

# ***Backpacking in India: Understanding the gap between backpacking ideals and practices***



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## SUMMARY

There is a notion of the increasing gap between backpacker ideals and practices. In a context of backpacking in India, this study looks at this gap from the perspectives of backpackers themselves who are spending the different amount of time while backpacking in India. Moreover, next to recruiting other backpackers, the method of autoethnography is also being used since the author of the study is a member of this group.

Study findings show what ideals backpackers hold about their practice as well as about the places in India that are suitable as well as not suitable for these ideals. It further looks deeper in how these ideals are being abandoned in certain cases and gives an understanding of what different factors contribute to abandoning these ideals.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Study Background

Around 1970s the first travel guides advising how one can travel in Asia “on a shoestring” appeared. Tourism scholars also turned their attention to tourists who questioned the idea of tourism as seeking only “sea, sand and sun” and looked for traveling “off the beaten track” (Cohen, 1972). Young Westerners were going to the East – India, Southeast Asia – and traveling was seen as more than just a way to see the world. At the same time, it was motivated by the feeling of alienation in the home countries of Western drifters (Cohen, 1972). Since then the scene of these alternative travelers was developing and nowadays the title of “backpackers” is given to refer to such travelers. However, as the number of people practicing backpacking increased, its diversity has also increased, and the nature of backpackers is heterogeneous (Ateljevic and Doorne, 2001). This way of traveling is practiced by individuals coming from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Teo and Leong, 2006), many of them with different motivations attached to this practice (Maoz, 2007). There are various motivations attached to backpacking, but what remains important aspects of this practice is traveling on a low budget and over an extended period (Uriely et al., 2002). The latter, as well as other aspects, are ideals that backpackers follow seek suitable experience (Welk, 2004).

Although the practice of backpacking is attached to a strong ideology (Welk, 2004), the actual practices of backpackers seem to be incongruent with the ideals (Cohen, 2004).

The latter is related to growing backpacker catering sector and such emerging spaces as so-called backpacker enclaves (Cohen, 2004). Among these, there are travel agencies that emerged offering one experience of local life while traveling. In the case of South East Asia, spots catering to backpackers emerged offering backpacker accommodation places, places to eat out and get familiar food (ibid). Such places became oases for travelers in South East Asia where they can meet other travelers and rest (Hottola, 2005). For example, backpackers often imagine India as ‘tough’ and risky country to travel in (Elsrud, 2001). However, India also offers backpackers many places to rest where one can forget the ‘chaos’ of India (Hottola, 2005). In the context of such changes in destinations, it is argued that the gap between backpackers ideals and practices (Cohen, 2004).

## 1.2. Problem Statement

There is a notion that backpackers while traveling, for example, in South East Asia, spend most of their time in backpacker enclaves and become a part of conventional tourism (Cohen, 2004).

Cohen (2004) suggested that one of the few future backpacking research directions should be to understand the emerging difference between what is the image and the practice in backpacking. In addition, it is important to understand the emic perspective of this topic, which is to give voice to backpackers and look at their narratives (ibid). In paying attention to this gap, some scholars implemented studies seeking to understand the way this gap is negotiated by backpackers (Elsrud, 2001, Muzaini, 2006). However, there is more need to understand this gap from the perspective of backpackers.

### **1.3. Research Objective and Research Questions**

In this study I seek to understand how backpackers themselves perceive and address such possible gaps between backpacking ideals that they have about their travels (frequently tied to clichéd ideas of what backpacking represents) and actual practices and experiences in India.

The aim of this research is to understand the gap between backpacker ideals and practices when traveling in India from the perspective of the backpackers themselves. The following are the research questions that are sought to be answered with the data collected.

1. What are ideals that backpackers hold about backpacking in India?
2. What aspects of the backpacking practices are incongruent with the ideals?
3. What are the factors contributing to abandoning backpacking ideals?
4. How does following and abandoning backpacking ideals relate to backpacking spaces?

This study will add to the field of backpacking research by contributing to the understanding of the perception of the emerging gap between backpacker ideals and practices by backpackers themselves. Moreover, the relation of this topic to the context of where backpacking takes place will add to better understanding of how backpackers use spaces in relation to their ideals as well as practices.

### **1.4. Thesis Layout**

In this thesis, the several main parts are being presented. Firstly, the theoretical part is presented giving an overview of the heterogeneous nature of backpackers, as well as concepts and literature related to backpacking ideals, practices, and spaces. Later the methods chapter follows, which explains what methods were used in this study as well as who were participants in the study. Then the results are presented with the illustration of citations of the participants of the study, and this is followed by discussion presenting the findings and discussing it in the context of other findings. Finally, the conclusions are given providing the overview of answers to research questions.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1. Defining backpackers

Though the term 'backpacker' already implies that it is someone using the backpack when traveling, the whole scene of so-called travelers is much more complicated. In order to understand this complexity, the evolution of this type of traveling is firstly given.

'Drifters' are perceived as the antecedent of backpacking (Cohen, 2004). This term refers to travelers in 1960's and 1970's. These were alienated individuals from Western societies heading for long-distance trips, such as to India and other destinations in South East Asia, and looking for alternative ways of living. The accounts of drifters are apparent in the writings of Cohen (1972). Drifters are conceived as traveling "off the beaten track", having no plans about their itineraries and so being open to immerse into whatever comes their way. So definition regarding drifters was related to the flexibility in their traveling since there are neither plans nor specific goals related to their ventures (Cohen, 1972).

Drifting is seen as a basis for contemporary backpackers (Cohen, 2004) whose name as such appeared about two decades after the term 'drifter', in the 1990s (O'Reilly, 2006). Though backpackers seek to be distinct from a group of conventional tourists, the emergence of 'mainstream backpacking' is present (Welk, 2004). Whereas drifters were considered to have flexible itineraries and to travel "off the beaten track", only a small part of backpackers do that nowadays (Cohen, 2004). It can be seen looking at the definitions used for backpackers. For example, Maoz and Bekerman (2010, p. 426) define backpackers as 'relatively young tourists who tend to gather in ghettos or enclaves: places where large numbers congregate to experience home comforts and the company of tourists of similar interests.' However, such definition is too simplified and as such it is difficult then to recognize whether this definition is tailored to describe mass tourists or backpackers. Maoz studies a specific group of backpackers – Israeli backpackers who seek relaxation in India after their obligatory military service (Maoz and Bekerman, 2010). Israeli backpackers in India continue their Israeli lifestyle – they spend time with other Israeli backpackers, eat Israeli food and read familiar newspapers (Enoch and Grossman, 2010). They also tend to require Western living and service standards (Maoz, 2006). Apart from relaxation seeking, other motivations are seeking experiences, aiming for interactions, sociability and contribution to the destination as the large-scale study show (Richards and Wilson, 2004). Experience seeking is especially important to self-defined backpackers (ibid). However, the picture of backpackers' motivations is not simple – they might also have multiple motivations even during a single trip (Uriely et al., 2002).



Next to the term 'backpackers', there are also other names delineating 'alternative traveling'. Some of the backpackers realize that calling themselves 'backpackers' can be associated with the mainstream traveling and instead choose to use the term 'independent traveler' (Hottola, 2004). Such division of one calling himself/herself either a backpacker or a traveler is seen in a large-scale transnational quantitative survey on backpackers' motivations, experiences and behavior conducted in 2002. Results show that more than a half of respondents preferred calling themselves 'travelers' rather than backpackers and 20% called themselves tourists (Richards and Wilson, 2004). New groups in the scene of backpackers are also being recognized, such as "flashpackers" (Hannam and Diekmann, 2010). The main differences between flashpackers and backpackers lie in the amount of money spent while traveling and the importance and use of technologies while traveling (ibid). Flashpackers is a sub-culture within a culture of backpackers who are embedded not only in the physical reality, but also a virtual one through the help of (communication) technologies (Paris, 2012). The use of technologies gives an opportunity to organize one's trip with the help of technological devices which increases the level of independence of flashpackers (ibid). The use of technologies also allows to have an instant contact with the family and friends back home and share the stories of one's trip. Thus, it provides the opportunity to be in both physical 'road' reality and virtual 'home' reality at the same time (Paris, 2012). Another group of travelers within the scene of backpackers is lifestyle travelers. Different from backpackers, lifestyle travelers see backpacking as not a temporary activity, but rather the main occupation (Cohen, 2011).

In conclusion, since the era of drifters, the scene of this group of travelers grew and became more diverse. Overall it is acknowledged that the nature of backpackers is heterogeneous and that there is no clear line in distinguishing who is a backpacker, a traveler or a tourist (Richards and Wilson, 2004). Backpackers are not a homogeneous group of travelers; rather it is a very heterogeneous group (Ateljevic and Doorne, 2001; Richards and Wilson, 2004).

## **2.2. Backpacking Ideals**

Cohen (2004) tells about his personal encounter in Peru with a German guy in 1960's. This guy traveled through the Amazon river mostly alone on a little boat and had undergone many hardships in his trip, such as suffering from tropical diseases and curing them by himself. As scholar notes, this encounter has greatly influenced the concept of 'drifter' he later proposed. Such image of an individual who is self-reliant and travels without an itinerary was an ideal of the 'original drifter' (Cohen, 2004). What later influenced the perception of backpacking ideals was a figure of Tony Wheeler, a founder of "Lonely Planet" guidebooks (Welk, 2008). Tony Wheeler published his first guidebook on traveling in Asia on

a low budget in 1970's (Wheeler, 1992). He described a traveler using an opposition to a tourist – travelers do not seek comfort, use less money and seek to experience and to live the places they go to (ibid). Such representation of backpacking ideals is persistent until now and is expressed through the idea of traveling on a low budget, preferably for longer periods of time and pursuing 'local' experiences.

Although nowadays there is more tourism infrastructure in diverse destinations than 40 years ago, an ideology that is embraced by backpackers still relates to the drifters (Elsrud, 2001; Cohen, 2004). It still requires one to travel "off the beaten track", to search for remote places and, most importantly, to make experiences while traveling (Welk, 2004). Bradt (1995, in Welk 2004) pays attention to the 'conduct of honor' representing the idea of backpacking and followed by backpackers, which includes these five elements:

- Traveling on a low-budget, which is especially important for accommodation, transportation, and food;
- Meeting people, which mainly implies other travelers, but also locals;
- Being free, open-minded and independent;
- Organizing one's trip by oneself;
- Travelling longer.

These elements are unwritten guidelines that help backpackers to distinguish themselves from conventional tourists. It is considered that conventional tourists spend more money during their trips, go on shorter organized packaged tours and stay in contact only with other tourists. So the ideals sought by backpackers relate to the idea of 'anti-tourism' (Welk, 2004). Such aspects as long-term traveling, independent travel organization, and meeting locals imply that one is seeking to have a different experience than conventional tourists (Welk, 2004). The idea of traveling 'off the beaten track' implies that there are no tourists in the places visited (ibid).

Positioning one as an 'anti-tourist' is also related to the idea of experiencing hardship while traveling. For example, engaging in a low-budget traveling implies that budget travelers do not require comforts such as familiar food or air conditioning (Rilley, 1988). Backpackers show less interest in luxury aspects than tourists (Larsen et al., 2011). Such aspect then again shows that one is not a 'typical' tourist looking for comfort and relaxation. Instead, there is an idea that backpackers manage to live with fewer comforts that they are used to back home.

Laythorpe (2010) studied volunteer tourists who are also backpackers. Immersing oneself in volunteering experiences is considered important and only traveling is perceived

as not enough by her study participants. One has to do something purposeful when traveling (ibid). Volunteering provides an opportunity for the latter as well as an opportunity to immerse into the culture, which is important to make local experiences. Volunteering helps one to set a routine, to understand the local culture and the daily customs and to meet local people (ibid).

So backpacking ideals have relation to the early drifters and revolve around the idea of being an 'anti-tourist'. Ideals revolve around and the idea of making experiences while traveling. This is sought through certain ideas of how experiences are made. Making experience is then realized through such aspects as experiencing hardship and trying to immerse oneself into local 'off the beaten track' environments.

### **2.3. Actual Backpacking Practices**

The ideas of ideal backpacking trip are not always easy to turn into practice (Cohen, 2004).

