90%) interviewees, including 4 young males, 5 young females, 5 middle-aged males, 5 middle-aged females, 3 senior males and 5 senior females, exhibited favorable environmental attitudes. The most prominent attitude was interviewees’ passion toward nature, especially toward pristine natural environments and their protection. For example, LN, a 62-year-old woman suggested, “I thought that place (a tourism destination she once visited) is the best place I have ever visited. It is primitive, quiet and clean… The air is fresh... All of these make people, especially old people feel comfortable.” Another interviewee, SL, a 36-year-old woman said, “I like visiting the places with beautiful sky. I feel there is no pollution and it makes me happy.” LN and SL’s words reflect their passion toward nature, in particular the tranquility, primitiveness, cleanliness, healthiness and beauty of the natural environment. In addition, 24 interviewees (80%) said that they love nature-based tourism destinations, feel comfortable visiting such places, and feel happy when they travel to them.
Some interviewees, including 1 young male, 1 middle-aged male, 5 middle-aged females, 3 senior males and 2 senior females, expressed their concern for environmental deterioration. They disliked encountering environmental deterioration in the places they visit. For example, HR, a 45-year-old woman said, “(I don’t like) people to damage the environment… Tourists often litter randomly… I went to Hutiaoxia Gorge (a tourism destination neighboring CNR) a few days ago. There was a lot of garbage floating on the river.” In addition, some interviewees exhibited a strong desire for environmental protection. For instance, SN, a 42-year-old woman told the researcher what she saw in CNR,

The streets (in Dali Ancient Town—an attraction of CNR) are dirty, which left me with a bad impression. It is even not as good as the town where I work. Rubbish is recycled in my town. But here, the government has not made enough efforts to protect local environment.

This response reflects SN’s concern about the environmental problems in CNR. At the same time, it indicates that she thinks certain actions such as rubbish recycling need to be addressed. In her mind, one of the executors of environmental protection should be local government.

Other interviewees thought the local environment and the pristine natural views of tourism destinations need to be protected. For example, GN, a 34-year-old man said, “Protecting the environment should be seen as the primary task of tourism development.” HYF, a 46-year-old woman stated, “The original natural view in tourism destinations is damaged because of mass construction… Tourism developers seldom consider these damages… They want to build more construction and therefore they can make a lot of money…” In addition, interviewees noted that resource protection is an indispensable component of ecological conservation. HYF indicated
that tourism development would ruin resources, in particular the natural scenery, which she regarded to be a vital tourism resource. She said, “The natural view is the most important resource in a tourism destination. Tourism developers, however, do not develop this resource in a sustainable manner… For example, cable cars in the natural areas damage the natural view…” SL elaborated on this sentiment by stating,

We need to protect the natural environment when we are traveling… We cannot make money at the cost of the natural environment. The sustainable, long-term development needs to be taken into consideration. (We need to protect) air, atmosphere, water, animals, plants, mineral and human built landscapes. We need to maintain their completeness.

In SL’s opinion, resources include air, water, species, minerals and human built landscape, and tourists need to protect all of these resources because they are all essential components of sustainable tourism development.

However, some interviewees, including 2 middle-aged males, 2 middle-aged females, 2 senior males and 3 senior females, were suspicious of the effectiveness of environmental protection. Some suggested that environmental deterioration cannot be avoided in the process of tourism development. SY, a 72-year-old man noted,

The road construction, accommodations and recreational facilities would damage the environment… The local people would do harm to environment in order to make more money… It is almost impossible to avoid environment deterioration (in the tourism development process).

While a number of visitors are knowledgeable about environmental protection, others have not yet realized that environmental protection needs to be addressed jointly by all stakeholders. Four (i.e., two middle-aged males and two middle-aged females) interviewees expressed this opinion. They considered environmental
protection to be the responsibility of tourists, ignoring the necessity of involving other stakeholders such as the government, tourism administrators, and members of local communities. For example, ND, a 40-year-old woman said, “I don’t care what local people or government would do (for environmental protection). I can only regulate my own behaviors and try my best not to damage the local environment.”

Apart from suspicion about and indifference toward the previous environmental issues, some interviewees misunderstood the relationship between human beings and nature. SN said:

In our country, the harmonious relationship between human beings and nature has not been realized yet. I once watched a TV program: Several tigers lived in a temple. The monks in the temple walked the tigers; children played with the tigers. The tigers did not hurt people. They had lived in the temple since they were born. They ate cooked food. They even ate meals with people.

In SN’s opinion, to make wild animals captive indicates a harmonious relationship between human beings and nature which, to most people, represents a misunderstanding about the relationship between humans and nature.

Tourists’ travel motivations

In Chapter 2, the main themes that have been associated with ecotourism were outlined: 1) Seeking nature-oriented experiences, such as visiting undisturbed natural areas, viewing plants and wild animals; 2) Experiencing challenges and novelty, such as taking physical exercise, experiencing new lifestyles, being adventurous and exploring novel things; 3) Learning, such as learning about nature, wildlife and local culture; 4) Participating in environmental activities; and 5) Escaping the mundane, such as being far away from daily life, feeling free from society’s restrictions and staying with the people who have the same interests or values. These travel
motivations were cited by most of the tourists who visited the CNR. Following are examples of the responses that reflected study respondents’ ecotourism travel motivations (i.e. “For nature-oriented experiences,” “To learn,” “To experience challenge and novelty,” and “Escape from the mundane”).

**For nature-oriented experiences.** Interviewees revealed that they generally are motivated to travel for nature-oriented experiences. Nearly three fourths (73%) or 22 interviewees, including 3 young males, 4 young females, 4 middle-aged males, 4 middle-aged females, 3 senior males and 4 senior females, said they were interested in certain natural scenic spots such as Cangshan Mountain, Erhai Lake, Shuanglang Village and Haishé Wetland Park. For example, ZYF, a 27-year-old girl said, “I went to Haishé Wetland Ecotourism Park… There were many egrets in the park… I particularly like the gorgeous clouds in the sky there… The color of the sky is extremely beautiful.” ND told the researcher that she wanted to appreciate the “unique natural landscape of CNR,” which she regards to be different from the natural landscape of the eastern part of China where she lives. DY, a 45-year-old man, said that the most important motivation for his current trip was to appreciate the natural scenery of Erhai Lake. ZZ, a 24-year-old boy, said that one factor that motivated him to travel to CNR was the healthy ecology of the area.

