Journeying with *ayahuasca*: An ethnographic study of tourism for transformation

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This is to certify that the following thesis is all my own work, except where acknowledgment has been made to the work or ideas of others. It has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

Signed: …….

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Abstract

Ayahuasca tourism in Peru has been widely examined, but few accounts consider all factors leading to a sense of transformation, or discuss the integration phase. This phenomenon has been conceptualised as drug, medical, and spiritual tourism, but considering the underlying desire to transform, this thesis will suggest a new label: tourism for transformation. Through ethnographic fieldwork at an ayahuasca centre outside Pucallpa, Peru, and reflection on current ayahuasca literature and industry actions, this thesis postulates that the sense of transformation comes from drinking ayahuasca (a hallucinogenic brew predominantly used for medicinal/spiritual purposes), plus previous unconsidered factors. These factors include: the formation of expectations through online interactions between industry subgroups (commentators, workers, tourists); the impact of the social and physical environment of a centre; and the challenges of reduced industry and site support once home. The complexity of the integration stage will be highlighted through examples and case studies of informant's application of their experience and insight into life back home. The theoretical similarities between tourism and pilgrimage will be highlighted, adding to the growing discussion on modern forms of travel, and pointing to avenues for future research that focuses on the final stages of a transformational journey.

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Following an intense evening of drinking ayahuasca*, a foul tasting, hallucinogenic brew, in a centre in Peru, I walked out onto my balcony and watched the river slowly drift by. Bo, hearing me wake, emerged from his room with a booming 'Good morning amiga' and a warm embrace. Leaning on the balcony rail watching the birds in the distance dance around each other, Bo and I discussed the previous night – the vomiting, the bodily sensations, and the transformation of the self. Like all other guests, we were sympathetically aware of the transformations taking place. Bo had welcomed ayahuasca into his body for the first time: 'Welcome to my home. Guide me and show me.' He had hoped to explore his inner 'self', how he functioned, what he could fix, and how he could improve. He was at the centre to learn, to grow, to transform, and within the beautiful setting and under the guidance of the shamans, he believed it all to be possible.*

Bo and many other Western tourists conceptualize ayahuasca as a tool to help explore and improve what they consider to be a malleable inner 'self'. As my informant Archy said, 'here, healing is like a cleansing experience, a clearing out of the mind' – an action anyone is able to take. How do people develop these ideas around transformations of the self with ayahuasca as a medium? And how do these ideas change in the course of the experiences during the journey and upon return home? In this ethnographic study I will explore the experience of those who travel to Peru to drink ayahuasca. I will show that whether tourist or pilgrim, and no matter the specific intention, those who travel for and with ayahuasca are motivated by a desire to transform. It will become clear that it is necessary to see such transformations in a holistic manner, as a part of the whole journey – from before one leaves home, to after their return. Through this holistic approach I will highlight how the

industry subgroups (the commentators, workers and tourists), the site to which tourists' travel (the ayahuasca centres), and circumstances they return to back home impact tourist's success in transforming.

Ayahuasca has been in use for millennia throughout the Amazon basin (Peru, Brazil, Ecuador) (Dobkin de Rios & Grob 2005, p. 120). The brew is a mixture of two plants, *Banisteriopsis caapi* (Ayahuasca vine) and *Psychotria viridis* (*Chacruna* leaves) which, when combined and boiled for many hours, creates a strong effect for those who consume it. The Chacruna leaves contain a chemical compound, called dimethyltriptamine (DMT), which induces visual hallucinations; the most reported part of an ayahuasca experience (Trichter, Klimo & Krippner 2009, p. 123). In addition to the visual; auditory hallucinations, interspecies and inter-dimensional interactions, deep psychological and philosophical exploration are commonly reported today.

It is unclear who has maintained ayahuasca's use over the millennia, whether indigenous Amazonian shamans or mestizo city dwellers (those with mixed European and non-European ancestry) (Trichter et al. 2009, p. 123). Regardless, throughout history ayahuasca has been continually appropriated to fulfill a variety of needs. Winkelman (2005, p. 210) states shamans used ayahuasca to prepare for war, prophesize the future and interact with spirits. In comparison, Dobkin de Rios and Grob (2005, p. 120) claim shamans used ayahuasca as a diagnostic tool to determine which plant medicines to prescribe for their patient's personal or societal ills. Trichter at al. (2009, p. 121) wrote that the brew has been used in 'healing ceremonies by the local indigenous people of the region for centuries', while Winkelman (2005) and Gow (1994, p. 91) suggest the mestizo population may be the ones to have shaped the brew's use over the past 300 years. Most recently, Saéz (2014, p. xxi) stated that it is likely that Indigenous shamans have adopted ayahuasca use from the mestizo peoples, having forgotten its original use long ago – obviously a contentious idea.