One of the ideals regarding backpacking is to have a local experience and apart from meeting other travelers, meet local people. However, meeting local people may be not only an exciting, but also a scary experience. A study of the female backpackers show that meeting locals can also evoke such feelings as a preoccupation of one's safety and fear (Falconer, 2011). The emotion of fear and pursuit of safety then influences one's contact with locals, e.g. female backpackers often inhibit interaction with male locals. However, such inhibition of contact with locals then leads to the feelings of guilt (ibid). Firstly, backpackers feel guilty as they perceive that their behavior is not respectful and rude towards the people of the country one is visiting. Secondly, avoiding the contact with local males results in a feeling of guilt since backpackers feel that they miss an opportunity to meet locals and make local experiences (ibid). So the risk is not only a factor that adds to the adventurous and spontaneous, exciting experiences (Elsrud, 2001), but also restrains one from getting into such experiences (ibid). A gender constraint is also noted in travel guidebooks. Apart from the discourse of 'empowerment' and adventure, there is a discourse of alert awareness in regards to safety for female travelers (Wilson et al., 2009). So although the idea of meeting locals is an important backpacking ideal, in real backpacking practices it can be rejected due to such factors as feelings of insecurity and fear. Then often instead of meeting locals, backpackers mostly meet other travelers and instead of getting to know the local culture, they learn about the cultures of other travelers (Sorensen, 2003).

Cohen (2004) notes that backpackers in their trips have to face different constraints. These are external constraints (such as limited access to certain places), and, more importantly, inward constraints – competencies and skills of a backpacker that one uses in a

trip. Sometimes the challenges one faces when traveling can be too overwhelming or the inward constraints too high to deal with difficult situations. In such situations, backpackers seek the suspension of such experiences (Richards and Wilson, 2004). The same authors suggest that backpackers structure their trip into the periods of work and leisure. Work is considered to be making cultural and local experiences and experiencing hardships (Hottola, 2005). Abandoning such experiences and instead seeking to rest then is considered to be leisure periods (Hottola, 2005; Molz, 2010). As the study of Molz (2010) shows, the backpacking trip is organized according to such needs of cultural work and the rest.

Laythorpe (2010) shows how backpackers seek such 'interplay between work and leisure' in Tanzania. Her study participants combine backpacking and volunteering. Volunteering is seen as a way to immerse in the local environment and get to know it (Laythorpe, 2010). Volunteering is then a period of work that is later replaced by backpacking to popular places in order to rest. However, for others volunteering can be perceived as leisure experience since one meets other backpackers and is in a safe environment (ibid). Whether volunteering is work or leisure also may be explained by the heterogeneous nature of volunteering projects and volunteers. While some volunteers can be dedicated to long-term volunteering projects and immersed in local environments, for others the primary concern is traveling around, and they stay on short-term volunteering projects (Callanan and Thomas, 2005).

Studies show that backpackers often instead "off the beaten track", choose already known itinerary (Cooper et al., 2004). Backpackers choose the itineraries that are suggested by other backpackers or 'Lonely Planet' guidebooks (Richards and Wilson, 2004). These are the places where there is backpacker infrastructure and where these travelers can find comforts similar to ones they find at home or meet other travelers who come from similar cultural backgrounds (ibid). The concept of such spaces is discussed in a following chapter.

#### **2.4. Backpacking Spaces: from enclaves to heterogeneous spaces**

Backpackers fulfill their need to rest escaping to backpacker enclaves (Hottola, 2004, 2005; Wilson and Richards, 2008). These places can be considered to be the beaten track. The original idea of an enclave is a relatively homogenous touristic space (Edensor, 1988). Backpacker enclaves are more diverse since the locals are still there (Wilson and Richards, 2008). Backpacker enclaves are located at the crossroads and can be many different places (ibid). A backpacker enclave can be in a busy commercial district of a city, for example, Bangkok or Jakarta, but it can also be the rural 'paradises' such as Bali (ibid). The backpacker enclave functions as the place where backpackers can meet and share their experiences of navigating through other territories (ibid). What distinguishes the backpacker

enclave from the one referred to as a touristic bubble is its 'permeability' since the access of the locals is not restricted in the former (Wilson and Richards, 2008). However, a reference to locals means that they are usually entrepreneurs and hospitality sector employees (ibid). Backpacker enclaves are places where backpackers can rest from culture confusion that is outside of enclaves and increase a level of control. It is also a place where a backpacker seeks for the company, support and information from other backpackers (Hottola, 2005). Thus, these spaces are named 'safe havens' (Wilson and Richards, 2008), 'cultural home away from home' (Westerhauzen, 2002) or metaworlds (Hottola, 2004). Such naming is used because backpacker enclaves remind backpackers of the home environment (Hottola, 2005).

However, backpacker enclaves are not always 'safe havens'. Studies considering Asian backpackers traveling in Asia notice that they can experience discrimination both from the side of local entrepreneurs as well as from other White travelers (Muzaini, 2006). Teo and Leong (2006) add the case study of Khao San (Thailand) showing how Asian origin backpackers are marginalized in this space, and Asian females are also being eroticized. Thus, social space of backpacker enclaves may inherit the norms regarding what kind of people belong to that place. These norms can be an assumption held both by entrepreneurs as well as other backpackers and can even result in discrimination of certain groups of backpackers.

Apart from understanding backpacker enclaves, backpackers' aspirations for the rest can be realized by going to flexible social spaces or using certain behavioral tactics (Hottola, 2005). Hottola (2005) studied backpackers in India and indicated five metaspaces where backpackers retreated and looked for an escape from Other public spaces. These are private spaces reserved for a traveller (e.g. one's room in a hostel), semi-private spaces with restricted access, public spaces with restricted access (e.g. shopping mall with a security checking the ones who are entering), spaces for temporary Western domination, such as enclaves and wilderness spaces where there are no local people. What is important in these metaspaces is the access of locals to the place – it is stressed that locals will have a more difficult access or be less present in metaspaces than in public spaces. The scholar also notices that with an increase of a feeling of control that one experience while being in the metaspaces, the desire to meet locals also increases. Controllable metaspaces and unpredictable other spaces meet and overlap helping one to realize both the needs for control and safety, as well as an adventure and local experience (Hottola, 2005).

Though the idea of escaping to enclaves or other flexible spaces is related to the need of rest, it is noticed that most of traveling time takes place in such spaces (Cohen, 2004). Hottola (2005) reflects on backpackers' cultural background and suggests that especially

backpackers from more individualistic Western societies require more privacy that can be increased in, for example, backpacker enclaves. Next to the need of control, there is also the need to belong which is also realized in these metaspaces since one meets backpackers. Thus, rather than gaining an understanding of local cultures, backpackers gain a better understanding of other western/European cultures (Hottola, 2005; Sorensen, 2003). Also, pursuing ideals of local experience and intercultural communication mostly occur while traveling from one haven to another (Hottola, 2005). Thus, it seems that the ideals of backpackers are not congruent with the actual practices (Cohen, 2004).

However, besides backpacker enclaves, there are also so-called heterogeneous places (Edensor, 1988). The scholar describes such spaces as being chaotic and open, where public as well as the private life of locals is portrayed. Such spaces are marked by difficulties, such as difficulties in moving through them. They are also spaces where different senses are touched and overwhelmed and, finally, are suitable for backpacker experiences (ibid).

## **2.5. Understanding the gap between Backpacking Ideals and Practices**

There is attention among scholars paid to the gap between the backpacking ideology and the practice, also to the backpacker enclaves since these are considered the places where backpacking happens (Wilson and Richards, 2008). However, little attention was paid to understand how backpackers themselves negotiate this gap between backpacking ideals and practices (Cohen, 2004).

The efforts to look at the ways used by backpackers to negotiate this gap were expressed by some scholars. Elsrud (2001) sought to understand not the actual motives or behavior of backpackers, but the perception of their backpacking experiences, as well as narratives, told about backpacking. The notion of risk and adventure in the narratives is prevalent, and they are used to relate their actual experiences to ideals of backpacking (ibid).

Another scholar attempt to understand how the ideals regarding gaining local experience are pursued was put forward. It showed that getting the local experience is negotiated in implementing certain strategies (Muzaini, 2006). Backpackers choose the cheap accommodation or local places to eat not only because they save money, but also because they perceive that such places are closer to locals and permit them to interact with locals (ibid). What more, in order to look local certain behavioral strategies are used, such as trying to speak some of local language, bargain and dress like a local (ibid).

Backpacker enclaves are also portrayed as spaces where backpackers not only rest and withdraw from other spaces, but where they also can address the need to follow the backpacking ideals (Wilson and Richards, 2008). Backpackers can experience both the

difference that they need to make an experience and familiarity that includes such aspects as meeting other travelers or having access to the familiar food in backpacker enclaves (ibid). Backpacker enclaves are spaces where backpackers can search for balance between the backpacking ideology and the need for the safe and familiar environment (Hottola, 2004; 2005; Wilson and Richards, 2008).

### **3. METHODS**

In this chapter, I present the methods I used in my study, the participants of the study, research setting.

#### **3.1. Character of the thesis work**

The attention in this study is paid to study experiences of backpackers and the subjective meanings they give to this practice as well as places visited. Therefore, the approach to studying the subjective points of view is needed. For studying subjective experiences the positivist approach does not fit, and the approach used is the interpretative one (Tribe, 2006). Such approach suits to study the specific experiences rather than to look for the general trends. Thus there is no aim to make a generalization to a wider group of the population, but instead to capture in-depth experiences of individuals, and so the choice of qualitative approach is made in this study.

Since the study deals with meanings and experiences of backpackers, the emic perspective is embraced in this study. Being (ex)-backpackers Wilson and Ateljevic (2008) studied women backpackers and acknowledged that often the topics of the interviews or themes that emerged resonated with what they considered themselves being relevant. Following this line of thought the idea that the researcher has an influence on the research was embraced. Since I define myself as a backpacker, the topic of this study relates to my personal appeals. Therefore in this research project not only the experiences of other backpackers were taken into account, but also my experience in backpacking in India. Thus autoethnography was used as one of the methods for this study. They are presented in the following section.

#### **3.2. Methods and Data Collection**

In order to answer research questions, two methods were used in this study – autoethnography and in-depth interviews.

Autoethnography was used as a method for this study. “Auto” refers to one’s personal experience, “ethno” – to the cultural experience and “graphy” – to systemic analysis. So autoethnography then means a way to understand the experience of the culture by systemically analyzing one’s personal experience (Ellis et al., 2011). There are many

approaches to autoethnography that differ in whether the greater emphasis is on the researcher himself/herself or also on others (ibid). In this study, autoethnography is manifest in two ways. Firstly, it is manifest in my choice of using the accounts of my backpacking trip as a material for the research. Secondly, it is used in my choice of conducting the majority of interviews with other backpackers with whom I have a good relationship and share the common experience of being a backpacker in India. The latter reflects what Ellis et al. (2011) call interactive interviews. Opposite to usual interviews with strangers, interactive interviews are conducted with and among people that know each other and share the topic or issue being researched.

So as a researcher and as a subject of this study I spent two months (mid-January – mid-March 2014) solo backpacking in South India. During this trip, I kept a travel diary about my backpacking experiences and published entries in the online travel blog that I kept during my trip. Originally the online travel blog served a purpose to keep my friends in Europe informed on how I was doing during my trip. This travel diary is used as the data for the study. In total, there are 12 travel blog entries submitted. Each entry is highly descriptive and detailed account of my experiences in India. They include the stories of my daily life, choices made throughout the trip, places visited, activities that I engaged in, people encountered as well as my emotional experiences and reflections. A few of the entries represented the experiences of the same day while most of them cover experiences of 3 – 4 days or the whole week. The first travel blog entry was submitted during first week in India and the last one on the last day in India just before leaving back to Europe. Thus, it encompasses the account of the full two month trip.

The other part of the study was conducting in-depth interviews with 11 individuals who defined themselves as backpackers and were backpacking in India. A convenient sampling was used in this study since people that I already knew were mostly approached. Five of the interviewees approached were the people whom I met in hostels in Chennai, Auroville, and Kodaikanal during my trip in South India. Two of the interviewees, I knew before India, but I also met them while being in India. Two other interviewees were recruited using a snowball technique, and the last two were drawn to the study by putting a notice in a Wageningen Student Plaza group meant for Wageningen students in a social networking site Facebook. The great majority of the interviewees in this study originated from developed countries that were mostly European countries, but there was also one interviewee from Australia and one from Mexico. All the participants of the study had a higher education – they either already finished the university/college or were enrolled in the studies at the moment of the research. The great majority of the interviewees were traveling alone; the age range of the respondents is from 19 to 28 at the time of the study; three of them were female and eight – male. Such



unequal gender distribution among the respondents can be explained by the fact that during my trip I mostly got acquainted with male backpackers. However, since this study does not focus on the gender differences in individual backpacking experience, I believe this does not undermine the quality of the study. The range of the length of the trips varied from 6 weeks to 9 months. More detailed information on each interviewee is given in Appendix 1 (names are changed due to confidentiality).