Four interviewees (13%) said that it was not their first visit to CNR. They visited again because of the natural attractions they encountered during their previous trips. For example, LN said that she was impressed by the natural scenery of CNR:

I visited here for the first time in 2002. I went to Kunming (a city which is four hours’ drive from Dali) and hence dropped by Dali… I have visited CNR three times. The first visit was triggered by my own wish to visit this place. I came here for the second time in order to accompany my family… This place is so
beautiful! …I did not visit Cangshan Mountain in the first two trips. Therefore I came here again to travel to it.

These words explicitly show that previous visits to CNR left LN with a deep impression of its beautiful scenery. The attractiveness of Cangshan Mountain motivated her to visit the area again.

Six people (30%) said that they came to CNR because of its agreeable ecology. ZZ said that he once visited Chuxiong, a city neighboring Dali, and he was impressed by its harmonious ecological environment, which motivated him to visit CNR:

I have learned that the ecological environment in Yunnan province is very good since long time ago… I visited Yunnan before… I visited some places in Yunnan such as Chuxiong…because my father once worked in Chuxiong…
The environment, climate and the living condition (of Yunnan province) made me feel good.

Another older man said that the reason he visited CNR was for its fresh air. In total, one middle-aged woman, two young men, and one young woman said that they visited CNR because of the pleasant environment.

**To learn.** Some interviewees traveled to learn about history, local culture, and nature. These activities included visiting historic sites, visiting exhibitions, watching shows and performances, and appreciating traditional works of art. Twenty-four interviewees (80%) visited different historical sites in CNR. The most popular historical sites were Dali Ancient Town (n = 22) and the Three Pagodas (n = 6).

Among the 12 interviewees who expressed an interest in learning, 1 was a young male, 2 were middle-aged males, 1 was a middle-aged female, 3 were senior males, and 3 were senior females. CB, a 61-year-old man who highly valued his travel to the Three Pagodas said,
In South Song Dynasty, Nanzhao Kingdom was founded here (in Dali). The place has profound culture and history… When maintaining the Three Pagodas, people found the imperial jade seal of Nanzhao Kingdom hidden in the pagoda… In such a secluded small town, a kingdom grew powerful and existed for two or three hundred years. It’s amazing… We (my family members and I) spent a whole morning appreciating the Three Pagodas.

Other historical sites visited by interviewees included the Chongsheng Temple \( (n = 2) \), the Chama Ancient Path \( (n = 1) \) and the Lesser Putuo Temple \( (n = 1) \). In addition, seven interviewees took part in different educational activities related to nature, history and local culture: One interviewee attended the butterfly exhibition, three interviewees attended the Sandao Tea performance of the local Bai ethnic group, two interviewees watched a singing and dancing performance by the local Bai ethnic group, two interviewees visited the folk villages, one interviewee visited the traditional artwork show, and one interviewee visited the Bai residence (some interviewees participated in more than one of the educational opportunities). Overall they thought these exhibitions and performances provided them with opportunities to learn about nature/wildlife and the local culture. For example, LN, who visited the butterfly exhibition, noted, “I have been curious about Butterfly Spring and wanted to learn about butterflies… This is the first time that I have seen so many butterflies. There is detailed information about all kinds of butterflies. I learned a lot about butterflies… This is a valuable experience.” SN, who attended the Sandao Tea performance, said, “Sandao Tea performance is a must. I heard it before and have been looking forward to learning about it. I eventually watched it during this trip… I eventually knew what Sandao Tea is. It is a very interesting experience.”
**To experience challenge and novelty.** Researchers have argued that experiencing challenge and novelty includes participating in physical exercise, experiencing new lifestyles, being adventurous, and exploring novel things (Ballantine & Eagles, 1994; Eagles, 1992; Goeldner & Ritchie, 2006; Kwan et al., 2008; Page & Dowling, 2002; Wight, 2001). Similar sentiments arose during the interviews.

Some interviewees were motivated by the opportunity to participate in physical activities. The most popular physical activities at CNR are hiking in Cangshan Mountain and biking around Erhai Lake. In this study, one young male, four young females, one middle-aged male, three middle-aged females and one senior female (n = 10, 30%) participated in physical activities when they were in CNR. Seven biked around Erhai Lake and five hiked in Cangshan Mountain (some interviewees participated in more than one physical activity). They indicated that their participation was due to the hiking and biking trails. In addition, three interviewees said they participated in physical activities in order to improve their health and to appreciate the scenery. For example, LN hiked in Cangshan Mountain and SL and HYF biked around Erhai Lake because they wanted to enjoy the fresh air and appreciate the beautiful scenery simultaneously.

Five interviewees (i.e., 1 young male, 3 young females and 1 middle-aged male) expressed a desire to explore a new lifestyle, which they saw as being challenging since it is different from their daily lifestyle. For example, NZ, a 22-year-old female college student said she realized she is too dependent on her parents and hence she decided to visit CNR in order to be independent:

The unfamiliar places make me feel I am growing up… When I hike in the mountains I have never visited before and walk on the unfamiliar roads, I feel I
am more grown up… I have to deal with everything during the trip. I was quite
dependent and used to asking others to help me do anything. I scheduled this
trip by myself first and traveled with my friend, who was more spoiled than me.
I am taking care of her during the trip, which makes me feel good… I travel in
order to make me independent.

ZJ and SP expressed a similar sentiment. ZJ thinks traveling can endow her
with the freedom to make decisions by herself and improve her personality. And SP
believes traveling provides her with a highly valued sense of achievement. As she
described, “(I can obtain) a sense of achievement from mountaineering, enjoy slow
living pace, appreciate different architectures and different things, learn the world and
all kinds of things I didn’t know before.” The sense of achievement is rooted in the
different things she experienced and learned during her trip, e.g. mountaineering,
enjoying slow living pace, and appreciating architectures.