With the publication of *Ayahuasca Visions* by anthropologist Luis Luna and Peruvian artist Pablo Amaringo in 1991, the Western public became interested in ayahuasca (Beyer 2012). The number of media releases and online discussions about ayahuasca has accordingly grown (Holman 2011; Buzinde & Yarnal 2012; Winkelman 2005), as has the number of international tourists travelling to the Amazon to drink the brew (Dobkin de Rios 2005, p. 204). In turn, hundreds of ayahuasca centres have been established, primarily surrounding the jungle city of Iquitos, northeast Peru. Cavnar claims thousands of people drink ayahuasca throughout the world today in a range of settings: South American ayahuasca retreats, in their own country with a touring shaman, as a part of one of the syncretic Christian-ayahuasca churches, *Santo Daime* or *Uniao do Vegetal* (UDV) (Labate, Santana & Santos 2008 in Cavnar 2014, p. 252), and as I suggest, through a number of small, underground ayahuasca scenes. Considering the numerous settings for ayahuasca use, this thesis will focus solely on the ayahuasca tourism industry, specifically in Peru.

While conceptualized in diverse ways, people are drawn to ayahuasca (as a tool, medium and even deity) for physical, spiritual, and psychological 'healing' and insights into the 'self'. As Wolfson (2011, p. 12) claims, the allure of psychedelics lies in 'that they offer the possibility of transformation of consciousness.' Westerners are travelling to Peru to seek guidance from ayahuasca, pose existential questions, overcome traumas or negative experiences, explore their mind, beat addictions, or interact with a plant or spirit world (Beyer 2012; Winkelman 2005; Quevedo 2009). All are hoping to change something in their lives. For many, the experience is deeply spiritual, but for others, the shamanic spirituality is just another part of the ayahuasca industry tool, there to aid in their transformation. The 'self' is almost unanimously considered something that can be worked on, met, interacted with, and transformed.

> Westerners tended to seek the source, as well as the solution, to their problems inside of themselves. In this healing paradigm, the responsibility for healing is placed on the individual (Fotiou 2012, p. 8).

The idea that the Western 'self' is transformable, and in need of transformation, will become clear through the exploration of each phase of the ayahuasca journey. It will be shown that a comprehensive understanding of the transformation process can only be gained by examining all factors influencing the tourist's experience. Journeying with ayahuasca is a process, an active involvement in the tourism industry, and a stepping-stone in the life-long development of an understanding of oneself. The industry is an organic life force, charging forward and drawing people in to help them explore and grow; and an industry that does have the power to transform.

Chapter 1 will provide an overview of the ayahuasca tourist experience and variety of services available in Peru. I will present an examination of existing concepts of ayahuasca tourism and demonstrate the theoretical similarities between contemporary pilgrimage and tourism journeys. By doing so, I argue ayahuasca tourism should be conceptualised as 'tourism for transformation' and adopt a more holistic framework that helps encapsulate the variety of ayahuasca tourist experiences. Chapter 2 will explore the first stage of an ayahuasca journey – the creation of expectations – focusing on the way the three subgroups (the commentators, the centres, and the tourists) are intertwined and shape expectations. Chapter 3 will examine the second stage of an ayahuasca journey – the impact of being at 'the site'. A brief overview of the lessons learnt from the effects of ayahuasca will be given before the way the physical and symbolic environment creates a sense of healing and support, what Gesler (1992) would call a 'therapeutic landscape', will be outlined. The interactions between workers and tourists that reinforce the

transformation purpose are also analysed. Drawing on detailed case studies, Chapter 4 will then sketch the final stage of an ayahuasca journey – the going home process. Once tourists leave the site, the influence of the industry drops away, and tourists deal with a geographical, social, spiritual, and psychological shift back home in a variety of ways. The transformations continue. Reviewing my informant's experiences of going home and integrating their ayahuasca journey, I will argue that future research should focus on this challenging phase to add to the understanding of transformations that can occur through forms of contemporary travel.

On Method

For the purpose of this thesis I examine the journeys of a number of informants who travelled to Peru from Australia, America, Denmark, Italy, France, and Chile. These informants, each with personal hopes and expectations, went to Peru at a time in their lives when they felt they needed extra insight, extra support, spiritual, philosophical or psychological guidance. Most tourists did substantial research into ayahuasca before their journey. Ranging from 24 – 50 years old, my informants are all middle class. They have steady jobs or are studying at university, and each have a network of family and friends back home. Half travelled to Peru with one other person, and half journeyed alone. All live in a city landscape, with the exception of one man who lives and works on a farm.