Interviews were conducted in April 2014 after I returned from India. At the time of interviewing most of the people I interviewed were in their home countries while a few were still traveling. Thus, nine interviews were conducted using Skype program (the camera function) and the other two – face to face here in Wageningen; the interviews were conducted in English, Italian and Lithuanian languages. The interview guide was prepared with open-ended questions (see Appendix 2). However, during the interviews I also came up with new questions including many probing questions in order to follow the reflections of interviewees.

### **3.3. Reflection on my role and the research**

Before I became an MSc student of Leisure, Tourism and Environment, I was a backpacker and hitchhiker (and still am) making frequent trips around Europe. Thus, backpacking was the topic for the first essay written at Wageningen University, and as I found out it was the topic I felt I was personally interested to explore during my master thesis.

As a backpacker, I wanted to travel finally out from Europe and India was one of the countries perceived as a desired destination. Thus, I chose India as a country to do the field work for my master thesis. I firstly went to India with an idea of doing the thesis about a different topic, storytelling tourism and for this reason stayed in a city of Chennai during the first month. However, due to various circumstances I failed to collect data and thus decided to spend the rest of the time backpacking. I started the trip in the state of Tamil Nadu in which I stayed in Auroville, then Pondicherry, Thanjavur, Madurai, a town in the mountains Kodaikanal. Later I entered the state of Kerala and visited Kannur, then moved to Goa state and finally a city of Mumbai from where I departed (the map of my itinerary is in Appendix 3). I had different experiences during my trip. I stayed with local families, as well as hostels and lodges, meeting both locals and travelers, experiencing sickness, staying in cities as well as rural areas and spaces with more westerners. While being in India apart from being a backpacker I was also a student of MLE since in my mind I was observing, reflecting and questioning diverse tourism and backpacking issues. What I also reflected on was the gap between what backpackers realize as an ideal trip of backpacking and the practices that were often not reflecting these ideals. After my return from India, I started to give this idea

more thought that finally turned into the final topic for my master thesis. I developed the research topic as a result of my personal experience as being a backpacker in India. Therefore, I decided to use an autoethnography as an approach to the study and to support it with the narratives of other backpackers I have met and known. Autoethnography mostly receives critique regarding the probability of biased data as well as navel-gazing (Ellis et al., 2011). Response to it is noting the importance of besides being rigorous and analytical also to be open to one's personal experience as a part of wider social phenomena (ibid). However, I believe the research has to bring more perspectives together. Therefore, apart from taking into account the data reflecting my backpacking experience, I also include the perspectives of other backpackers that are more prevalent in the section of results than my own.

Regarding the interviews with other backpackers, I sought to capture an emotional, and personal aspect of the stories told. The fact that most of the interviewees were the people that met before (during my trip or otherwise) added to the confidence interviewees felt once conversing with me. Prior knowledge of interviewees also added to mitigating the possible limitation of not receiving honest answers and a more relaxed and confident interview atmosphere. It was also helpful that interviewees knew that I also did a backpacking trip in India. For example, when sharing stories that were unpleasant, interviewees would ask me or add "I guess you know," "Did anything of that kind happen to you?", "You know it is sometimes like that in India." Therefore at certain moments I was also sharing my experiences. It helped interviewees to share their stories and sometimes uncomfortable aspects of it. In addition, not only did my experience help interviewees to open up, but it also let me gain a deeper understanding of the content of their stories.

### **3.4. Data analysis**

The data from my travel experience was stored in MS Word documents. The interviews conducted were recorded and later transcribed into MS Word documents. The interviews that were conducted in Italian and Lithuanian were directly translated into English when transcribing.

"Open coding" was used for data analysis (Boeije, 2010). Thus separate interviews were examined individually, and the emerging topics were noted; the same was done with the travel diary. Later these topics of each interview as well as my travel diary were compared; initial topics were reconsidered, and the final list of recurring topics was set. The adequate citations were chosen to illustrate the topics.

## 4. RESULTS

The aim of this research is to understand the gap between backpacker ideals and practical choices when traveling in India (with a few reflections on other destinations in SEA) and the following are the research questions that are sought to be answered with the data collected.

1. What are ideals that backpackers hold about backpacking in India?
2. What aspects of the backpacking practices are incongruent with the ideals?
3. What are the factors contributing to abandoning backpacking ideals?
4. How does following and abandoning backpacking ideals relate to backpacking spaces?

### 4.1. Following Backpacking Ideals

Firstly, it is sought to see what are ideas that backpackers in this study hold about their way of traveling. The results are showing what study participants perceive as ideal traveling style and the way to experience India are presented.

#### 4.1.1. Budget-minded

Backpacking is highly represented as traveling cheaply, on a low budget, or as the first 'Lonely Planet' guide was titled – on a shoestring. Traveling on a low budget means one does not need luxury during a trip and is opposed to the idea of mass tourism where the consumption of luxurious services is present (Wheeler, 1992).

India is already perceived as a cheap destination, and such is stressed in some accounts of backpackers, including the one of myself. For me, an important criterion for staying somewhere further away from Europe for two months was that the country would be relatively cheap. Thus, India was suitable according to this criterion. So the choice I made regarding the destination already implied my concern with traveling on a low budget. A Swedish student Adam tells me that his choice of India as a country to go was influenced by several factors of which one was that the country was cheap to travel in.

*“So I chose India because it is cheap which is for me easy as I do not have much money, and it is on a way home.”*

Other backpackers do not explicitly say that they chose India because they have a low budget. However, throughout their narratives the joy and excitement about low prices that they have to pay for different services in India is expressed and stressed. Backpackers pay much attention to the prices and often look for lower prices, especially regarding accommodation, but also transportation and food. The choices of the thelow budget

regarding this triad are also reflected in my experiences. I was concerned with prices when looking for auto-rickshaws, when choosing to eat in a local canteen type restaurant where food is cheap and when bargaining and searching for the cheapest room in hostels. The latter is shown in the excerpt from my blog during the first week, reflecting my efforts to look for the cheapest room in the hostel in Chennai.

*“Once again I ask the price, and I manage to bargain off only 50 rupees (=0.76 euros). Well, another option is a single room with shared showers and toilets. I follow the local employee who shows me the room – simple and cozy – that is what I need. However, the common bathrooms do not seem so cozy, but still ‘doable’, so I say “yes” and take this shared facility, single room option.”*

The blog excerpt above shows that I am concerned with getting the accommodation for the lower price. For the sake of staying on a low budget, I also change my initial idea of staying in a room with a toilet and shower to sharing these facilities with others. So for me the idea of more comfort, such as having the facilities in my room is less appealing than the idea to stay on a low budget. Such idea of putting more importance on low price rather than comforts is also expressed by another female backpacker Phoebe whom I met in a hostel in Chennai. During the interview, she tells me about her experience in a city of Thanjavur mentioning the price and conditions of the room she was staying.

*“Then I went to Thanjavur and I had this room for 150 rupees (=2.27 euros), it was really dirty. I had little ants on my mattress and everything.”*

Phoebe comes from Switzerland where she is working as a professional. Thus, concern about paying a low price for a room is not because she does not have money. Rather it is more related to the idea of staying on a low budget per se.

A 26-year old Italian student Alessandro tells about his summer trip to the North India of which a bigger part he spent in the mountains of Himalaya. He revealed that often for the accommodation he either paid a very low price or stayed for free.

*“Sometimes in these small towns you have a small guest house that are like 100 rupees (=1.51 euros). And especially when we did hiking in valleys, there is no guest house, so you have to ask for hospitality from people, and they hosted us without problems, for free.”*

Alessandro also does not face a money issue, but as it is portrayed staying on a low-budget is still sought and celebrated.

Bargaining and paying the low price is present also regarding the transportation prices when, for example, drivers ask backpackers to pay the 'tourist' price which is higher than what local Indian people pay. In my case especially when staying in Chennai it was a daily battle to search for an auto-rickshaw driver who would charge the local price. It was important for staying on a low-budget as well as not being treated as a tourist that is also important in backpackers' ideology. Moreover, though the difference between tourist price and local price would be very small, for me it was worth to invest my time in searching the 'honest' auto-rickshaw driver.

A similar account is also told by a 25-year old Dutch guy Joe who took a month holiday from his work and used it for his first trip to Asia.

*"Once in a public bus I walked in, and I asked a ticket to somewhere and I remembered it was 25 rupees (=0.38 euros). I asked the ticket, and the guy in front of me took the same ticket and he had to pay 25 rupees. When it was my turn to pay, the bus driver asked me 50 rupees (=0.76 euros), but he printed the ticket for 25 rupees. I started an argument like I had to pay double, and the driver was like "You have a big backpack". I was showing to other people who also had big luggage. However, then I thought that now I am an asshole for 30 euro cents, so I told "Just leave it, it is ok.""*

Thus, I see that there is the attention paid to prices which mean the participants of the study being conscious about the budget and considering it an important aspect. Further, the idea of traveling on a low budget is taken into account firstly when choosing India as a destination and when taking daily decisions regarding paying, especially the ones of accommodation and transport.

#### **4.1.2. Freedom and spontaneity**

Most of the backpackers in this study held the idea of being spontaneous in their itineraries – though they had initial ideas about itineraries they want to follow, they were flexible to change it. A few interviewees had a stricter itinerary prior to coming to India but still were willing to change it during the trip itself. Others, such as myself, did not have planned itineraries and thus were more open to making on-the-spot decisions on where to go and what to do. A 25-year old English male Ross headed to Asia after he left work and was on long-term travel without knowing how long his trip would be. His itinerary was flexible and depended on his needs at the time of the travel.

*"I did not have a plan of what I do after Nepal. The reason I came to India was because I was in Kathmandu, and it was really cold and I did not want to be there and I wanted to go somewhere nice and warm."*

Thus, Ross leaves the itinerary open and chooses the places to go based on what he needs at any moment. In the above case, it is noted that he made the decision based on his desire for warm climate.

An Italian student Alessandro changed his initial plans to stay in India for a few months by prolonging his stay with one more month. He also changed a way he perceived the desired traveling. Prior to coming to India, he planned to travel to many places, once he was in India he decided to take time when visiting places and getting to know people in the places.

*“In the beginning we thought of doing like Euro trip – you visit a few days and go on for another place. However, later we saw it was not the case, and so we changed all the plans. It was nice to stop in the cities, to get to know the people, ask them where we could go.”*

Besides seeing the changes in their itineraries and travel plans, some of the backpackers also explicitly expressed the importance of being spontaneous and open to changes when traveling. For example, it is viewed in the excerpt from an interview with a Swedish student Adam. He came to India after spending a year in Australia and as he said he was too busy to collect information about India prior to going there.

*“In general I did not have a plan. I think it was good. I like to travel around spontaneously and if other people are going to good place, come with them.”*

Such an attitude to traveling implies that one is open to change their ideas of itineraries regarding as here expressed by Adam the plans and suggestions of other travelers they meet. Thus people that one meets when traveling become the source and inspiration for one's itinerary.

Spontaneity is also expressed through the attitude of planning one's trip ahead. Here the decision of the length of the stay and choice of the places is rather encouraged to be led by one's experience of that place. A Mexican backpacker Jimmy says he does not like to do a prior research using internet, but rather relies on his first impression of the place.

*“There are some people who do booking before, but I do not like it because maybe you arrive at the place, and it is a piece of shit. So I just prefer to go down from the train or airplane and just walk around the places first before making a decision.”*

Here he again makes a comparison to 'other people' who instead plan their trips ahead and by such comparison distinguishes him as an independent and spontaneous traveler. Another backpacker, a Lithuanian Monica also puts forward the idea of relying on her 'gut feeling' when deciding on her itinerary.

*“I did not know where I was going or what I was doing, relying on more on my intuition.”*

So here the notion of relying on one’s feeling of the place plays a role in making decisions throughout the trip and so the willingness to be open and spontaneous is important.

A Dutch backpacker Rachel who spent most of her Indian time in Auroville together with other travelers and her relatives tells me that her way to feeling free was driving a motorbike.

*“I really enjoyed driving my motorbike and feeling free.”*

In the narrative that Rachel gives there is a feeling of empowerment provided by the figure of the motorbike. Even such mundane aspects of, for example, carrying the shopping goods by motorbike in the traffic gives a feeling of adventure and enhances one’s worth as a ‘tough backpacker’.

*“I felt really tough when I did some shopping, and I had some bags over there and here on my bike and I was like yeah, I can do it.”*

So being flexible about one’s travel plans is present and practiced by the majority of the travelers of this study and not having a plan is perceived as a good attribute of the trip. Moreover, even when staying in one place, such as in a case of Rachel is negotiated through, for example, engaging in driving a motorbike that stands as a figure of being independent and free.