**Escape from the mundane.** Five interviewees, including three young males,
one young female, and one middle-aged male cited this motivation. WW, a 22-year-
old female college student said that her motivation to travel to CNR was to reduce her
parents’ control:

I travel in order to have relaxation and to stay far away from my family. I like
being away from my family, being out of the control (of the family), doing all
things by myself and making decisions by myself… I love freedom… I feel
very repressed in daily life, so (when I travel) I have a feeling of being
comfortable and carefree.

HY elaborated on his desire for escape: “To have fun is important, (but the most
important reason to travel is) to purify my heart, to get rid of the pressure of work and
family.” These comments exemplify the motivation exhibited by many people to escape from the mundane and to obtain freedom during the trip.

While the interviewees mentioned motivations that have previously been documented in the literature, they also spoke of various non-ecotourism travel motivations—“Curiosity,” “To relax,” and “Enhancement of social and familial relationships.”

**Curiosity.** Twenty-five interviewees (83%) said that they visited CNR because it is a popular destination in China and/or they heard that CNR is wonderful in certain aspects they appreciate. In order to gain more insight, they were asked to elaborate on why they regarded CNR to be a wonderful place and where they learned about CNR. Seven interviewees (63%), including one young female, one middle-aged male, two senior males and three senior females said that one of their motivations for visiting CNR was that they were curious about the place. Three interviewees could not explicitly explain why they visited CNR but simply described their travel motivation as “taking a look” or “being curious about this place.” For example, JG, a 61-year-old man said, “I had never been to a place far from my home town, so I want to visit CNR to take a look.” When asked why he chose CNR as his travel destination, he said “Er…haha… it is a good place.”

The interviewees noted that their curiosity about CNR was aroused by different media. A large number of interviewees got their information from other people (e.g., their friends and family members), and many were influenced by TV programs, the Internet, movies, books, and more. One particular information source that aroused visitors’ desire to visit CNR was a movie named Wuduojinhua (Five Golden Flowers). Released in the 1950s, this movie describes the love story between a young man and a young woman who lived in the Butterfly Spring area. It romantically features the Bai
group’s unaffected folk customs and the pristine scenery of Dali. In the 1950s and 1960s, Five Golden Flowers was the most popular movie in China, which made Cangshan Mountain, Erhai Lake and Butterfly Spring well-known among the public. Among 10 senior-aged interviewees, 8 mentioned the movie when talking about their motivation. For example, CB noted that his motivation to visit CNR was due in part to the movie:

At the end of 1950s, a movie named Ashima (The movie is named Five Golden Flowers and Ashima is the leading role in the movie) was popular in China. The movie impressed our generation deeply with its beautiful scenery…We (my family members and I) came here because we wanted to see its natural scenery and local culture.

While the above quote was shared by one of the older interviewees, some middle-aged interviewees traveled to CNR due to the same motivation. For example, SN, who accompanied her aunt to CNR, said that one of her motivations for traveling to CNR was to let her aunt see the home of “five golden flowers,” which had been her long-time aspiration.

To relax. Seven interviewees (23%), including two young males, one young female, two middle-aged males, one middle-aged female and one senior female, explicitly expressed that they were motivated to travel for relaxation. Relaxation for some was sought because of their daily stress, as a reward for hard work, or because of the relaxation that is brought about through the attributes of CNR. For example, WW said, “I feel stressed since I am in the fourth academic year (The fourth academic year is the time when university students graduate and look for jobs). I travel in order to have relaxation…” DY, a 45-year-old businessman, expressed a similar sentiment. He told the researcher that his job is stressful and tiresome. Therefore he enjoyed
relaxing during the trip, and he does not care to which destination he travels. He said, “I have visited many places in order to do business. So now I don’t mind which place I travel to… I like traveling with my good friends and family members… (For example,) when I am sitting in a tea house, chatting with my friends over tea during the trip, I feel very good.”

HR said she traveled with her daughter to CNR because her daughter had finished the national college entrance examination and wanted to relax. SH, a 32-year-old man corroborated HR’s comment by indicating, “I like taking a leisurely vacation, being relaxed and carefree. I like good accommodations and comfortable travel.” In his mind, the ideal form of travel is leisure-based tours and CNR is a place that provides him with a feeling of leisure.

Further, interviewees indicated that they traveled to CNR for its specific and relaxing attributes. ZZ, who had stayed in CNR for a few months, said:

I just want to relax in a new environment…I don’t like traveling around but staying in one place. I live in the guesthouse without participating in any specific activities or traveling to specific places. Sometimes I take a walk in the ancient town in my spare time. Sometimes I go to Xiaguan (the commercial center of Dali), walking and seeing around. Sometimes I take a walk by Erhai Lake...

SW, who had lived in the guesthouse for about two months shared a similar opinion:

I stay in the guesthouse most of time. I went to Shuanglang Village once. When I was in Shuanglang, I walked by Erhai Lake and had lunch there. I once hiked in Cangshan Mountain, walking around on the top of the mountain. Except for that... most time I just play games with guesthouse visitors at night.
Enhancement of social and familial relationships. For some visitors, visiting CNR is motivated by an interest in enhancing their social and familial relationships. Eight interviewees (27%), including two young females, two middle-aged males, one middle-aged female, one senior male, and two senior females, said that they visited CNR because they wanted to accompany their family members, friends or colleagues who wanted to visit CNR.

ZY said that he visited CNR twice—the first trip was organized by the company he works for and the second time was to accompany his wife. KJ, a 65-year-old woman said that she does not like travel because she cannot get used to the exhaustion, the different language, and the dirty food on the trip; therefore, she travels only to accompany her family, in particular her daughter. Similarly, another senior-aged interviewee, CS, a 68-year-old man said that he is not interested in travel and sometimes he even dislikes travel. The only reason he travels is to accompany his family, in particular his children.

WL, a 48-year-old man said, “I like to travel with my friends. I think highly of the friends I travel with rather than the places where I travel.” Comments like this suggest that the travel destination itself is not as important to the overall travel experience as is the company with which one travels.