Despite these similarities, the individual stories and intentions of each of my informants vary widely. Bo, a 50-year-old American businessman was in Peru to address concerns about his ability to show love to others. He had a strong connection to the natural world in his everyday life and grew up in a family that often used alternative medicines, rather than Western doctors. Sally, a 39-year-old psychologist has had many years exploring spiritual avenues, including a number of one-off ayahuasca ceremonies. Sally

was in Peru to find answers on how to merge what she considers her separate spiritual and rational sides after having an emotionally challenging year. She also wanted to use the additional plant medicines available at her centre, having not had access to them before. Nick, a 25-year-old Danish student was looking for proof that a spiritual world exists having never had the chance to explore spirituality before. He also wanted answers as to why he always doubted himself in performance situations, and insight into his insecurities over masculinity. A city-boy, the natural world was not something Nick was specifically interested in learning about. No one story was the same.

The examples I give throughout this thesis are those I experienced or were relayed to me during my fieldwork. Using a technique similar to Picard (2011, p. 18), I attempt to study ayahuasca tourism of today through the lived experiences of a number of individuals. From January to mid March 2014, I conducted participant-observation in an ayahuasca centre outside Pucallpa, Peru. For the purpose of this thesis, the centre will be named 'The Shaman House'. The shamans who worked there daily, Patrick (the head shaman) and George, as well as a local woman who worked in the kitchen and a team of maintenance men, are from the Shipibo indigenous population from the local Ucayali River region.

To broaden my perspective I spent the final two weeks of March in a hostel in Iquitos, Peru where I talked to a number of ayahuasca tourists before and after their ayahuasca experiences, gaining valuable knowledge about the tourism industry in Iquitos and the variations between centres. Follow up interviews and discussions with informants have occurred continually via email, Skype, and Facebook with many (although not all) informants since each has returned home. I have also conducted interviews with past tourists who have been home for many years, both in person and via email.

The role and relationship I held with my field site, The Shaman House, was complex and precarious. I was a paying guest, receiving a discounted price, while simultaneously acting as a volunteer at the centre helping in the kitchen, preparing the

saunas, and teaching yoga. I was young compared to the other guests and workers, inexperienced in spiritual activities, and was interested in the use of ayahuasca from a theoretical standpoint, rather than because I felt I had reached a point in life where it was necessary to explore my spirituality and mind. I continuously drifted between being an insider and being an outsider, as many anthropologists conducting participant-observation do. While I openly admit to finding comfort, guidance, wisdom, and experiencing a deep sense of spirituality while at The Shaman House, I am simultaneously unconvinced that ayahuasca is the sole reason for many people's feelings of transformation; a view I hope will become explicitly clear in this thesis.

While I was an active member of The Shaman House's community of guests and workers, I was but one part of a multi-pronged experience. I taught yoga, which may have aided in the creation of feelings of calm, ease, and positivity among guests, but this was irregular, and at most 3 or 4 hours out of an entire week for each guest. I drank small doses of ayahuasca a limited number of times (six in total) in order to gain invaluable insight into the quality of the experience. Drinking ayahuasca is a highly personal and internal experience, and hence I do not believe my drinking impacted those around me in any negative way.

I cautiously navigated guests' and workers' expectations of me, and their collective desire for me to drink ayahuasca as frequently as they did (3 times per week). Underpinning the ideology of ayahuasca tourism is that everyone can learn about who they are, unlimitedly, through the use of the shamanic medicine system. With this belief held by the majority of people I was living with, I had to participate in ceremonies often enough to ensure I was accepted, and that I understood enough, while simultaneously distancing myself from the experience so I could take a more critical stance and remain focused on the research, rather than my own subjective experience.

I have taken a positive approach to examining the behaviours, actions, and

experiences of my informants for two core reasons. First, the experiences guest's had were overwhelmingly positive, and to claim disingenuous reports or naivety on the part of my participants would be to paint the picture of their time in Peru both incorrectly and unfairly. Secondly, the ayahuasca industry, like any other, has many aspects that can be critiqued. This thesis will touch on some of the dangers and drawbacks of the industry in order to highlight the positive way in which ayahuasca tourists respond to them. The role of this thesis is not to provide insight into how the industry and the tourists can improve their situation, but instead to suggest how we, as scholars, can better analyse the transformational experiences of our informants.