#### **4.1.3. Extended stays in places**

While the perception of a backpacker is related more to a mobile figure carrying the backpack on one’s shoulders, the time that one needs to experience the place differs. Another aspect that ideologically distinguishes conventional tourists and backpackers is that backpackers claim to stay longer in places they travel to which helps one to experience a place better (Wheeler, 1992).

Some backpackers in the study put the experience of ‘rooting’ in one place as a priority to seeing as much as possible. This is seen from some of the narratives of the backpackers I interviewed. A Mexican guy Jimmy prefers to stay longer in one place and to set his routine in there. It is related to the fact that he aims to learn things throughout his trips, such as yoga, meditation and such process of learning requires one to settle down in a place. Jimmy during his trip aimed to settle down in places for 1 – 2 months. For him, such extended stays in one place give an opportunity to get to know the place and its routine, the relationships and daily as well as cultural practices that happen in that place.



*“My intention is to stay as much as possible, like setting a routine, that is the interesting part. <...> I can see how things evolve. First day you don't know anyone. In 2-3 days, you start to know how the place where you stay works, you start to make a map in your head about the places around, and this map starts to get bigger. And you can see what people do on weekdays and weekends, and something happens in between, a birthday or an anniversary or a party. And then it is a time to say goodbye. It is a whole process that you cannot live in a week.”*

So staying in one place provides an opportunity not only to expand one's map of the place, but also to get to know the place through the rhythms of other people living in the place.

Jimmy travels more than half a year, and he can spend more time in one place. However, in this study it is the philosophy that is also embraced by travelers who are on short-term trips. Such is an example of a 21-year old Australian student William. He came to South India only for a few months, but instead of spending this time visiting different places and traveling around, he decided to stay in one town in South India (Pondicherry). He did the voluntary work in a local organization and set his daily routine there.

*“I like to get comfortable in a new place, so it was like to fall into the Indian routine. To wake up in the morning, to take coffee, to go to the orphanage and to play with children. Then in the evening to go to Auroville and hang out with my housemate for a while, come back and go to sleep. Then I feel like I was working and enjoyed myself.”*

A Dutch male backpacker Chris adds to this notion and puts forward the idea opposing to 'see as much as possible' and instead favors to stay in fewer places but for a longer period.

*“I really like India so much, and I just want to take each part slowly. And I really want to experience life here, like now part of Kerala, maybe south of Tamil Nadu and north exploring other time.”*

The interesting thing to note is that Chris decides to stay longer periods in one place in India based on his previous backpacking experience in South America. Before coming to India, he had a fast road trip in South America. He reflects on it and expresses the feeling of rush that he had when he traveled in South America. Chris contrasted it with feeling of engaging oneself for a longer stay and two months voluntary work in India.

*“When you are traveling you also have a feeling that you are always on the run, and you have to do this and to go there – like you have to do lots of fun stuff. When you do a*



*voluntary work, and you have a place, you don't have that rush. For me it was really laid-back time, it was not much happening, but it also gave some time to think and establish more friendship relationships."*

So in India he chose to stay in one place for two months instead of going to many places and 'doing fun stuff' as he explains that.

A Dutch student Rachel also expresses that she prefers to travel by staying in places rather than going through the itinerary of 'must see' places that reflect the way organized tourism works.

*"I think it is personal – if you really want to see the hotspots or if you want to see... For me, it is just better to stay in the place if it is feeling good, just stay a bit longer. "*

So interviewees tell that the idea of visiting many places is attractive, but they see that it is worthy to spend more time in fewer places. It is a way to experience places or as expressed above to "experience life".

#### **4.1.4. Meeting people – locals and travelers**

A great importance in backpacking is given to people met throughout the trip, which implies both other travelers and locals. Mostly the desire is expressed to travel in a way so that one can engage with locals and to understand local customs and culture.

For me, it was very important to meet local people in order to understand what India or more precisely different regions of India are. Prior to the trip, I got in contact with a local Indian guy via my friend. He helped me to arrange a stay in his friend's family in a city of Chennai, in a state of Tamil Nadu. As the excerpt from my blog during the first days in India shows, living with a local family allowed me, for example, to experience such aspects of Indian culture as the way particular festivals are celebrated.

*"On the first day of a festival of Pongal the family put big branches of sugar tree at the entrance of the puja room and together with the family we prayed. And then it was a time for a wonderful food served in banana leaf that we ate with hands."*

An Australian guy William tells that he came to India since he wanted "to see some of India, to meet Indians." In order to fulfill this desire, William decided to spend his time volunteering in Pondicherry and being in his voluntary organization permitted him to stay with local people.

*"I was in NGO and being there felt like I was working. People appreciated me being there, so I felt good. I met lots of Indians, and I made actual friends that were Indians."*

So the appeal and idea of one's trip to India is towards experiencing the local via meeting the local Indians, an idea that is also repeated by other travelers. A Dutch backpacker Chris traveled in India for a few months and spent half of the time volunteering in one NGO and at the same time living with a local family. Chris gives great importance to the desire to meet locals as such is the source of the 'real' local experience which also helps one to distinguish oneself as a backpacker from a tourist.

*“Connecting with local people is one of the nicest things when you are traveling. If you cannot communicate with local people, you can only communicate with tourists and then you are only there for sightseeing.”*

Such distinction from tourists is also apparent in the narrative of the youngest interviewee, a 19-year old Lithuanian backpacker Monica. In order to have a local experience and be with locals she also chose a volunteering option and stayed in a town of Kannur in a state of Kerala. She stayed there together with other volunteers and locals that run the business of voluntourism, and she was volunteering in a local Ayurveda hospital.

*“I liked that in Kannur I was living with lots of people and had the possibility to meet locals. I could say I was only with locals, although sometimes they don't speak English, I had help with translations. I liked that there were no tourists at all so you can see the life.”*

So for Monica staying in a local setting serves both to enhance her anti-tourism status as well as to understand the local lifestyle.

An Italian male student Alessandro tells me of his experience in visiting monasteries and being hosted by local people in the mountains of Himalaya and for him that is a way to understand the Indian culture.

*“It was magical because I could talk to priests and local people about their religion, about what they felt. I felt immersed in the environment fuelled with meaning – I am not religious, but in those places so much important for them I felt something. <...> In Pushkar we did all the rituals, like offering flowers, and it was really magical.”*

Apart from volunteering experiences or as Alessandro meeting locals when staying in monasteries, another option to meet locals as well as to stay with locals is, for example, social networking for travelers site Couchsurfing. I met a Dutch male backpacker Joe, whom I met in India where we spent a few days together in a region of Goa and Mumbai. I met him also before India when I was traveling in Europe, and I knew him as a passionate, and active user of Couchsurfing.org. Joe used Couchsurfing also in India. For him, it was one of the ways to meet local people and to experience local life. Therefore, he stayed at some places

at homes of local Indians he found through this network community that gave him opportunity also to see, for instance, the family life.

*“I also had a Couchsurfing host over there; he was like a really nice guy. I was also invited to his parents place because they heard I was there, so I went there and had dinner with them.”*

An English backpacker Ross headed for a long-term trip to Asia after taking a career break and though primarily sought relaxation, he was still interested in getting to know locals. He as well as Joe sees Couchsurfing as a suitable way to meet locals.

*“In terms of authenticity you always ask how can I find something authentic. I suppose, it seems for me the best way of doing this is Couchsurfing, cause you actually meet real local people, and you learn what life is like in that place for them.”*

So for Ross the best way is to get to know local scene and lifestyles. Moreover, as he notes again, meeting local people adds worth to one’s experience.

*“It is genuinely much more interesting to meet local people. When I was in Pondicherry, the guy whom I was paying for staying in his house, but it wasn’t like a proper guest house, it was just ‘yeah, do you want to stay in my house?’. So it was a normal local Indian guy. And that was quite nice because it is a different kind of experience.”*

So Ross sees the experience of meeting local people as more interesting and providing one with a different experience than when staying, for example, in hostels with other travelers.

However, while great attention is being paid to meet local people in order to get to know the culture and the country, meeting other travelers is also perceived as a vital aspect of one’s trip. What is prevalent in the narratives of travelers is the importance of sharing the stories about India with other backpackers. The need to share the stories of other travelers in regular terms is expressed as an important one to all the travelers of this study, even for the ones who rather prefer the local experience. Like Joe noted.

*“It is nice sometimes to meet foreigners. Only sometimes, cause I love local experience”.*

A Swedish male Adam notes that on his trip to India meeting other travelers in particular settings, such as in the spontaneous gathering in the forest, for him was the best experience.

*“We were in the forest <...> it could have been Sweden in summer. The thing that makes it highlight is the people, the group.”*

People also added to a sense of a place of an English backpacker Ross. He tells me a story about his connection to other two backpackers in a town of Hampi twice. The first time it was when I met him in a Kodaikanal, in a town in the mountains of South India, and later he repeats it during our Skype interview.

*“I have noticed that when the people I have been hanging out left, it was really different and in the guest house. The whole kind of atmosphere changed. It just didn't seem so nice; it did not seem so comfortable.”*

For Ross, this connection illuminates the experience of the place itself and so meeting other backpackers becomes an important aspect of making experiences.

I see that in the narratives of backpackers interviewed people that one meet are given a great deal of space and importance. Firstly, it is the local Indians who are approached in different settings and via different strategies. Backpackers meet locals when volunteering, look for locals via such virtual travelers networks as Couchsurfing.org or use one's networks. The main motive to meet locals and to be with locals is as backpackers believe that local people help them to understand and experience the Indian culture and lifestyle better. Apart from this, staying in local settings adds to one's status of being a backpacker, but not a tourist. Secondly, apart from local Indians, it is also important to meet other travelers in order to share experiences and to make experiences together.

#### **4.1.5. Doing vs. 'gazing.'**

The notion that backpackers are not traveling just to see new places, but rather to experience the places was prevalent throughout the interviews, as well as my travel blog. The stories revolve around the activities that backpackers were involved in rather than the places they just visited. Moreover, some of them explicitly oppose the idea of 'just sightseeing'.

A notion of feeling as a tourist is used in many accounts with a negative connotation. It implies that one does not feel involved in a place, that one feels that is just there to observe the place rather than to experience. As such is illustrated, for example, by a 21-year old Australian student of photography William whom I met in Auroville. William tells about the anxiety that he felt during his first week in India, when he stayed in Auroville.

*“In the first week I felt more of a tourist. I did not have to do anything. I only felt I could rely on what other people give to me, and I do not like that feeling very much.”*

William does not want to feel as he only consumes the services. He prefers to take part in something when traveling, and that is why he engages in volunteering in a local NGO, which is an orphanage for street children. As a volunteer, William spent his time with these children on a daily basis. So William, some other interviewees as well as myself have a desire to not only be in India looking at the things, but rather engage in life there by doing something.

Another male traveler Jimmy is a university graduate from Mexico whom I met in Auroville. He explains that the difference between tourists and travelers depends on the objective they have. According to him, travelers, opposite to tourists, are looking for something more than just traveling itself. For example, Jimmy sets goals of what he wanted to learn during his more than a half-year trip.

*“I was looking for meditation and now I learned it. <...> I also want to learn a new language. You remember I was studying French. I just want to finish with that. That is my third goal. Yoga, meditation, and French. And I would come back to Mexico very happy after having achieved the third goal, but I will see how it goes – important is just to do something.”*

A 28-year old Dutch male Chris is seeking to experience life as he says rather than just see places. It is illustrated by this citation where he contrasts his itinerary choices with an image of a cliché of a Japanese tourist.

*“Some people take planes, pass all India, and they see all in a few days. I don’t want to do that because I really like India, and I just want to take each part slowly and I want to experience life here. When you have to plan everything in advance, you are like a Japanese tourist – just sightseeing.”*

Clearly idea that Chris has about Japanese tourists is the one of a mass tourist who gets to know places through the lenses of their cameras. However, what he stresses here is that it is not worthy to come to India just to see it, but rather one needs to engage in life here. His choice of engaging in India is volunteering in the NGO and offering his expertise to them.

*“I made a sustainable management plan for a community-based conservation, very interesting, and now I am also doing that, I also want to promote eco-tourism there. They also just gave me a declaration that I volunteered, and I really loved the organization.”*

A 25-year old Italian student Alberto reflects on his experience in India and at the same time reflects on his more recent time spent in Nepal. He contrasts these two trips, and tells

that in India he and his friend were following suggestions of the backpacker's guide 'Lonely Planet' and mostly stayed in guest houses. In Nepal, he mostly stayed in one place and worked on a farm as a part of his thesis project. Alberto comes to a realization that he prefers the way he was traveling in Nepal since that was an experience of living in a place and doing things there, whereas his Indian experience he sees as mainly sightseeing. So only sightseeing is portrayed in a more negative light when comparing to living in a place and be engaged in doing things. Furthermore, as he notes following the 'Lonely Planet' suggestions he felt that he was only sightseeing.