Convenience: A facilitator. While not an environmental attitude or a travel motivation, “convenience” was mentioned as a facilitator of travel. Interviewees mentioned “convenience” from four different perspectives: because their place of residence is close to CNR; transportation to CNR is advanced enough or easy to obtain; CNR happens to be on the way or close to the travel route; and they have social connections in CNR.
Eight interviewees (27%), including one young male, one young female, one middle-aged male, four middle-aged females, and one senior female, came to CNR because of its convenience. Three of them said that CNR is close to their home. One participant, SN, who accompanied her parents and aunt on this trip, said that the transportation to CNR is so convenient that her parents and aunt would not suffer too much. ZYF said that her friends live in CNR, which would lighten her sense of loneliness during the trip. In addition, two interviewees visited CNR because it is on their travel route. ZY chose to visit CNR because he planned to visit Lijiang and Shangri-la, which are two well-known tourism destinations in China, and CNR is on the way. GN, who came to CNR from Hong Kong, planned to ride a bicycle to Tibet with his friend. He visited CNR because Dali is the closest city to the airport where he landed.

**Tourists’ evaluation**

When interviewees were asked about their evaluation of CNR’s ecotourism characteristics, most indicated that they highly value CNR’s beautiful scenery, especially the natural scenery. The pleasant weather and environment also pleased a lot of interviewees. CM, a 62-year-old woman said, “The mountains and water (in) CNR are very beautiful… The weather is good…The air is fresh…All of these make people energetic.” SL evaluated CNR by stating, “I love the blue sky here (in CNR)… I feel there is no pollution and it makes me happy.”

In addition, some interviewees said they learned about the history, local culture and nature through traveling to CNR. They visited historic sites, attended exhibitions, and watched shows and performance, some of which were educational. CB indicated that he had learned a lot about the history of CNR through visiting the Three Pagodas. LN learned a lot about butterflies by attending a butterfly exhibition. And, SN
attended a Sandao Tea performance and learned a lot about Sandao Tea, a famous cultural heritage activity of the Bai ethnic group.

However, some interviewees shared unfavorable evaluations of CNR. Their comments fell into three categories: “Over commercialization and loss of authenticity,” “Environmental deterioration,” and “Lack of cultural respect.”

**Over commercialization and loss of authenticity.** A total of 10 interviewees (33%), including 2 young males, 1 young female, 2 middle-aged males, 2 middle-aged females, 1 senior male, and 2 senior females, considered CNR to be over commercialized and the unregulated massive development and expansion to have resulted in a loss of authenticity. More specifically, they thought the massive construction underway in CNR lacked rigorous planning and may ruin the traditional image of the area. For example, SY said, “There are buildings everywhere along the streets in Dali Ancient Town and few original things have been kept.” ZY said, “It (CNR) is like a huge construction site. We could not see the original appearance of the place.” The construction—lacking sophisticated planning—is perceived to be damaging the unique character of CNR. In addition, some interviewees thought that the historic sites in CNR lack adequate protection. For example, some interviewees felt that Dali Ancient Town had been over developed and now was similar in appearance with other ancient towns in China.

Some interviewees felt disappointed when they found CNR to be different from their expectations. This was due in part to the construction of tourism facilities, which has drastically changed the original appearance of CNR. LN, a woman who was visiting CNR for the third time, was disappointed with the changes in CNR. She said:

In the movie (Five Golden Flowers), Butterfly Spring was small, but what we saw is a big pond… There were no buildings or modern constructions (in the
movie)… Today this place is totally different … There are a lot of buildings. There is a new road around Erhai Lake and many villas in Cangshan Mountain. I think the original view has been ruined. Apart from the loss of the original view, over commercialization has led to immoral behavior, which has widely infiltrated into CNR, including its religious sites. SL, who visited CNR with her husband, shared her experience at a Buddhism temple in CNR:

We went to Lesser Putuo Temple, where we were cheated by the monks in the temple. A monk told us we would encounter misfortune, and then he showed us a brochure which documented those donors’ names and the amount of money they donated, asking us to donate money to the temple in order to get rid of misfortune. When they saw that I didn’t want to donate money, they did not allow my husband to stay with me and talked to us separately. Finally my husband had to donate three hundred yuan to the temple.

In addition, two interviewees were pressured to buy souvenirs by local people, which, in their mind, diminished the aesthetic benefits they received from their travel experiences in CNR.

Environmental deterioration. Eight interviewees (27%), including two young males, one young female, one middle-aged male, one middle-aged female, one senior male, and two senior females, explicitly expressed their impression that environmental deterioration is an increasingly serious problem in CNR. SN spoke of her worry about local environmental deterioration:

The streets are dirty, which left me with a bad impression. It is even not as good as the town where I work. Rubbish is recycled in my town. But here, the government has not made enough efforts to protect the local environment.
SN regarded the environmental problem in CNR as serious due to insufficient protective measures, and also suggested that the local government poorly protects the environment. KJ also said that she was disappointed with the environmental deterioration she encountered in CNR. She disliked encountering the rubbish discarded along the streets in Dali Ancient Town. “It (rubbish) made me lose my appetite… I have lost the interest in this place.”

In addition, SW described his experience as a volunteer picking up litter at Cangshan Mountain:

I was shocked by the garbage discarded by tourists in Cangshan Mountain...
There are thousands of plastic bottles and plastic bags along the hiking trail. It took us (volunteers) several days to collect them and dispose of them… We worked in a small area. But Cangshan Mountain is too huge and we are unable to save the whole mountain… The pollution is increasingly serious.

SN, KJ and SW’s responses reflect the environmental problems being faced in CNR. They are caused by both tourism developers and tourists.

Lack of cultural respect. Another negative evaluation cited by interviewees is that the local culture and traditions receive little respect. Six interviewees (17%), including one young male, one young female, two middle-aged males, one middle-aged female, and 1 senior male, expressed their discontent with the cultural exhibitions and performances presented by local tourism operators. In CNR, a number of exhibitions and arts performances are promoted as focusing on the “minority ethnic group,” “local culture,” or “primitiveness.” However, many interviewees felt that these exhibitions and performances distorted the local culture in order to cater to tourists and inappropriately involved sex. ZY said,
All of the exhibitions or shows about the local culture are fake. Because there is a minority group, they built a folk village and employed a few local people to perform the show… They just want to make money… They cheat the tourists… Some jokes are dirty…

In addition, CT, a 34-year-old male noted,

The culture and tradition of local ethnic groups are shown to the tourists… They are not the authentic culture of those ethnic groups. The only goal for these performances, such as Sandao Tea performance, is to make money… The local people are treated like animals in the zoo.