All informants' names are pseudonyms, and to protect the identity of the workers and guest's at The Shaman House, examples and quotes from their website (see p. 32, 33, 34, 36) will remain unreferenced.

Chapter 1: Ayahuasca Tourism

Ayahuasca tourists may attend a centre from one night to many months, with prices ranging from a small donation to a few hundred American dollars per night, depending on what is included in the package. Tourist's preferences vary greatly, and hence a wide variety of services are on offer between different centres. While The Shaman House was considered quite luxurious, with beautifully constructed private bedrooms and bathrooms overlooking a wide river, and all meals prepared with fresh produce delivered twice weekly, other centres were more basic. Down the road from The Shaman House another ayahuasca centre had a different offer: a small donation allowed guests to sleep in the *maloka* (a square or circular ayahuasca ceremony house, separate from other buildings on the land) on a thin ceremony mat, a small fee bought you a bunk bed in a dorm with no electricity, and a slightly higher fee bought you a single room with electricity. At this centre the food was also prepared for guests, but was much more basic than at The Shaman House. Nearby, another ayahuasca centre did not offer cooked meals, and guests had to buy and prepare their own food. When asked, the guests at this centre said they preferred this arrangement it as it meant they were free to choose the times they ate, and ultimately they could afford to stay longer at the centre – a more important factor to them than any luxury. The range of prices makes having an ayahuasca experience affordable for almost anyone, and the range of services available means everyone is able to find a centre that suits their intentions, needs, and preferences.

The increase in ease and affordability of international travel over the past ten years has helped create a more accessible industry (Buzinde & Yarnal 2012). As was found by Reader (2007, p. 216) in regards to the Shikoku pilgrimage in Japan, a number of social factors of today have led to an increase in pilgrimage numbers, and these factors could similarly be applied to ayahuasca tourists: increased chance to travel (affordability, speed,

transport), economic growth, and increased life expectancy. Hence, as a result of the variety and affordability of ayahuasca experiences available, and the social factors of the modern world, the number of people travelling to Peru for ayahuasca is steadily growing (McKenna 2005, p. 233; Dobkin de Rios 2005, p. 204). While a small number of Westerners stay in Peru long term to become apprentice shamans, tourists most often stay between two and four weeks.

Ayahuasca centre guests are typically put on a specific diet outlined by the centre, although some tourists source dietary suggestions online prior to their journey and begin a cleansing diet in the preceding weeks. The diet, which commonly includes eliminating salt, sugar, cooked oil, chilli, garlic, and mango as well as abstaining from sex, has both chemical and spiritual justifications. Chemically, the diet is used to ensure the psychoactive brew is absorbed effectively into the stomach. Spiritually, the diet ensures strong energies in foods and behaviours do not upset the spirit of ayahuasca who is personified as motherly and jealous by many in the industry (personal communication with Quinn, The Shaman House owner, January 2014).

In addition to the ayahuasca cleansing diet, each centre offers a variety of other services. The Shaman House has a strong focus on plant medicines, with most guests doing a *dieta* throughout their stay. A dieta is a specially formulated diet and plant medicine regime. Dietas vary widely and can address anything from high cholesterol, to stomach ulcers, connecting to a spirit world, and the desire to dream again - physical, mental or spiritual problems. Treatments include specially formulated plant baths, saunas, drinks, and having to smoke or be wrapped in different plant mixtures. In comparison, some centres do not use additional plant medicines, as shamans are not necessarily trained in botany (Fotiou 2012, p. 9). Having the chance to connect to the spirit world through a dieta is one reason my informant Sally stayed at The Shaman House having previously done ayahuasca ceremonies without additional medicines.

On the day of a ceremony, guests fast for approximately eight hours before drinking ayahuasca. This is to ensure the stomach is clear for the brew to be absorbed. Simultaneously, guests undergo a range of cleansing activities, which vary between centres, such as tobacco purging, plant saunas, drinking laxative plant mixtures, and having plant baths. These activities are described as cleansing the body of physical and psychological toxins, and helping connect the guests to the plant spirit world – both of which are said to help guests gain the most out of their short stay in the jungle. The concept of working on one's 'self' permeates all activities.