A 19-year old Lithuanian female backpacker Monica narrates her experiences in India using the words that represent doing something instead of just being in India for 'sightseeing'.

*"I really liked Gokarna, we would wake up there at 5 am, meditate, then would do yoga and work. My spiritual world became much richer."*

Another female backpacker that I met already in the Netherlands, in Wageningen, a 24-year old Dutch student Rachel during the interview tells me about her friend who was also going to India. Her friend had a strict plan regarding what she wanted to see in India and a strict itinerary. Rachel reveals that her idea is to trust one's feeling when traveling and to stay in places in order to experience them. Thus, Rachel engages in volunteering in a local school as well as practices yoga and attends other social activities in Auroville where she spent most of her time.

However, one does not necessarily have to be involved in the activities of a certain organization in order to experience India by doing things. For instance, an Italian student Alessandro when traveling through places puts stress, not on visual aspects of the places, but rather even mundane things that he does in these places.

*"In small towns you are relaxed because you go to see the bazaar, you can go to make clothes at the tailor, eat out, and go to the nature. It was all another type of trip."*

Then the aspects important while traveling are such as engaging one with the environment around. These activities can be making clothes at the local tailor, doing the shopping in the bazaar, going to local places to eat. It gives a better understanding of how a place works.

Overall there is an idea expressed explicitly and implicitly that a worthy trip is not related to sightseeing, but rather experiencing the place by engaging in activities and doing something in the place. When doing things they either engage their skills or learn new ones.

They also feel belonging to the place by being a part of a volunteering organization or a yoga practice group.

#### 4.1.6. Experiencing hardship in India

While the usual holiday idea is related to relaxing, having fun and other hedonistic aspects, a Swedish student Adam tells there is more of what he sought when going to India. He sees India as a place where he encounters hard things to accept, but it is through such a difficult experience that he learns something.

*“I went to India not just to have fun and hang out on beaches, but also for experience. So even sometimes it was shitty, I still felt like I experienced something new. That was a reward. <...>it is not a holiday in the sense that you relax, it is an experience.”*

An Australian guy William shares his expectations as well as the experience of India, which relates to experiencing India as a messy country.

*“India was in a way what I thought it was supposed to be. The whole thing was a mess. I got into the car and started driving through the heavy traffic in Chennai, which was crazy. This guy was driving like triple speed. It was a new experience, yeah.”*

At the time of the Skype interview with a Mexican backpacker Jimmy whom I met in Auroville, India was in Bangkok, Thailand. Jimmy compares his experiences when staying in India and when staying in Thailand, and he portrays India as the country where there are many tough things to accept for a traveler. According to him, India per se is a country that attracts backpackers, but not just tourists since backpackers are ready to experience hardship.

*“People in India are travelers; they are backpackers; they are not just tourists. And here in Thailand I find tourists. Or tourists that pretend to be travelers. <...> I think in India people accept whatever it comes. Food, noise, cows – they accept. In other places, they are not so open to that because everything is more controlled.”*

So idea that Jimmy holds about India is related to providing disturbances such as cows, noise that one has to accept. Since it is not easy to accept the “chaos” of India, Jimmy sees that only certain people are ready to endure its conditions, such people as backpackers, but not mass tourists. Jimmy portrays India as a place that provides good conditions for testing oneself – a backpacker in India challenges oneself and goes through “burdens” in order to reach something ‘higher’.

So India as a choice of destination implies the search for backpacking ideals related to confronting one with perceived dangers, risks, and tough experiences. The whole idea of



going to India relates to challenges and only certain groups of people, such as “real” travelers, but not tourists are meant to confront it.

Hardships are also experienced by using local transportations. Though one can choose higher class trains or buses, often backpackers use the buses and trains that have limited comforts. It also related to the issue discussed regarding staying on a low-budget earlier on, but what is seen and stressed in the accounts of the backpackers in this study is its relation to experiencing hardship.

A Swiss backpacker Phoebe tells the story of her bus trip to the mountains that she finds adventurous.

*“It was a really interesting and exciting bus drive. It was hilly, and it felt like an adventure. I was with many Indian women, they were just standing next to me and talking, although they did not understand me. There was no tourist there, only Indians.”*

Such bus drive experience makes one feeling an adventure. Firstly, it implies risk as the local buses do not comply with safety aspects that one is used to back home. Secondly, it involves the risk conditions such as driving through the mountains. Besides that, an important aspect is that there are no other tourists in a bus, only local people. This gives a feeling of local experience. Moreover, Phoebe expresses she was with women, but it was hard to communicate. This shows that the environment is new and sometimes might be challenging to deal. From my accounts of bus trips, elements of hardship such as sometimes sitting on a bus floor are expressed with a notion of excitement and pride of “surviving” it.

*“I was the only non-Indian in the fully packed bus. There was no space to sit down, only to stand. One hour was enough to feel pain in the legs, and then I just sat down on the floor. Some men next to me smiled at me in a friendly way, and another woman followed my example and accommodated herself on a dusty ground of a fast running bus. And once again applause to my sleeping abilities – I was able to sleep also this time!”*

A Dutch guy Joe tells about his train and bus trips marked with elements of not being very comfortable during his trips.

*“Then I was falling asleep and I stretched my legs. At one point the feet of this Indian guy were next to my face, and my feet were next to his face. <...> I had like lowest class ticket, and I was sitting in crazy small.”*

Traveling in India is perceived and portrayed in the narratives as challenging and hard. Since gaining experiences rather than just having holidays, is the important idea of



backpacking, the hardship that one has to accept or go through help one to build such experiences.

## 4.2. Role of Spatial aspects in backpacking ideals

Next to the aspects of the ideal type of traveling and making experiences, there is also a notion of what places are and are not suitable to make a 'real' backpacking experience. From the narratives collected in this study, the places that are told about are westernized spaces, heterogeneous spaces of cities and heterogeneous spaces of small towns. So in this chapter I will present what are the discourses around these places as told in the accounts of backpackers.

### 4.2.1. "Ghettos" and "oasis of ease"

Firstly, there is a notion of not suitable places, which are places where one meets tourists or other travelers. As such it is noted by the Australian student William whom I met in Auroville and who spent his first week here. For him, as he tells Auroville is a place to have fun, and as he says himself this was not his purpose.

*"I felt like Auroville, and those shops along the street, I did not care about that much. I knew I could stay in Auroville for a month and just have a good time, but stay with Europeans. However, it was not what I wanted in India <...> Auroville just doesn't feel like India. It is kind of silly to stay in Auroville when you are in India. Even though it was also very India the way it was."*

William's purpose was connected to the idea of not staying with other travelers, but rather to have a local experience and to stay with locals. For such purpose, Auroville was perceived as not a good place. He later tells about his worry he had in the first week when he came to India.

*"I was worried I will keep traveling like other people do in India and will not experience nothing new just meet Europeans, Israelis, and Australians and stay in ghettos in every village."*

So William again tells that for him when he is traveling it is important to experience something new and for him the places of encounters with westerners which he calls ghettos are not the places to gain such experience. In such places, he does not meet local people, but instead he meets only other backpackers.

An English guy Ross whom I met in the hostel in the mountains in Kodaikanal, the state of Tamil Nadu, also thinks in a similar way. He perceives that any tourism accommodation is a service for tourists so implying it does not provide a worthy or "real" experience.

*“Obviously when you see any kind of tourist thing, it will always be a tourist thing, even if that is kind of homestay.”*

Thus for Ross the possibility to make a worthy experience in India when being in places adapted for tourists, even such as homestays, is not feasible. In his view, this is a touristic part it is not a way to experience India.

I met a Swedish student Adam during my first weekend stay in Auroville. In our Skype interview, he reflects that Auroville and other similar places are “oasis of ease”. As such they provide a backpacker with experience of rest but are not suitable for actual traveling experience since these spaces are comfort zones.

*“I think it is really easy to get stuck in many places in India just because you know they are an oasis of ease and quiet and the rest of India is kind of chaotic. So it is kind of easy and safe to stay in one spot like Auroville, same thing in Gokarna, Hampi. However, as a traveler you have to push a bit more if you want to experience more. You have to break out of your comfort zone all the times.”*

Thus such places are perceived as not the right places to make backpacking experience, but rather what is that being in such places is related to the discourse of these places being resting places.

For example, a Swedish Adam heard about the region of Goa prior to their trip and had an idea that this can be the place he can go when he needs a rest.

*“Like I heard of Goa before and I thought maybe I could go there. But it’s really not of priority, but if I get bored or if I get tired of traveling, I can go to a more touristic place.”*

Thus, Adam perceives that such touristic places, as he calls, is not what he wants during his stay in India. Rather it is a place where in his mind he can go only the times when he needs a rest.

A Dutch backpacker Chris spent some time in Goa. Like Adam, he sees it as a place to go partying, but again does not relate it to what the “real” experience in India is.

*“I had some nice time, but it is not India. But if you want to go partying, that is the best place.”*

So Goa is perceived as serving a function of entertainment, but not what is ‘real India’ for Chris.

I also heard (through the internet search mostly) that Goa is a 'paradise' where I could go to relax and enjoy the beach. Therefore, I included it in my vague plans for the very end of the trip.

*"We arrived at Palolem, which is a touristic place, and this side is not so attractive to me <...>However, it was a good short vacation after usually not so relaxing India experiences before going back home."*

As such going to Goa, I portrayed as only going to have a short vacation, a bit of relaxation and still added its position as a touristic place that is perceived negatively by me. Another space for me, where I could go to rest while I was staying in Chennai, was Auroville since it was only about 3 hours bus ride from Chennai. Such experiences in Auroville are also told on the internet blog as a short time to rest. The first time in Auroville I described as an experience of coming back to Europe and taking a "weekend off of India".

*"The whole weekend was so much fun! I felt like taking a weekend off from India and getting to Europe again. <...> We took cappuccino in the place called "Moka" and spoke Italian to the owners of the place. We drank Tuborg in "The only place" together with people from many countries (like in Wageningen). We ate an Italian like Pizza in Brother's Pizzeria. We rode a motorbike through the green surroundings of Auroville and enjoyed the fresh air when walking different places of it that some of them remind me the nice houses and parks of Europe. We danced "holistic dance" with teachers from UK and France."*

Auroville in my mind was connected to the image of Europe since I could not only meet many other European people, but also again enjoy the material aspects of Europe, such as food and drinks.

So such places, where there are more westerners and western attributes, are being visited but within a discourse of these places being places of rest or party and are visited only for short breaks. Such places thus are not related in the perception of backpackers to making the backpacking experience when being in India, but rather just places of rest.

#### **4.2.2. Heterogeneous places - making experience**

Whereas the narratives of the previous section were related to the notion of rest and break, the heterogeneous places that backpackers went to are perceived more as the places worth going to when one is in India.

All of the backpackers went to big cities in India, such as Delhi, Mumbai, or Chennai. Such cities give one a scene to experience the aspects of mess and chaos. For a Swedish Adam big cities are not places where he likes to be, but these are perceived as being "out of

his comfort zone” which is related to making backpacking experiences. So at the end of his trip Adam goes to the city of Mumbai where he visits such places as market or slums. The latter especially is perceived as an uncomfortable situation and space to be, but it is for him a way to push himself out of his comfort zone and so to make backpacking experiences.

*“I went into the slums to walk around and obviously that would be socially uncomfortable because people will stare, and people will be wondering what are you doing there. But at that point I didn’t really care. I traveled a lot in Mumbai just going to markets. I do not like big hectic cities, but that is as far as I can get outside of my comfort zone.”*

A Dutch guy Chris also spent some time in Mumbai during his first days in India. As he narrates, he also went to the slums with a local Indian guy whom he just met on a street.

*„We had coffee and talked a bit more. I don’t know, you also have to go for some adventure, and I had a good feeling about this guy. And nothing was organized, we would just take taxis and buses and trains and just go.“*

Indian cities give one a scene to make experiences by being a part of fast dynamics in, for example, shopping in markets, what I did and what is recorded in my blog.

*“In the market all was open, all streets filled up with people selling, buying, staring, trying to find a way, bargaining, just looking, eating, smelling, etc. I felt a part of it and got into shopping mood flowing with the crowd from food markets to clothes to Chinese stuff to shiny jewelry and on and on. At the end of the day, I felt like I spent money, but I did not buy anything good. Well, all is for the experience.”*

Here the scene of the market in Mumbai rather than serving the purpose of buying goods is perceived and valued as an experience for me to be able to be part of the crowd of the market.

Such heterogeneous spaces for me also served as spaces to meet and talk to local people in the streets as well as in the public places, such as restaurants. Here I recall having lunch in a place I used to go in Chennai and starting talking with the man who was sitting at the same table.