CT also noted that many native Bai people have moved out of CNR. Most of the houses in CNR have been rebuilt either by the owner of the house or migrant tenants. The residence of local Bai people, which is an important component of cultural heritage, has been disappearing. Soon, there will not be any “authentic” Bai residents living in the area.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

A mixed method approach (survey and semi-structured interview) was used to address the purpose of this study. A discussion of the results is presented in three separate sections. This is followed by a discussion of study limitations as well as final conclusions.

The Results

The three research questions posed in Chapter 1 of this thesis are used to guide the discussion of results.

RQ 1: Do tourists’ environmental attitudes, ecotourism travel motivations and responses to evaluation statements differ significantly based on the type of destination (i.e., ecotourism vs. non-ecotourism) they visited?

The overall ANOVA results indicated that visitors to CNR (i.e., ecotourism destination) are quite similar to the three other groups of visitors. One possible reason is that Chinese tourists tend to visit many different types of tourism destinations such as natural areas, human-built landscapes, heritage sites, shopping areas and casinos (Kim, Guo & Agrusa, 2005; Wu & Pearce, 2014). Their diversity in travel preferences may result from the fact that the travel and tourism industry is still developing in China. In little more than 30 years the country has experienced rapid economic growth and residents have realized substantial increases in disposable income. Tourism operators have responded by developing new products and destinations, and promoting them through various media channels, including TV, the Internet, movies,
books, brochures, outdoor advertisements, and so on. This product development and promotion has resulted in increased interest in and fame for tourism destinations as well as curiosity on the part of tourists. In fact, Chen, Chen, and Lee (2010) found that many tourists are motivated by their curiosity and desire to travel to as many tourism destinations as possible even though they know little about them. This notion was supported in this study. Interviewees stated, “Our country is beautiful and [we] have so many great places... I want to travel to all of them” and “After I heard about that place, I was looking forward to traveling to it... I was curious about that place... I wanted to see if it is as good as it has been portrayed.”

Respondents in this study were more similar than different. This result could be due to two very different reasons. First, CNR may not be an “ecotourism” destination. According to TIES (2015, p. 1), an ecotourism destination should be a natural area “…that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education.” While data were not directly collected about CNR’s conservation efforts or its contribution to the sustainability of local residents’ well-being, anecdotal evidence from some of the interviewees suggested that the destination may be a “nature-based” rather than an “ecotourism” destination. Unfortunately, without concrete evidence, it is difficult to make a definitive decision about whether or not CNR is an ecotourism destination.

The second reason may be that in China, tourists do not yet differentiate between ecotourism and non-ecotourism destinations. In this study, visitors to CNR significantly differed from visitors to one or two non-ecotourism destinations on one of the two environmental attitude factors, one of the two motivation factors, and three of the five evaluation statements, only. In terms of their “Attribution of responsibility,” which accounted for tourists’ attitudes about environmental issues as well as the
relationship between human beings and the environment, the ANOVA results indicated that visitors to CNR were more likely than visitors to FCB to feel that they had a responsibility to protect the environment. However, visitors to CNR did not significantly differ from visitors to JAC or HSS (refer to Table 7 in the previous chapter). This result is perplexing because the literature suggests that ecotourists should differ from all other mass tourists in their level of responsibility to the environment.

Further, visitors to CNR were more likely than the visitors to FCB, the non-ecotourism destination, to agree that they are motivated by “Nature and novelty.” Compared with FCB, where the attractions are closely linked to history and culture, experiencing and preserving nature is a primary focus of CNR. According to Fountain, Espiner, and Xie (2010), more and more Chinese tourists are traveling with an aim of escaping from urban areas and getting closer to natural areas or wilderness. This may be because, when compared with their familiar urban life, tourists regard staying in nature to be novel and attractive. Many of the interviewees stated that they were attracted by the nature-oriented experiences and agreeable environment provided by CNR. Some interviewees also noted that they wanted to explore a new lifestyle, which is seen as being challenging because it is drastically different from their daily lifestyle. As one interviewee stated, the travel experiences in CNR made her feel that she was grown up because CNR is a place drastically different from the places where she lives and with which she is familiar. Some interviewees said that they obtained a sense of achievement which was rooted in the different things they experienced and learned during their trip in CNR.

However, visitors to CNR were not significantly different from the visitors to JAC and HSS, the two other non-ecotourism destinations in terms of their motivation
for nature and novelty. One possible explanation is that although the attractions of JAC and HSS are closely linked to leisure (JAC) and the metropolis landscape (HSS), these two places still provide tourists with travel experiences related to nature, which are seen as being novel and challenging. In JAC there are natural areas such as courtyards, gardens and lotus ponds where tourists can appreciate natural scenery. In HSS there are areas for visitors to appreciate the landscape of the city, which includes considerable natural scenery such as mountains and rivers.

Visitors to CNR were significantly more likely than visitors to FCB to agree with the evaluative statement: “Tourism development has contributed to the well-being of the local communities.” CNR is located in one of the most economically underdeveloped areas in China. Therefore, it makes sense that people would see the contribution that tourism is making, particularly, in FCB, which is located in the most economically prosperous area in China, In the region where FCB is located, the contribution of tourism would not be as obvious because it is already developed.

Visitors to CNR were also significantly more likely than visitors to HSS and JAC to agree with the following evaluative statement: “Tourism has exacerbated the environmental deterioration in this area.” One possible explanation for the difference could be that promotion for CNR focuses on, and as a result its image is associated with, nature, an agreeable environment, and healthy ecology. Thus, visitors to CNR may be more likely to expect a pristine natural environment. When they don’t see this, their evaluation may be much more negative. Another explanation may be that tourists’ evaluation is derived from fact. Some interviewees explicitly stated that environmental deterioration is an increasingly serious problem in CNR. The unregulated construction and waste emissions generated by tourists and tourism operators have severely damaged the environment surrounding CNR.
For the evaluation item—“The trip has improved my understanding of natural environment, wildlife and the culture of local communities,” visitors to CNR were significantly more likely to agree with this evaluative statement than visitors to HSS. People visit CNR expecting to learn about nature and the local culture, which makes sense because there are huge natural areas, a number of historical sites, and ethnic minority groups in CNR. In fact, many interviewees talked about their educational experiences in CNR, including visiting historic sites, visiting exhibitions, watching shows and performances, and appreciating traditional works of art. Some of them highly valued these educational opportunities. However, the visitors to CNR do not significantly differ from the visitors to FCB and JAC. Without further data that suggests ecotourism destination visitors can be similar to non-ecotourism destination visitors in terms of their experience evaluations, this phenomenon cannot be explained by the current study.