Ayahuasca ceremonies begin between 7pm and 9pm and are conducted in darkness by two or more shamans, depending on the number of guests present. The nighttime setting is justified in different ways – Strassman claims it is because the pineal gland in the human brain, which he argues has a spiritual role, (see Strassman 2001, chapter 3, p. 56-66), is active in darkness; while Quinn (The Shaman House owner) claims the spirit world is active and hence more accessible during the night. Ceremonies last five to eight hours each and are held two to four times per week in the maloka (Jauregui, Clavo, Jovel & Pardo-de-Santayana 2011, p. 747). Guests and shamans have their own thin mat, seat, or bench to sit or lie on, with individual vomit buckets, thin blankets and pillows provided. Once everyone is settled, the shaman blesses the ayahuasca then distributes the brew to each guest one at a time. In the quiet and dark of the maloka, each guest conducts their own personalized ritual, sitting a certain way, stating their intention in their mind, and drinking the putrid tasting brew as fast as they can. It is thought that ayahuasca can, and will, address the problems the drinker puts forth as intentions at the beginning and throughout a ceremony; hence this beginning ritual is important.

The strength of the ayahuasca brew and intensity of effects varies between centres. The guests at The Shaman House were all given the same amount of ayahuasca for their first and second ceremony no matter their previous experience with the brew – a starting

dose that helped to introduce ayahuasca into the person's system. In their following ceremonies, guests could ask for more if they wished, but the importance of becoming accustomed to the brew and allowing your mind and body to adjust was discussed. Vicky and Bindy spent two weeks at The Shaman House and had the same amount of ayahuasca in each of their six ceremonies. They saw very few visions, but described emotional insight and expression. They were pleased with their experience as they learnt about the problems they brought to Peru, and were reintroduced to their inner 'self' – the purpose of their stay.

In comparison, Nick went to an ayahuasca centre for one ceremony just ten minutes up river from Iquitos. Here, Nick had a large dose of ayahuasca and experienced an intense, often understood as 'full', psychedelic, vomit-inducing, overwhelming spectrum of effects, despite never having drunk the brew before. While every batch of ayahuasca is brewed differently (Jauregui et al. 2011, p. 747) and hence the amount consumed does not indicate the strength of experience to be had, the differences in effect between Vicky, Bindy and Nick demonstrates the difference in ayahuasca centres services. The Shaman House wants guests to learn about all kinds of plant medicines, and cautiously enter the world of ayahuasca; other centres want to give tourists a mind-blowing ayahuasca experience to match their expectations. Fotiou (2012, p. 9) found some shamans gave a standardized dose, whereas others say they administer the amount of ayahuasca to each person indicated by the spirits. While spirit intervention may occur, this was not explained to any of my informants who all seemed bewildered at how the shaman determined how much to give.

Guests begin to feel the effects of ayahuasca from 10 to 40 minutes after consumption, at which time the shamans begin to sing spirit songs, called *icaros*. The icaros are individual to each shaman. Working with many different shamans, Fotiou (2012, p. 18) found that some claim the icaros were passed down to them by plant spirits during each ayahuasca ceremony, while others claim the icaros are learnt from other shamans.

Either way, the singing provides guidance and support for the guests and many shamans 'advised participants to concentrate on the icaros during the ceremony, especially if they were having a hard time or were afraid' (ibid., p. 17). Also used by shamans, workers, and guests throughout the ceremonies is *mapacho (nicotiana rustica),* pure tobacco, smoked in large cigarettes wrapped in banana leaves, or in a wooden pipe (ibid., p. 10). Mapacho is used to ward off negative energies and spirits – the smoke is considered protective. Numerous smoke rituals can be performed on individual guests for support or protection throughout the ceremony. Similarly, *Agua Florida*, a strong scented flower perfume either made by the shaman or bought at the local markets, is put on the body of shamans and guests for protection from negative energies and spirits before and throughout the ceremony.

Some aspects of the shaman's ritualistic practice have been abandoned for tourists in certain centres, including *chupada* (sucking of negative energy out of the human body) (Fotiou 2012, p. 13), and some centres use few shamanic rituals. At Ron Wheelock's *El Purguero* Ayahuasca Healing Centre (n.d.), the head shaman is a Westerner who has moved to and opened up his own centre in Iquitos. In Winkelman's (2005) study, ayahuasca tourists were played music out of a sound system instead of having a shaman sing to them. Holman (2011, p. 106) claims that the ayahuasca industry is causing the Peruvian Indigenous culture to be commodified. He claims this is happening through the elimination of 'any reference to the historical, social, or traditional context of the ayahuasca plant and ceremony… severing it from its indigenous roots, making it seem ahistorical and more easily appropriated as a product for purchase in an all inclusive retreat package… ' This is a common critique of New Age ideology which encourages the picking and choosing of different aspects of a range of religions and spiritualties, de-contextualizing their original meaning (Rindfleish 2005). From the examples given above, the commodification and simplification of the shamanic culture within the tourism industry

is a real risk. However, Holman's argument ignores the wealth of information available to ayahuasca tourists online. From my experience, tourists were well read, often highly aware, and cared about the impact their journey may have on the indigenous culture and knowledge being shared.