*“We started to talk about food, then religion, ideologies. After lunch, he invited me to visit the room in which he is staying when working at a local school. I sat on a small bed, and he took a black suitcase, in which under neatly folded shirts he found a photo album and showed it to me.”*

Also, a Swiss girl Phoebe whom I met in Chennai in our interview tells me about the place she found in a city of Madurai. There she found a place where she spent lots of time and could communicate to local people.

*“I went to the temple ten times, at different times – morning, day and evening. I loved the atmosphere! It was like a social meeting point for many Indian people. I just sat there by the pond. Sometimes I was alone because I wanted to, other times I would just meet someone like I was with this woman who did not speak English, but we still spoke.”*

However, most of other interviewees indicated to have contact with local people and to feel a part of city dynamics was difficult in big cities, such as is illustrated in the account of an Italian guy Alberto.

*“But when I was in Delhi, I was feeling like a tourist. There was life going on in the city, the mess, people going on, selling, eating. And then it was me who was going around, outside, looking and trying to sneak in the life of the people, but I was an outsider.”*

Thus in order to connect to local people study participants often chose smaller heterogeneous places. In the account of Italian Alessandro, it is noted that as such a right place to make backpacking experiences he sees, for example, pilgrimage places. He also notes that it is worthy to visit places where one can experience contact with people and sort of “magic”.

*“There are so many magical places like pilgrim places, where there is a temple, where you can stay 2 hours in the temple and talk to people. <...> I liked Bundi, a small town in the center of Rajasthan, full of colors and not touristic at all, very quiet, not a lot of cars. Or Rishikesh that is the capital of Yoga. It is better to visit small towns.”*

Such is also acknowledged by a Swedish backpacker Adam, who notes that contact with locals one can make in small towns is different from the one in cities.

*“I felt like I could have a much better contact with people where things were less hectic.”*

He reflects that the preference of experiencing smaller local places is also connected to his cultural background since Sweden is also a calmer country.

*“I like more the calm India, for instance, when I was up in the mountains where there are tea plantations and people are living a slower lifestyle. I think it is a cultural thing, I think it reminds me of home.”*

An Australian photography student William stayed in Pondicherry nearly all of his time in India which is a relatively small city in India and as he says he preferred it since he found his way around.

*“Pondy was a good size for the time that I had, I knew where I could go for everything I needed and when I walked around Pondy I bumped into someone I knew!”*

A Dutch guy Joe tells me about this temple in a rural place where he, similarly as earlier in this section mentioned Alessandro had an experience of “nice feeling”.

*“We visited a very quiet temple. Like it was not the prettiest one, but it gave a really nice feeling. We were just sitting there and chilling, and he was telling me something about it, but it was also a moment when we were just quiet. I was surprised it was really quiet and peaceful. Everybody walked there with a special spirit or something. That was nice.”*

Heterogeneous spaces are connected to the idea of making experiences. Experiences are often the ones of being a part of dynamics and trying to participate in the life of the city and also to meet local people. Smaller cities or rural places as well as special places inside the cities, such as temple, are perceived and experienced as giving an opportunity to connect with local people and so to also understand the culture. Such places are perceived as providing one with an experience of vaguely narrated as “magical”.

### **4.3. Abandoning the backpacking ideals**

However, though the narratives of backpackers show what are perceived ideals by my study participants, the notions of transgression from these ideals are also mentioned throughout the interviews as well as my recorded experience. Thus in this chapter I want to show how the ideals held about backpacking are being abandoned as well as to show what factors contribute to this transgression.

#### **4.3.1. “I just wanted a good toilet!” – disrupting the ideal of traveling on a low budget**

Although backpackers expressed the importance of staying on a low budget and with minimum comfort, my study participants do not make such a choice because when traveling they have a very limited budget. An Italian Alberto reflects that he feels there is a freedom regarding money when being in India which gives him a feeling of security.

*“I had a feeling that since you have the money, because of course I mean you have, you can do everything like it is so easy.”*

Thus traveling on a low budget is not a necessity, but more often it is rather sought as a part of backpacking ideology. In situations where one wants more comfort regarding a

place to stay, food or transport, paying more for the services was not mentioned by anyone as an issue. In the narratives of backpackers, it is mostly noted that when they needed to rest, they chose the accommodation that had more facilities and accordingly paid higher prices for such comfort.

A Dutch backpacker Joe tells about his tough and tiring train trip that he spontaneously decided to interrupt by just taking a rest for a few days in a hotel.

*“I was a little bit tired after a train ride of 21 hours and there I had the lowest class ticket. Then I had to get out and get into another train, and they were pushing the people in! That train ride would have been 25 hours, and I was thinking “I’m not going to do this, this is too crazy”. I saw people already climbing on a train and then I just walked away.”*

Joe responds to his physical tiredness and instead of proceeding with a ‘crazy’ adventure, he chooses to leave it away and to find a good place to rest.

*“Everybody was coming to me and suggesting cheap hotels. I was like “f\*\*k it, I want a great hotel with AC, Wi-Fi, everything”. They brought me to a hotel, I stayed there for two nights, it was like a 5 star hotel, in the end I paid 23 euros a night.”*

In such a moment of fatigue, the ideals of traveling on a low budget are being abandoned and as seen above Joe jumps from the lowest class train compartment to a 5 star hotel. The resting phase is fulfilled with coming back to the attributes of comforts of one’s usual life, such as Wi-Fi, AC and leaving behind the role of a low budget backpacker.

The accounts of similar situations were mentioned quite often during the interviews. Besides the need for rest due to fatigue, backpackers also needed such more comfortable “private oasis” when they got sick. In my case, while I was staying in a hostel in a city of Chennai, I had food poisoning that was followed by Dengue fever. After the fifth day of fever and advices by other people, I decided to go to the private hospital. At that time when being terribly weak I did not care how much I will have to pay for the service as long as it will help me as it is noted in the excerpt of my blog.

*“The service in the hospital was amazing! They took care of me immediately, checked my temperature and blood pressure, took a blood test, gave me a separate bed and brought wonderful food! And as the medicine was running in my vessels I felt like some energy is coming back... Four hours after we left the hospital and I paid more than what I usually spend in one week, but I did not care at all about it since the service was so good.”*



After the hospital, I decided to go to Auroville where I already knew a comfortable place to stay in and where I could find European places to eat. The latter was important to me since I could not eat Indian food for a while after food poisoning.

*“I left Chennai and went to Auroville for what I called ‘Rehabilitation.’ It is a much calmer place with European food places as well which was essential for me.”*

In this case, the ideals of backpackers that I had such as staying on a low budget, eating local food were abandoned. Instead, what I was seeking at that moment was the comforts, such as familiar food and a room with a toilet as well as a calmer and more familiar place to stay. According to my knowledge, then such calm place was Auroville.

I met a Swiss female backpacker Phoebe in the hostel of Chennai. During our interview, she told me a story of her and her travel partner at that moment being sick, and she also sought a more comfortable and more expensive private space where she could rest and recover.

*“When we were ill, we stayed in Ashram, a very expensive room for 800 rupees (=11.94 euros). It was a really good room with a fan and a nice toilet – I just wanted a good toilet!”*

Phoebe stresses the price of the room stating it is not what she usually pays, but her need for comfort at that time was more important than a price.

An Italian guy Alessandro told that he spent a great part of his trip in Himalaya mountains staying with locals and hiking a lot. It resulted in his weight loss, and he reveals to me that also he faced a situation when he needed to take a room with more facilities at some point.

*“I was physically weak and felt bad, it was so hot, and it was the only night when I had to ask AC room – the thing I did not do before.”*

It is noted that during one’s trip though the idea of staying on a low budget is prevalent, it is being abandoned in certain cases. Such cases mostly mentioned were related to fatigue and sickness and one’s need to rest. Thus, backpackers in such situations seek comforts such as accommodation with more facilities or European food and do not mind to pay higher than usual prices.



#### 4.3.2. “I had limited time” & “I need new environments and new challenges” – disrupting the ideal of freedom and spontaneity and extended stays

Backpackers expressed the idea of traveling freely and spontaneously as well as staying in places longer which adds to one experiencing places and life there better. However, there is a dichotomy noticed when trying to make decisions for traveling through many places and staying in a few or one place for a longer period.

An Italian guy Alberto traveled to India with his friend. It was their first outside of Europe trip, and they wanted as Alberto says “to see everything.” Prior to the trip they did not have a plan, but they had ideas of the places they want to go. They followed these ideas when being in India though Alberto sometimes felt like he wanted to disrupt their plan and to stay in places longer than they did. However, the travel companion made him pressure to keep on their initial plan.

*“Since we wanted to see everything, I think we never stayed in one place more than three days! <...> We met these girls, and they were telling us to go with them, I do not remember where they were going. I was like ‘maybe, why not’. And my friend said ‘No, we already have a plan where to go, don’t be a pussy and just to change your mind.’”*

While, on the one hand, there is a felt pressure of Alberto’s friend, there is also an idea that they have a limited time to visit the places they want to. Limited travel time is also apparent in other narratives, and this perception disrupts the ideal held of one being free and spontaneous in one’s itinerary as well as staying in places longer. He later reflects that comparing his India trip and later experience in Nepal where he was more settled as well as he was on his own he actually prefers the latter one.

*“If I think the regret that I have about India is that we did it too fast. Now that I was in Nepal where I did my thesis it was different. You do not visit, but you wake up, and you go to see the sunrise every morning, and then you go to work. I prefer it – you have more of the experiences.”*

A Swedish guy Adam stayed in India for two months, and this idea influenced that sometimes he left places that he liked earlier than he wanted since he wanted also to visit other places.

*“I felt like I needed to leave and to do something more, cause I had a limited time –8 weeks. It was about the time to go to do something else.”*

A Dutch guy Joe spent one month in India and wanted to visit many places due to his limited time. So he stayed in each place three or four days, but still changed his initial plan of also visiting Nepal.

*“I still feel bad that I did not go to Nepal, but it is good that I did that. Because I spent more time in some different cities or else it would be just a rush to go to Nepal and not to experience.”*

However, there is a tension in Joe’s account about the felt pressure of accumulating the number of places visited.

*“Travelers I met told me about other cities and places. And then I felt a little bit bad like I spent now four days in Palolem and instead I could have visited another city. I started to think to go to Hampi for one day, but then I told myself again that then it is hurrying.”*

This account also reflects the others questioning the nature of backpacking – whether it is collecting the places or whether it is about staying in one place and experiencing it for a longer time.

However, longer stays in one place are being combined with shorter stays and being on the road. For example, a Dutch guy Chris after his volunteering experience dedicates the rest of his time to travel faster around India. Though he appreciated the volunteering experience, at the moment of the interview Chris finds himself excited about being in a city of Mysore. He reflects about his restlessness that makes him want to move instead of staying in one place.

*„Maybe that is just my thing that I need new environments and new challenges; I cannot just stay long in one place.”*

So often, such factors as limited travel time or one’s dependency on a travel partner restrict one from being free and spontaneous when traveling and also staying longer in places preferred. Next to that there is also the notion of seeing as much as possible which can be perceived the restlessness.

#### **4.3.3. “Social interactions in the culture are very different” – disrupting the ideal of meeting locals**

Though the idea of meeting locals is given a great importance in making an experience, it is also often a demanding task. I myself started my stay in India with a local Indian family in the outskirts of Chennai city where I had an idea to stay for the whole stay in Chennai, for a month. However, I left after a week since I felt I had too many restrictions on my perceived freedom from the family side.

*“Apparently this is a different lifestyle from the one I have. I will have to take into account things that I never had either in Lithuania nor the Netherlands (like to call the family a few times a day, to come back home before it gets dark). I understand that it is also for my safety, but such circumstances make me feel like a golden fish in an aquarium.”*

Thus, lifestyle and attitude to a single female traveler that my host family held were something that I was not used to. I perceived it as restrictive and because of that I changed my plans to stay with a host family and left their home to stay in a hostel in a center of Chennai.

A few of backpackers met and interviewed who were also volunteering though were happy with an opportunity to meet and be with locals, in the end admitted it was not that easy. A Dutch guy Chris spent one month in a small rural place in a state of Karnataka working on conservation projects and living with a host family. He communicates that it was sometimes too hard to always be in the center of attention.

*“I just got a little bit annoyed about being always in the center of attention. Like when I am walking down the street, and everybody is saying “Hey, what’s your name, what’s your country, are you married?”*

Regarding his stay with a local family, Chris tells that he had different expectations about living with locals. Although he enjoyed this experience, it was very different from his usual lifestyle, and he missed the aspects of his usual lifestyle in the Netherlands.