RQ2. What themes are uncovered through analysis of CNR visitors’ responses to questions asked during a semi-structured interview?

Interviewees expressed favorable and unfavorable environmental attitudes and identified multiple motivations for travel, three of which were unique in the context of ecotourism. They were also free with their evaluations of CNR. In terms of their favorable environmental attitudes, most were passionate about the natural environment and its protection. Perhaps because of this passion, some interviewees expressed concern about the environmental deterioration they observed at tourism destinations. This was particularly true with middle-aged and senior tourists who were more inclined than young tourists to be concerned about environmental issues. This
may because middle-aged and senior adults are more concerned about their own
and/or their family members’ health, which may be negatively influenced by
environmental deterioration: KJ, a 65-year-old woman, thought that the dirty
environment would pollute the food and make people sick, and BM, a 62-year-old
woman, thought that seniors would get sick in polluted environments.

Interviewees also held unfavorable environmental attitudes. For example, some
were suspicious of the effectiveness of environmental protection measures, some did
not fully recognize the importance of joint efforts made by different entities for
environmental protection, and some misunderstood the relationship between human
beings and nature. Middle-aged and senior interviewees were inclined to possess these
unfavorable attitudes. Perhaps this is because environmental education is a relatively
new phenomenon in China. Systematic environmental education was not introduced
to the public until the 2000s when the Chinese government began to promote
environmental education in elementary and middle schools (Chen, 2010). Further,
notions of environmental protection, particularly protection efforts implemented by
the government may be questioned and perceived as suspicious by tourists. According
to the researcher, who was born and has lived in China for over 30 years, in China,
local government takes charge of tourism development, administering most tourism
planning and construction in tourism destinations, which contributes to a great deal of
corruption among government officials. Many Chinese people have heard about or
even witnessed such corruption. Therefore, some Chinese people mistrust the
government and are suspicious of the effectiveness of government officials’ tourism-
related activities.

Respondents cited many of the ecotourism travel motivations identified in the
literature. Interviewees were motivated by the challenges and novelty they would
experience. One challenge was participating in physical activities such as hiking and biking; interestingly, this was more commonly cited by females than males, which contradicts the existing literature which suggests that more males tend to participate in physical activities than females (Wight, 1996). A second was staying in a place that is drastically different from their familiar environment. Many (particularly young interviewees) felt that in this different environment they could make decisions and deal with all kinds of issues by themselves, and experience and learn about novel things, from which they obtained a sense of achievement.

Young and middle-aged interviewees also were motivated to escape from the mundane, in particular from the pressure of family and work. One possible reason is that young and middle-aged people in China are facing more and more pressure from family and work (Yang, 2012).

Interviewees also introduced three new types of ecotourism travel motivations: to relax, curiosity, and enhancement of familial and social relationships. While these motivations have been identified in the general travel literature (e.g., Chen et al., 2010; Crompton, 1979; Uysal & Jurowski, 1994), they are new to ecotourism, particularly in the ways they were articulated by this study’s interviewees. For instance, some interviewees, particularly senior tourists, said that they traveled to CNR out of a sense of curiosity. Their curiosity was mostly aroused by “Five Golden Flowers,” a Chinese movie released in the 1950s. This movie romantically portrayed a love story between a young man and a young woman who lived in CNR, with its beautiful natural scenery and the culture of local Bai ethnic minority as the background. Scholars have documented film-induced motivations. For example, Hudson and Ritchie (2006) proposed that movies encourage tourists to visit destinations that appear (or are depicted) in them. Although many of these tourists are not knowledgeable about
current CNR, the fantasy created by the movie and the resulting curiosity have motivated individuals to visit the destination.

Young and middle-aged interviewees presented one additional non-ecotourism travel motivation—relaxation. Some interviewees indicated that they enjoyed the relaxing attributes of CNR. A few interviewees spent most of their time relaxing rather than participating in activities. One possible explanation for this is that young and middle-aged people generally have more job-related pressure and therefore want to have more time for relaxation.

Some interviewees also indicated that they were motivated to travel in order to enhance their social and familial relationships. This motivation may be explained by Chinese culture and philosophical ideology. In China, individuals are considered to be one element of a larger group such as family, school, company and so on. As a member of the larger group they contribute to “harmony,” i.e. they obey the interests of the larger group rather than their individual desire (Kwek & Lee, 2010). This philosophy is also reflected in tourism. Some tourists travel to fulfill their obligation—to accompany other people (e.g., children, parents, spouse, friends, colleagues) who desire to travel (Kwek & Lee, 2010).

Tourists’ evaluations of CNR varied. Most interviewees highly valued CNR’s beautiful scenery, pleasant weather and agreeable ecological environment. Some also spoke highly of the educational opportunities provided by CNR, from which they learned about nature, history and culture. However, some interviewees were less favorable about their trip experiences. One unfavorable evaluation was linked to the over commercialization and loss of authenticity taking place in CNR. Over commercialization has resulted in a loss of authenticity and led to immoral behaviors such as cheating and pressuring visitors to purchase goods and experiences. Some
interviewees were also discontent with CNR’s environmental deterioration, especially the huge amount of waste generated by tourists and tourism operators, which is severely threatening both nature areas and historical sites. Unfortunately, these environmental problems have not received sufficient attention from the local government and tourism developers and effective environmental protection measures are absent. As some interviewees noted, CNR’s environment is worse than some other places in China. Compared with those places where environmental protection measures have been effectively addressed by local government and/or tourism developers, CNR’s environmental problems have not received enough attention and treatment. This may be one reason why unique species in CNR are disappearing faster than anywhere else in China (Peng & Wang, 2005). Undoubtedly, CNR will eventually face an environmental crisis and lose its attraction as an ecotourism destination if its environment continues to deteriorate.