In addition to strong visual, auditory, spiritual, and psychological effects, vomiting and diarrhea are endured, and many observable, overt behaviours occur (Shanon 2010). Some guests dance, sing, or tap the floor with their hands and feet in time with the icaros, and others cry, laugh, or yell; some guests don't move at all. Each ayahuasca ceremony is different to the last. Combining all of these effects with the shaman's singing, use of mapacho, strong perfume, and the jungle setting around the maloka, an overwhelming sensory experience occurs. Lessons are learnt in a multitude of ways from the visions, narratives, emotions, and experience of ayahuasca, as will be explored in Chapter 3.

Once the effects of ayahuasca wear off, guests generally fall asleep in the maloka or slowly, unsteadily venture back to their bedrooms. The following day guests experience varying moods, ranging from being confused and physically, emotionally or psychologically fragile, to inspired, positive and feeling superhuman energy. Intentions of tourists vary dramatically and, as has been shown, so do their experiences. It is hence unsurprising that the ayahuasca journey has been conceptualised as drug, medical, and spiritual tourism as different scholar attempt to explain the phenomenon (Holman 2011; Winkelman 2005; Fotiou 2010, 2012). However, such frameworks limit the analysis of what those who seek and find transformations with ayahuasca experience. In the following I will examine the applicability of existing concepts of ayahuasca in an attempt to develop a more holistic approach to the multifaceted lived reality of tourists.

Drug Tourism

'Drug tourism', a term coined by Dobkin de Rios in 1994, 'involves people from industrialized countries traveling to the Third World in search of substances that, while banned in most Western nations, are considered to be sacred plants in local traditions' (Winkelman 2005, p. 209). While it is tempting to assume ayahuasca tourism is driven by the hallucinogenic nature of the experience, the number of people solely interested in the 'drug' aspect of ayahuasca is notably low.

Winkelman conducted a study in 2005 to determine the motivations of ayahuasca tourists and what they considered the benefits of their experience to be. Winkelman's study surveyed guests from one particular retreat and found only one of sixteen participants was motivated by the hallucinogenic effect of ayahuasca, as a form of aesthetic and creative inspiration. The remaining fifteen were motivated by personal spiritual and emotional insight, addiction relief, and the search for life guidance (ibid., p. 211). Not one person I spoke to in Peru understood ayahuasca solely as a drug, although their actions do fit into Dobkin de Rios' definition of drug tourism above. Instead, ayahuasca – while containing a drug and producing hallucinations – is considered a medicine, a spiritual access-card, and a psychological and philosophical tool. None of my informants used psychoactive substances regularly, although a small proportion had experimented with other hallucinogens such as LSD and Psilocybin mushrooms before. For many, drinking ayahuasca was their first experience with a hallucinogenic drug. 'The expensive trip to Peru is rarely pursued merely to sample a potent hallucinogen' (Fotiou 2010, p. 241).

Medical Tourism

Among ayahuasca tourists in Peru, ayahuasca is often referred to as *la medicina*. It is believed that using ayahuasca is hard work, but work that can help you change, grow,

learn, and heal (Dobkin de Rios 2005; Rindfleish 2005; Holman 2011; Fotiou 2010). Due to the growth in accessible international travel over the past decade (Buzinde & Yarnal 2012), there has been an increase in the number of Westerners traveling abroad to obtain medical treatment and enhance their 'overall health and well-being' (Eissler & Casken 2013, p. 180; Ormond & Sothern 2012). This trend, labeled 'medical tourism', is driven by a general displeasure with health services available in the West (Eissler & Casken 2013) and as Fotiou states, people often use ayahuasca and shamanic healing as 'an implicit critique of biomedicine' (2012, p. 8). Medical tourism is appealing as it is health care combined with travel and adventure (Eissler & Casken 2013), and in the case of Peruvian ayahuasca centres, offers a different approach to Western medicine – a holistic physical, psychological, and spiritual model (Fotiou 2012).

While historically ayahuasca was never considered to have healing powers, today many tourists attribute healing to the brew (Quevedo 2009, p. 98; Fotiou 2010, 2012; Beyer 2012). One of my informants in Iquitos, for instance, attributes the clearing of a chronic groin cyst to ayahuasca, and can even pinpoint the moment in her ayahuasca experience when the healing took place. During one of her final ceremonies, this lady saw light emanating from her groin and thinking she was sitting on her torch, scrambled around to turn it off, worried she was disturbing the other guests. To her amazement, the torch was off, but the light was still shining out of her crouch. Not understanding this experience at the time, she later – excitedly – attributed it to the physical healing of her cyst.