*“I had to follow the rhythm of my host family. Breakfast at 9 am, then office and then you have lunch and back to the office. And then at 6-7 pm chill out a bit and then at night you are again in the family and the evening was closed. <..> It was a very tight rhythm, and I liked it in the beginning because you settle down, and this is like another lifestyle than the one in the Netherlands. <...> In the end, I missed a bit of excitement like there’s no evening program, it’s always the same and the family was always watching one of those dramatic shows. I was disappointed because I hoped that living in a guest family would take to all other parts. Like to the jungle or other families and also that there would be lots of family things that they do.”*

So Chris appreciated the experience of a different lifestyle with local people. But also missed the excitement and what he was used to before – having evening program that as he later tells me he could realize, for example, in Goa.

Another Dutch backpacker Joe was seeking interactions everywhere around him during the time I was traveling with him. However, he admits that sometimes the attention and communication with locals gets overwhelming.

*“The guy started to talk English to me and I was not feeling to because I felt bad and most of the things I was saying he did not understand. I was like done with it, and I was ignoring him a little bit. It was nice that they all pay attention to you and want to have a conversation, but sometimes it is too much.”*

A female Lithuanian backpacker Monica also spent a month in a state of Kerala where she volunteered in a local Ayurveda clinic that I have also later visited myself. She shares that though she appreciated the local experience, the perceived differences between her and Indian people were too vast for her to relate to local people. She prefers the company of people from West.

*“I understand that it is a different culture, but it does not fit with my dynamics at all. I liked it, but if I lived in India, I should be surrounded by westerners, it would just be too difficult to deal with Indians.”*

An Italian backpacker Alessandro traveled through the mountains of Himalaya and sometimes was hosted by local people there. Firstly he expresses the excitement about it, but later also adds that sometimes the cultural differences were hard to handle.

*“What is a bit missing in India is individualism. Always so many questions – What? Why? How? The people are so...invasive. It becomes a bit difficult to handle. I am more autonomous than Indians. Also, because the society does not leave much space for an individual I would not live in India.”*

Since connecting to locals is perceived as too demanding, a few backpackers including Monica as mentioned earlier acknowledged that staying with other travelers is what they preferred. For example, also a Swedish guy Adam expresses that in the end he just preferred to stay with other travelers.

*“There were some local people that I sort of connected with, but sometimes it is a bit... I mean social interactions in the culture are very different.<...> I really wanted to get to know Indian people, but it is really difficult. I think I could have tried more, but after a while I just really did not feel like trying more. I met other travelers, and I was happy with that. “*

As Adam explains to me, the main obstacle for him to relate to local people was the language barrier, a different way of social interactions, and ‘needy’ way of approach. He gives an example of his encounter with one local Indian in a train.

*“The guy was hectic, talking a lot. It was kind of difficult to understand, and he approached me in a way like ‘We should hang out, we should be friends’.”*

The difficulty to connect to local Indians is then contrasted to the experience of ease when connecting to other travelers. The experience of ease is related to certain spaces, such as Auroville and the stay in Auroville is prolonged as Adam explains due to the feeling of ease he had there.

*“I felt sort of relieved that it was so easy to connect with people – it is both about the language, but also about being the same mindset, you’ve got cultural similarities. I think that’s why I stayed there for so long. Because I knew I was going to leave the safe zone, Auroville and go somewhere out there again, and that kind of held me back a bit.”*

So Adam expressed his effort to connect with local people but chose to stay more with travelers. Another backpacker, a Mexican guy Jimmy told me that he did not try too much to interact with local people since he had language requirements.

*“Sometimes I am not patient to local people. I request like a certain level of English. Otherwise, the communication becomes hard. And I feel like they are different, I do not feel so much empathy for local people because they are not traveling. But mainly because of English.”*

Jimmy later adds that the only Indian guy with whom he communicated was Dan – our common acquaintance we met in Auroville, a guy coming from a wealthy background and who studied in the UK.

*“Dan was an exception because he was a good English speaker.”*

Similarly then also other backpackers tell what local people they felt more connected. A Dutch backpacker Chris found one young local Indian guy interesting and tells about him.

*“This guy is 22, from a new generation of intelligent people who moved to Bangalore. He thinks a lot about politics and hates corruption.”*

Reflecting on different contacts with local people that he made, he again returns to this guy and tells that he related mostly to him.

*“I think I could become good friends with this Bangalore guy who is really innovative in his mindset.”*

A Lithuanian female backpacker Monica, although earlier noting that she finds it very difficult to connect with local people, mentions the enjoyable contact she made with local priests.

*"I met priests from temples; we would go to have a cup of tea with them, and then they would come to visit us in the ashram. They were really nice people, also very intelligent and funny at the same time. <..> They all know English. And they have so much experience and are quite open minded. Maybe not totally, but I would say educated."*

Joe also told about his enjoyable contact, a Couchsurfing host, with whom he still keeps in contact.

*"I keep in contact with my Couchsurfing host. He's a great guy, and he speaks perfect English, I think at one point better than me. <...> We have the same image about traveling, and I think on that one we connected a lot."*

So most of the backpackers put effort into meeting and even staying with local Indians and expressed the difficulties of such experience. These difficulties were a language barrier, cultural differences and differences in lifestyles. As the most salient and disturbing difference my interviewees, as well as I expressed, is a notion of perceived lack of individuality in the local culture and the perceived invasiveness. However, backpackers connect to local people who are good English speakers and share a similar mindset or other interests. So backpackers solve general communication difficulties by selecting local people with whom backpackers can connect and by seeking the company of other westerners.

#### **4.3.4. "It is nice to have some easy life" – disrupting the ideal of Hardship and Doing**

In the mind of backpackers, India is portrayed as something that requires one to go through dangers, to use one's 'survival' skills. Alberto here describes his impression of India before the actual trip.

*"I thought it was much more difficult. Maybe it was my first time kind of alone in a Third World country. I thought it would be super stressful, but it was not difficult."*

As he later reflects the expectations of it being super difficult was not the case since they choose the places that they perceive with less hardship.

*"We arrived in Delhi and then we said we go to Rajasthan. We knew it was easy; it is the most touristic part. You can go by train, it is almost like going in Europe. Ok, not. But if you have the time and miss the train, you just take another train and go to another city."*

The idea of going through hardship and being involved in activities is exchanged to the idea of taking a rest. It happens due to such reasons, as overwhelming experience as a Lithuanian student Monica tells.

*"I thought I will kill myself. I do not mind that is dirty or something, but so many people, always trying to take money out of you, the traffic jams – everybody is going, running."*

Monica chooses not to explore Mumbai. She had to stay there a few days and her (spatial) strategy in Mumbai was to stay in her hotel room and escape the chaos she experienced in streets of Mumbai.

*"I just tried to spend as much time as possible in a hotel. I had a good hotel there."*

A Mexican university graduate Jimmy had a strict routine regarding his yoga practices during his trip to India. He was interrupting such practices with taking a break in between. During these breaks, he was immersing himself in a laid back rhythm of holiday and enjoying such attributes as sun and beach as well as allowing oneself to use alcohol or weed.

*"I was following rules and I had to practice yoga every day. So I could not go out or sleep very late or smoke so much weed. In Gokarna I was having a little bit of beach, sun, like something different. <..> I have like some long periods somewhere and short periods somewhere. So I consider these my breaks from the traveling."*

A Dutch guy Chris was involved in a volunteering project in one local organization located in a rural area. At that time, he also had a need just to take a "break" and to rest. For this reason, he immersed himself in such leisure activities as pubbing and clubbing with other people from a similar background as his. It then relates to the spatial aspect – immersion into leisure is sought in such touristic place as in his case was Goa region.

*"Goa gave me a holiday feeling – drinking there is not a problem, and there is an evening program for dance and clubs, bars, and restaurants. It is touristic like you can find "Goa" also in Spain or Thailand. It's not India, but it's nice to go there once in a while just to have some variation. Just to have some easy life, not being the center of attention and be with a lot of tourists and just meet some nice people."*

So Goa is a place to have vacations where Chris feels at ease. He meets other people with similar background and can return to the comforts of what he is used to back home, such as ability to consume alcohol or party. An Australian backpacker William decides not to stay in Auroville during his stay in India but to spend all his time volunteering in a local NGO in Pondicherry and to live in Indian routine. However, during the evenings he takes his time to go to Auroville, which is half an hour ride on a motorbike. There he also takes the time to relax.

*"In the evenings I go to Auroville hang out with my flatmate for a while."*



Backpackers in my study try to stress the part of hardship they experience in India as well as being involved in different activities. However, they abandon these ideals in a pursuit of relaxation that is related to the triad of sun, sea and sand, as well as alcohol and weed. Such breaks often take place in more touristic places and places where there are more western people as well as facilities and conditions allowing one, for example, to consume alcohol.

## **5. DISCUSSION**

### **5.1. Backpacking ideals – being more than a tourist**

The study indicated that backpackers hold certain ideas about what is a worthy backpacking trip. The ideals expressed as important and sought during one's trip are the ones already widely mentioned in the literature. These are traveling on a low budget, searching for freedom and spontaneity in one's trip, staying longer in places, meeting people, being engaged in activities while traveling and experiencing hardship. These ideals reflect the 'conduct of honor' of backpackers that were suggested by Bradt (1995, in Welk 2004).

This study in line with the study of Welk (2004) shows that anti-tourism is a cornerstone for defining backpacking ideals. Often it is mentioned that going to India is not a holiday so delineating that it is not 'just a tourist' experience. Backpackers put stress on experiencing hardship and staying on a low budget and with a few comforts. These ideals are built as an opposition to what is perceived conventional tourists do when traveling – enjoying the comforts and relaxing. Lower prices for accommodation or transportation reflect less luxurious services which often results in, for example, dirty accommodation. However, backpackers in this study often make decisions in favor of the price rather than comfort. The concern about prices is present not because one does not have enough money to afford a more expensive option for accommodation since most of the backpackers either have a well-off family background and are already working. Rather it is a way to manifest an idea held about backpacking.

Another way to manifest one's stance as 'not a tourist' is the nature of the trip. Backpackers express idea about one's trip being of spontaneous nature and the need to feel free about it. For the majority of backpackers it is important to have open itineraries prior or when being in India. Also, it is important to make travel decisions based on the experience of the place as well as on one's intuition or suggestions by other backpackers. Feeling of freedom is also sought when one is staying in one place via, for example, being mobile and using a motorbike to move around wherever one wishes. Another idea about a worthy trip is the idea of being spontaneous and making decisions based on one's feeling, to have an



extended stay in one place. It is important to get to know the place as well as people in the place and not only do 'sightseeing'. 'Sightseeing' is seen as an activity of conventional tourists. So backpackers as 'anti-tourists' seek other ways to travel. An idea of becoming a part of the place visited is an important one and is fulfilled when setting one's routine. Going one step further from the conventional tourists, the majority of backpackers make a claim that only traveling is not enough. Instead of just travelling, backpackers have to stay in places longer times, to dwell in places. A notion of dwelling in a place is observed among so-called lifestyle travelers who engage in long-term and continuous trips (Anderson and Erskine, 2014). In this study, it is seen that also backpackers who come to India for a short period, such as a few months, decide to settle in one place. Such extended stays are perceived as giving one an opportunity to get to know the local culture better through relating to the culture by engaging in a daily routine in the place. Such extended stays and the need for experiencing places relate to another salient ideal noticed in this study that is engaging in activities when traveling. In this study, it seems that engaging in activities mostly relates to one's needs such as learning new skills or applying one's knowledge and skills and having a role in a local setting. The latter allows one to have local experience. One's engagement in the activities once traveling is also perceived as not what usually tourists do. Instead, what conventional tourists do as backpacker say is 'only sightseeing'. Welk (2004) says that activities that both tourists and backpackers engage in are rather similar. Backpackers see sightseeing as a conventional tourist activity and hold it unworthy for a backpacker who seeks 'real' experiences. However, it does not mean that backpackers in this study do not engage in sightseeing, but rather that they do not give it importance in their narratives.

The activities that backpackers engage in are either related to one's training in yoga or meditation, but also volunteering to local organizations or simply doing such mundane routine things as shopping in markets. These activities relate to the idea of pursuing understanding of what is a local life and experiencing the local life. The right places to make such experiences are considered to be the heterogeneous places, where there is no presence of other westerners or as backpackers say tourists. However, not all heterogeneous places are considered to be suitable for immersing oneself into a local life. Big cities are perceived as too overwhelming and difficult to immerse. Notions of feeling like an outsider in a city and not being able to participate in life are manifest. It also connects to the length of stay in big cities only for a few days, what is also noted by Hottola (2004) when using spatiotemporal mapping of backpackers in India. Accordingly, backpacking spaces such as backpacker enclaves are then perceived as touristic, so 'anti-tourism' discourse also shows these spaces as not appropriate for backpacking.