Interviewees also expressed concern about the insufficient respect for the local culture in this area. They thought that local culture and traditions were being distorted in order to cater to tourists. This sentiment has been documented in the ecotourism literature. According to the literature, tourism development distorts and even accelerates the extinction of indigenous culture in some areas (Butler & Hinch, 2007; Cole, 2008; Smith, Scherrer, & Dowling, 2009). Tourism developers must immediately develop policy and strategies to protect the culture in CNR

RQ3. Do the themes uncovered through analysis of CNR visitors’ responses to questions asked during a semi-structured interview support the existing literature on ecotourists’ environmental attitudes and ecotourism travel motivations?
The themes uncovered through analysis of CNR visitors’ responses to the semi-structured interviews partly support the existing literature. Scholars widely acknowledge that tourists who visit ecotourism destinations generally possess favorable environmental attitudes. In this study, most of the interviewees possessed favorable environmental attitudes, particularly towards nature, environmental protection, and environmental deterioration. However, they also had unfavorable environmental attitudes, such as being suspicious of the effectiveness of environmental protection measures, ignorant of the joint efforts of environmental protection made by different entities, and unaware of the healthy relationship between human beings and nature.

Further, the literature suggests that tourists who visit ecotourism destinations generally share the following common travel motivations: seeking nature-oriented experiences, experiencing challenges and novelty, learning about nature and culture, participating in environmental activities, and escaping from the mundane. Most of these themes were uncovered through the analysis of interviewees’ responses to the questions asked during the semi-structured interview. However, non-ecotourism travel motivations also emerged. Some interviewees noted that they traveled to CNR out of a sense of curiosity, for relaxation, and/or for enhancing their social and familial relationships. This finding indicates that the travel motivations of conventional tourists may be universally possessed by tourists who visit ecotourism travel motivations, particularly in China.

The evaluative comments made by interviewees provided support for the existing literature regarding the definition and criteria of ecotourism—ecotourism involves travel to nature, interpretation and education (e.g. Donohoe & Needham, 2006; Fennel, 2001; TIES, 2015). However, in this study, some interviewees
criticized the over commercialization, loss of authenticity, environmental deterioration, and lack of cultural respect that has come about as a result of local tourism development. Hence, ecotourism as it is being presented at CNR, appears to be inconsistent with the principles of ecotourism proposed by TIES (2015), i.e. that ecotourism needs to minimize impacts, build environmental and cultural respect and benefit for conservation.

**Conceptual Implications**

This research extends the existing ecotourism literature in three ways. First, the current research holistically examines tourists’ environmental attitudes, motivations and evaluations of one ecotourism destination—CNR, China. Although tourists’ evaluation, environmental attitude and travel motivations have been documented previously as important indicators of success at ecotourism destinations, they were generally examined independently and separately. In addition, few ecotourism studies have assessed these indicators with visitors to Chinese ecotourism destinations. Therefore, the results of this study provide a more holistic assessment of tourists’ motivations for visiting, environmental attitudes about, and evaluations of an ecotourism destination. While the resulting data is limited in generalizability, it does provide a baseline to which additional research on tourists to ecotourism destinations in China can be compared and could lead to the development of theory.

Second, visitors to CNR, an ecotourism destination, exhibited a spectrum in terms of their environmental attitude, possessing both favorable and unfavorable attitudes on specific environmental issues. And visitors to CNR have considerable similarities with visitors to FCB, JAC and HSS, three non-ecotourism destinations in terms of their environmental attitudes and ecotourism travel motivations. This result challenges the notion that visitors to ecotourism destinations are distinct from visitors
to non-ecotourism destinations. Unclear is whether this finding is unique to China or could be generalized to other Asian countries.

Third, a large number of the tourists who visited CNR highly valued the educational opportunities provided by CNR. They thought their overall experience improved their understanding of nature and the history and culture of CNR. This finding supports the viewpoints of some scholars that ecotourism plays an important role in educating people about nature and culture (e.g., Ardoin et al., 2015; Higham & Carr, 2003; Honey, 1999).

Managerial Implications

The current study provides valuable results for tourism operators. First, the visitors to CNR are fairly similar with visitors to FCB, JAC and HSS in terms of their environmental attitudes. They exhibit a spectrum of environmental attitudes, possessing both favorable and unfavorable environmental attitudes. Therefore, ecotourism operators need to consider whether they should (a) improve their conservation projects in order to attract more environmentally friendly tourists, and (b) provide more conservation education that may impact positive environmental attitudes and prove valuable for ecological conservation and sustainable development.

The second implication is related to tourists’ travel motivations. Generally, CNR visitors are strongly motivated to stay in nature and to learn about nature, culture and history by participating in physical activities and improving their skills. However, they tend not to be as motivated by the opportunity to observe wildlife or help preserve the natural environment. While the mean difference is small, tourism operators should heed this finding as it may indicate that they should consider whether or not to develop or promote wildlife as a primary attraction at their destination. In addition, they may need to consider how to advance education about
environmental preservation in a way that links to nature, culture and history, which are foci of current tourists.

The third implication is related to tourists’ evaluation of CNR’s ecotourism outcomes. According to the survey data and interview responses, visitors to CNR are concerned about environmental deterioration, mass development, over commercialization and a low degree of cultural respect. Thus, tourism operators need to work with other stakeholders to ensure that the uniqueness of CNR and the surrounding environment is maintained. If they do not do this, they may no longer have a viable, sustainable tourism destination.

In addition, the survey data indicate that visitors to CNR and visitors to FCB, JAC and HSS are fairly similar. Therefore, local tourism operators need to rectify this situation by thinking more strategically about the promotion of their eco-friendly programs/activities and, if necessary, generating more that are unique to CNR.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

There are limitations with this study. First, this study adopted a convenience sampling approach. The participants recruited through this method may not fully represent the population of tourists that visit the study sites. Thus, in the future, researcher should consider employing systematic random sampling. Systematic random sampling is simpler and less time-consuming than other probability sampling methods and is more likely to cover a wider range of the population and area than non-probability sampling methods (Bernard, 2013).