Medical tourists travel to Peru for ayahuasca, but they also travel for the range of plant medicines available, and the healing nature of the journey. Core to the ayahuasca tourist belief is that the mind and body need cleansing, and that plant medicines of the Shipibo people can help them transform. At The Shaman House, guests have daily plant saunas, which, as explained to me by the owner of the centre, are used to connect guests to the plant spirits, but are also a cleansing mechanism – clearing negative energy from their

minds and bodies. The saunas consist of four plants (*Marusa, Pinon Colorado Patikina, Ayahuma* bark, and Ayahuasca leaves), which are brought to boil in a large black pot of water. This pot is placed in front of the guest, as they sit on a wooden stump, and a plastic orange tent is pulled over the guest. Breathing in the plant fumes, and stirring the boiling mix with a stick, the guests would then sweat profusely for as long as they chose. Some guests also travel to Peru for medical treatment of serious illnesses and addictions. Reportedly, one past guest of The Shaman House, under the care of the head shaman Patrick, overcame his addiction to the highly addictive narcotic pain reliever, OxyContin.

Bo, the American man previously mentioned, could be easily conceptualized as a medical tourist. While he had his personal intentions for ayahuasca, he also had a strong interest in the plant medicines available at The Shaman House, consistent with his upbringing using herbal remedies. Throughout his stay, Bo discussed plant medicine options for his diabetic father with the head shaman, Patrick, and owner of the centre, Quinn. He also purchased eye-drops made from the *Piri Piri* plant from Patrick on his final day in Peru in the hope to improve his eyesight. While Bo's eyesight did not improve, his trust in alternative medicines and interest in travelling abroad to access them has not waivered. For Bo, and other 'medical tourists', the trip to Peru is about ayahuasca's healing ability, and the chance to access plant medicines of the indigenous people not available in the West.

Spiritual Tourism

Most commonly ayahuasca tourism is considered spiritual tourism. Since the late 20th Century there has been a rise in popularity of New Age spirituality in the West (Rindfleish 2005). A world view that encourages syncretism and the 'commodified production of self-actualisation' (ibid., p. 343), New Age spirituality focuses on the development of the

individual self in a holistic manner, and ayahuasca offers a means to begin, or further, such development. The New Age belief system is an alternative to mainstream religions that continue to lose legitimacy and authority in the West (Amarasingam 2009, p. 277; Rindfleish 2005, p. 344), and encourages the merging of different belief systems, and the picking and choosing of the beliefs that best suit one's needs (ibid., p. 345; Aupers & Houtman 2006, p. 201). While none of my informants explicitly claimed alliance with New Age ideology, many referenced other spiritualities or religions as influential in their belief systems while simultaneously learning from, and using, ayahuasca and shamanism.

Leila, a guest at The Shaman House could be considered a spiritual tourist. She had previous ayahuasca experiences and, unprompted, examined me through a number of spiritual lenses. She interpreted my weak stomach problems (of which I attribute to lactose intolerance) to the fact that I am born in September and hence a Virgo. According to Leila, being a Virgo meant my stomach and uterus were weak and I had to maintain a well-balanced lifestyle to ensure my problems did not persist. She introduced me to Japanese Reiki, a form of energy healing she uses on herself and others. Living in Santiago, Chile, Leila attends a local Reiki centre for treatment, and has done a course in performing this healing art. For Leila, everything that happens has a spiritual or energetic reason behind it. She went to The Shaman House to broaden her spiritual experience.

As a young woman with little experience in any spiritual world, I often became the focus of guest's efforts to educate me. Guests spoke of their religions, spiritualities, and world-views continually, demonstrating to me the wealth of spiritual thinking present in the West. I had discussions about Buddhism, Gestalt Therapy, enneagrams, the Feldenkrais method, chakras, Western psychology and psychiatry. I was having my own and other people's beliefs analysed, along with participating in and observing shamanic spiritual activities daily. Every guest had different, complex belief systems as a result of their upbringing, education, and experiences; all had varied definitions of what spirituality was,

and how it existed in their lives; and they were all picking and choosing the aspects of shamanic spirituality that best fit with their established ideologies. The New Age tendency of these tourists was clear.