## **5.2. Abandoning ideals – suspending the anti-tourist reality?**

However, the backpacking ideals are being abandoned when needed and desired. When ideals are being abandoned, backpackers immerse in more comforts and often seek for touristic spaces. As Wilson and Richards (2004) note, retreating to more westernized spaces is the experience of suspending the reality of one's trip. Factors contributing to abandoning ideals relate to the need to rest due to fatigue, sickness or one's desire for entertainment and holiday. In such situations, the comforts are being sought. For example, taking a private room in a hotel with many facilities, for which they pay high prices. Thus, such rest is taking place in private and comfortable hotel or hostel rooms. It reflects the suggestion of Hottola (2005) of paying attention to metaspaces where backpackers retreat to when in a need of enhancing a feeling of safety and control. A private space, such as a hotel room is a possibility of such metaspaces. Hottola (2005) delineates the position of such spaces as being outside of Other public spaces and the importance of restricted access to locals. However, in this study it is noted that a greater importance to retreating to such comfortable private spaces is given because of one's fatigue or sickness. Moreover, when one seeks to take a break and to relax, having fun is being sought. It reflects with the mass tourism triad of seeking "sea, sun and sand" and next to that the picture of alcohol and weed appears. It is sought in particular spaces such as backpacker enclaves and backpackers take these breaks in more touristic places. Such spaces are perceived giving a possibility to enjoy the beach or go to bars and drink that is mostly not the case regarding heterogeneous spaces. Thus, rest and breaks are a way of suspending the reality of following backpacking ideals and thus going to perceived "oasis of ease" in order to get recharge after the physical/mental fatigue or sickness.

## **5.3. Meeting locals, more than the Other?**

The most salient ideal related to making suitable experiences while backpacking is the one of meeting local people. Such is pursued via finding volunteering opportunities, staying at homes of local people by getting such connection through their network or by using such social networking sites as Couchsurfing. Meeting locals is seen as the main provider of one to get into the local culture. Moreover, the relation between being a backpacker and meeting local people is opposed to being a tourist. An ideal is held and celebrated of being with local Indians implying that there are no other tourists around. It again connects with the anti-tourism idea as an important element in safeguarding the identity of a backpacker (Welk, 2004). Moreover, this is highly related to the places visited. It is suggested that backpackers tend to stay mostly in backpacker enclaves and meeting locals is transformed into meeting local entrepreneurs and tourism service providers (Wilson and Richards, 2008; Hottola, 2005). However, the results of this study show that backpackers are instead rejecting the

idea of backpacker enclaves as places to meet locals. The idea of staying in an enclave is rejected because one is aware that such place is a “ghetto” of other travelers coming from Western societies. It is also perceived that staying in such a place will result in not meeting local people. Thus meeting local people is still sought in heterogeneous spaces, being it private spaces of local Indians or such public spaces as places of worship. On the other hand, the company of other travelers is also sought to a different extent. Mainly it is presented as a discourse of meeting travelers on a regular basis in order to share stories and get in easy contact though in certain cases meeting travelers becomes the only truth of meeting people. Factors contributing to one abandoning the pursuit of meeting locals are related to difficulties in communication. Firstly, it is a language barrier since it is difficult to understand local accents of English or the cases when local people do not speak English and, secondly, it is perceived cultural differences. Backpackers feel a lack of individualism in India and the contact with local people is sometimes experienced as being invasive. Because of these reasons sometimes backpackers inhibit contact with local people and become selective with whom to communicate. Backpacker enclaves are used as spaces to meet familiar, to meet other travellers, to have a space for oneself. Being among other backpacker or tourists implies one is not anymore a center of attention. Such spaces thus become “oasis of ease” since one firstly can relax from being in the center of attention and since one can feel “at ease” when meeting other travelers from similar individualistic societal backgrounds.

However, stories of connection with local people have to be delineated. Wilson and Ateljevic (2008) showed that in the host-guest relationship there is more than a dualism of a tourist and ‘exotic Other’. Instead of looking at differences, female backpackers in the study of these scholars recognized sameness that they found in their connection to local people. In my study, though struggling with perceived differences, backpackers tell about contacts with locals where they find sameness. However, firstly it is important to note that local is not a homogeneous concept. Thus backpackers seek communication and find sameness with local people with whom they share something. Firstly, backpackers connect to local people who speak good English. Then it is important for backpackers to share interests with local people. So often backpackers relate to locals who have a more similar mindset, are educated, speak good English and often have had traveling or living abroad experience. So instead of looking for ‘exotic Other’, backpackers tell the stories of connection to ‘modern local’.

#### **5.4. Seeking balance**

Wilson and Richards (2008) noted that backpackers structure their trip into periods of cultural work and leisure. This study also shows that cultural work is done when ideals are being sought, but when the time comes to rest, the break is taken. Therefore, backpackers

are balancing between following ideals and being 'anti-tourists', but at the same time when needed they abandon these ideals and relax. So when following ideals backpackers make decisions to stay longer and engage in activities in smaller cities or rural areas. In the case of taking a break leisure activities are practiced in spaces with more western domination and services. Laythorpe (2010) study on backpackers who volunteer showed that volunteering is combined with backpacking. Intense cultural experiences are replaced by relaxing. This is in line with the current study. Backpackers express the importance of being involved in diverse activities when traveling, such as volunteering. However, volunteering is being combined with relaxation. For example, a backpacker who decides to spend his whole time in one place volunteering, find the relaxation in the evenings when he goes to a nearby backpacker enclave in order to relax and spend time with other backpackers. Another backpacker seeks such relaxation from volunteering taking a weekend break and going to a touristic place to relax. So backpackers are negotiating the ideals they pursue. It seems that though seeking the ideals at the same time they look for ways to relax and to find familiar (space, people, activities).

Extended stays in one place are also combined with traveling through places faster. A factor contributing to that is the restlessness and the need to experience different environments as also noted in the study of Molz (2010). Molz (2010) in her study of the round-the-world travelers noted that there is a dichotomy between traveling slowly and the quest to see and visit as many places as possible. The current study shows that some of the backpackers express the pressure of visiting many places during a trip. It results in staying in one place only for a couple of days and after that rushing to a new place. The factors that relate to such practice are often tied to the limited time of traveling. When one comes to India (or Asia in general) for the first time only for a few months, they might feel like they must visit many places. What is interesting to note is that such pressure noticed among a few backpackers for whom it was the first time traveling in Asia. The ones who already had the experience of traveling in developing countries during their stay in India make decisions related to extended stays in places. However, also here the balance is sought. Backpackers seek to combine extended stays with the so perceived 'tourist' thing of visiting many places and sightseeing.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

It was found that ideals that backpackers hold during the trip in India revolve around making experiences by traveling on a low-budget, making extended stays in places visited, pursuing independence and freedom in one's travel choices, experiencing hardship, meeting local people as well as other backpackers and engaging in the activities while traveling.

These mostly reflect what has been until now seen in the backpacking studies and relate to the idea of building the experience that would importantly be different from the one of conventional tourists. It can be stressed that the ideal of engaging in activities while traveling is salient in the accounts of backpackers for whom only traveling is not enough to make a real experience. Thus, especially among more experienced backpackers there is a notion emerging as it is shown in this study that only extended stays and meeting local people is not enough in order to make a proper backpacking experience. A backpacker ideally also seeks to experience “life” in a country visited. It is sought by engaging in activities that result in having one’s routine in a certain place as well as by playing a role in a certain local context. The ideals indicated relate to certain spaces that are heterogeneous spaces where one is a stranger in a local environment and thus are perceived as fitting the backpacking ideals. However, among heterogeneous spaces some are preferred more than others – big cities are perceived as too demanding and chaotic. So they fit the ideals of experiencing hardship but do not fit such ideals as connecting to local people or engaging in activities. For the latter, the smaller heterogeneous spaces are looked for.

However, the ideals mentioned by backpackers are also being abandoned throughout the trip. It happens when demanding services of more comfort and thus paying higher prices for it, traveling on a rush through places and therefore not staying in places for a longer time, leaving the idea of meeting locals and so exchanging it into the contact with other travellers, engaging in relaxation activities and so seeking sun, sand and sea as well as such home entertainment aspects as, for example, pubbing. The factors contributing to one abandoning the ideals of backpacking are experiencing fatigue and sickness which leads one to seek more comforts; having a limited traveling time and a restlessness in visiting many places especially if one is in a country such as India for the first time; difficulties in intercultural communication with local Indians which is perceived as too invasive and lacking the consideration of individual as well as language barrier in communication since sometimes backpackers perceive local people as not good enough English speakers. What more is that there is an idea of taking small breaks while traveling and such notion is related to other backpacking spaces where backpackers go to have breaks. Thus, the backpacker enclaves are considered to be appropriate only in case one is tired and thus serve a purpose of relaxing. So backpackers narrate such suspension of their backpacking ideals through the discourse of rest, and such breaks are not considered as the main practices of their trips. The discourse held is that such suspension of their backpacking ideals and the breaks of rest help one to recharge and then to continue one’s trip. However, this is what represented as appropriate use of enclavic space, but practices also show that the use of such space can also continue more than a short break.

Overall, as study shows, backpackers follow and abandon ideals and combine stays in heterogeneous and enclavic spaces at the same time. Thus as this study suggests, the key notion in understanding the gap between backpacking ideals and practices is that backpackers seek balance. Although the narrative of ideals is built around discourse of 'anti-tourism' and the backpacker enclaves are seen as spaces only for 'rest', the both realities are being combined. Instead of looking at the backpacking ideals and practices in a dualistic way, more integrated approaches are needed to understand how backpackers seek balance between following and abandoning backpacking ideals.

Since the participants of this study are mostly from Western backgrounds, it would be useful to have a better understanding how backpacking ideals and practices are perceived and addressed by backpackers from another cultural background. Therefore, a cross-cultural study could be implemented.

Moreover, this study was of an explorative nature and study participants were self-defined backpackers. However, they were quite different in such aspects as the length of trip, itineraries, previous travel experience and motivation to travel. Thus, to better understand the way backpackers perceive and address the gap between ideals and practices, future research could look at the differences linked to gender, previous travel experience and length of the trip.

Finally, in this study, it was grasped the importance to do something in the place visited and traveled by playing a role in a local setting and/or by setting one's routine. Thus, it is suggested for future research to gain a better understanding how such practices are sought and combined with the relaxation. Understanding it would be useful for entrepreneurs focused on a segment of backpackers.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1 Overview of the Study Participants

Name	Sex	Age	Nationality	Traveled in/when	Previous travel experience
Phoebe	F	26	Swiss	January - February 2014; South India	Two times India
Rachel	F	24	Dutch	November 2012 – April 2013; South India	Africa, Indonesia, European countries
Monika	F	19	Lithuanian	Mid Oct-mid Dec 2013; South India	Indonesia, Malaysia
Joe	M	25	Dutch	Beg March- mid-April 2014; South and North India	Diverse European countries, Turkey
Jimmy	M	25	Mexican	December 2013- August 2014; India, Thailand, Burma, Malaysia, Germany	Americas
Ross	M	25	English	October 2013 – June 2014; Nepal, India	European countries
Chris	M	28	Dutch	Jan-April 2014; India	Europe; South America (Peru, Equador, Colombia ec.)
Adam	M	24	Swedish	Beg Jan- beg March 2014; South India	Europe, US, Australia
Alessandro	M	26	Italian	May-July 2012; North India	Europe
Alberto	M	25	Italian	May-July 2012; North India	Europe
William	M	21	Australian	End Jan- end April 2014; South India (Auroville and Pondicherry)	US, Canada, France, Japan, Indonesia, Scotland

## APPENDIX 2 Interview Guide

### **Introductory questions:**

Is it your first trip to India? Is it your first faraway trip?

How long did you travel/ do you travel?

### **The nature of the trip:**

Why did you choose to come to India?

How would you define your traveling style? [*also, solo or not solo?*]

What places do you use for accommodation, what means of transport?

### **The experience of the trip:**

Tell me about the places you've been to (what did you do? Whom did you meet? How did you feel about that place?). Why did you decide to go to this place?

Why did you decide to continue your trip and leave this place? [One's itinerary, advice, companions, feelings]

Looking back at your overall trip, where did you spend most of your time (also with whom, activities)? Why?

Was there any place you left sooner than planned? What happened?

Do you recall difficult moments in your trip? Please tell me about it [felt tired, sick, scared, etc.]. What did you do? How did you feel?

### **Finishing question:**

What was your favorite experience during the trip?

**APPENDIX 3 Map of My Trip Itinerary**