Second, the questionnaire and the interview questions were modified or developed by the researcher because there were no existing, valid measures of environmental attitude, ecotourism travel motivations or evaluative statements generated for Chinese tourists. Even though the literature was closely consulted in the
crafting of the survey and questions, the data collection instruments employed in the current research may not be valid, in particular for the variable, “evaluation.” To ensure that the data collection instruments are valid in future studies, researchers may want to begin by conducting interviews with key informants. Doing so would allow for verification of the words/statements used to assess environmental attitude, ecotourism travel motivations, and evaluation. A second step would be to modify the attitude, motivation and evaluation items based on the key informant interviews. This would then be followed with a pilot test, which would allow researchers to test the reliability of the questionnaire and craft the items listed on it (Bernard, 2013).

Third, since CNR was established, local tourism developers have been promoting and marketing it as an ecotourism destination. However, through examining visitors’ environmental attitudes, ecotourism travel motivations and evaluation, it was revealed that tourists’ see over commercialization, loss of authenticity, environmental deterioration and lack of cultural respect in CNR, characteristics that are inconsistent with the principles of ecotourism proposed by TIES (2015). The researcher assumed CNR was an ecotourism destination, partly because its “brand” as an ecotourism destination has existed for a long time. It may, however, be better named a “nature-based” destination. In the future, an assessment of the destination should take place prior to conducting a study. An assessment could be based on the principles of ecotourism proposed by TIES (2015).

Fourth, in response to tourists’ use of the term, “Dali,” I referred to “Dali” rather than “CNR” during the semi-structured interviews. While the intent in doing this was to use the name most commonly used by tourists, referring to “Dali” rather than CNR may have misled interviewees who were visiting multiple places in Dali
This may impact the responses generated by interviewees and the research results.

Fifth, assuming that we can continue to refer to CNR as an ecotourism destination, the differences noted between tourists visiting the four destinations may not comprehensively reflect all of the differences between tourists who visit ecotourism and non-ecotourism destinations. For example, the study results suggested that tourists differ in terms of some demographic characteristics as well as some attitudes and motivations. This study did not address travel behavior (e.g., number of destinations visited, types of destinations visited); preference(s) for types of travel and travel destinations; or level of knowledge about the environment and/or environmental issues, all of which might differ between tourists who visit environmental destinations and those who do not. Further, the influence of environmental attitudes and ecotourism travel motivations on evaluations was not taken into consideration by the current research. This should be considered in future studies.

Sixth, interviews were conducted with CNR visitors, only. In the future, to obtain more insight to visitors who visit ecotourism destinations, researchers should consider interviewing a random sample of visitors to multiple ecotourism destinations to determine whether similar types of environmental attitudes and travel motivations exist for ecotourists.

Despite these limitations, the current research did provide answers to the research questions in a scientific manner. Thus, it does provide a new perspective on ecotourism and suggests many avenues for further scientific exploration of ecotourism and ecotourists in the context of China and beyond.
References


Van der Meer, K. (2007). *Perspectives on ecotourism and volunteer tourism in post tsunami Khao Lak, Thailand.*


Zhang, X., Han, J., & Shang, Y. Value Orientation, Environment Beliefs and Sustainable Food Consumption Behaviour in China.


Appendix. Survey Questionnaire and Sources

Part 1: Environmental attitude

Please circle the answer that indicates how much you agree with each of the following statement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>STATEMENT</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Slightly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Environmental degradation is the necessary cost for economic development.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>CEAP, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Environmental protection relies on science and technology development more than individuals’ behaviors.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Nature has the ability to fix the environment by itself.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The natural resources will never exhaust.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Environmental protection measures can slow down the exhaustion of natural resources rather than stop it.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The current environmental degradation is a great</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Environmental protection is the mission of the government rather than individuals.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Individuals’ contribution to environmental protection is negligible.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I would choose to drive only when it is absolutely necessary (i.e. other transportation means are unavailable).</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I will definitely be a member of an environmental organization if I have the chance.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>I feel passionate about conservation issues.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>I am interested in learning about environmental issues.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>It is our responsibility</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kaiser, 1996
Wurzinger & Johansson, 2006
Wight, 2001
Wurzinger
to leave a healthy ecosystem for other people and our future generations.

14 | I am willing to pay for an extra carbon travel tax according to the transportation means and travel distance. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | & Johansson, 2006

15 | Donating to environmental organizations helps the environmental protection. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Dodds et al., 2010

16 | I am concerned about wildlife. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Wurzinger & Johansson, 2006

Note: the items with negative meaning are in italics.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>STATEMENT</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Slightly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Seek nature-oriented experiences</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ballantine &amp; Eagles, 1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Explore a new perspective of life</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Observe wildlife</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Be physically active</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Learn about nature</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Learn about wildlife</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Learn about ecological conservation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Help preserve the natural environment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Experience novelty and challenge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Weaver &amp; Lawton, 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Be independent</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Kamri &amp; Radam, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Be with other people who have the same interests or values with me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Eagles, 2001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Part 3: Evaluation

Please circle the answer that indicates how much you agree with each of the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Slightly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Tourism development has been contributing to the well-being of the local communities.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>TIES, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><em>Tourism has exacerbated the environmental deterioration in this area.</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Local culture, custom and tradition win sufficient respect and have not been affected by tourism.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><em>The accommodations are highly advanced and can fully satisfy all levels of demands of tourists.</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The trip has improved my understanding of natural environment, wildlife and the culture of local communities.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The items with negative meaning are in italics.
Part 4: Demographic characteristics

1) Are you:   A. Female       B. Male

2) How old are you?  ___________ years old.

3) What is the highest level of education you’ve completed?
   a. Four-year university          b. Two or three year college
   c. Master’s degree                 d. Doctoral degree
   e. High school/technical school    f. Middle/elementary school

4) What is your estimated annual combined household income?
   a. Less than 10,000 dollars        b. 10,000-19,999 dollars
   c. 20,000-29,999 dollars          d. 30,000-39,999 dollars
   e. 39,999-49,999 dollars          f. More than 50,000 dollars