My discussions with the guests indicated that they were using ayahuasca and the other plant medicines as a means to bolster their own belief systems, and to help find meaning in their individual lives. Interestingly, Notermans (2009) similarly found Marian pilgrims, who travel to Lourdes, South France, take with them personally constructed images of Mary. The pilgrims personify Mary in a way that best suits their needs; they identify with Mary as a mother, a powerful woman, or a carer. As a result, they use their pilgrimage to reinforce their already established beliefs, and help them deal with problems back in their everyday lives. As in ayahuasca tourism, the expectations and intentions for the journey are constructed before traveling to the site and in turn inform interpretations of the experience.

Tourism or Pilgrimage?

Before suggesting a more holistic approach, I will explain my choice of the term 'tourism' over 'pilgrimage'. Collins-Kreiner (2010, p. 440) claims the boundary between tourism and pilgrimage is becoming increasingly blurry in a world where the commercialization of pilgrimage sites, preferences of pilgrims, and recognition of secular pilgrimages' mimics different forms of tourism (Kaell 2014, Taylor 2004, Reader 2007).

Ivakhiv explains the contemporary New Age pilgrimage scene in which 'Natural sites of power' are 'thought to be health-promoting in their effects and catalytic to spiritual growth' (2003, p. 97), much like the Amazon jungle in ayahuasca tourism. Pilgrimage to these natural places is considered a way to transform oneself, not simply by viewing the landscape, but by 'attuning oneself to voices, channels, and invisible energies harboured by

the landscape' (ibid., p. 98). As I will show in Chapter 3, the landscape at ayahuasca centres has a distinct impact on the sense of transformation developed. Similarly to the ayahuasca tourism information presented online, New Age pilgrimages are supported by online manuals that give details on how to prepare, how to purify oneself, and how to establish intentions (Ivakhiv 2003, p. 104).

Ayahuasca tourism is also similar to mainstream, religious pilgrimages. Kaell's recent book entitled *Walking Where Jesus Walked* offers 'the first major study of Christian pilgrimage that tracks how participants prepare for the trip and remember it upon return.' (2014, p. 3). Kaell's study of American Christians who travel to the Holy Land in organized group tours shows remarkable similarities to the ayahuasca tourist experience. Both journeys are made possible through the international travel industry, pilgrims and tourists form expectations through online media before embarking, and the journey is embedded in one's life trajectory, 'as a stage in an individual's life course' (ibid., p. 14, p. 27). Kaell is careful to highlight the transformational purpose of her pilgrims, over their religious drivers, in a (successful) effort to demonstrate the contemporary style of these pilgrims' journey. Considering these comparisons, ayahuasca tourism can appropriately be conceptualised as a form of modern day pilgrimage, with the shared desire to transform underpinning each journey.

Within the scholarly world, the term 'pilgrimage' is shifting from carrying connotations of organized religion, spirituality, asceticism and hardship (Reader 2014), to being more focused on the process of journeying. In his study of the Shikoku pilgrimage in Japan, Reader (2007) highlights many of the different forms of contemporary pilgrimage occurring around the world. He states that journeys to sites that are not connected to any formal religion have begun to occur in a pilgrimage-like manner. These contemporary pilgrimages commonly include 'acts of devotion, concepts of healing on emotional and other levels, and places that speak of issues of identity and belonging' (ibid., p. 213). He

supports his claim that pilgrimages are no longer necessarily connected to a religion or spirituality through the following examples: the Burning Man Festival in the Nevada desert; travel to Ground Zero, the 9/11 memorial site in New York; and visits to Graceland, Elvis Presley's home in Tennessee. He also claims that the rise in pilgrim numbers in recent years does not necessarily mean a rise in faith. Rather, contemporary pilgrimages are used as an 'avenue for finding meaning in life' and if applicable to the individual, present a possibility to connect with a spiritual world (ibid., p. 221).

While this summary of contemporary pilgrimage literature points to ayahuasca tourism being a form of pilgrimage, one problem remains. Not one of my informants uses the world 'pilgrimage' to explain their own journey, perhaps a result of the term still holding religious connotations within the language of the general public. As this is an ethnographic study of tourist experiences, I do not wish to undermine my informant's own perception of their journey. Therefore, while I will highlight the similarities between ayahuasca tourism and contemporary pilgrimages (see also Mantere 2013) to add to the growing literature on modern forms of travel, I have decided to label my informants 'tourists.' This semantic decision respects my informants understanding of their own experience and provides a language in which I can conduct an industry wide analysis of the way tourist experiences of transformation are constructed.

The term 'tourist' is by no means perfect as it is often considered a criticism and insult in the ayahuasca world. The term connotes insensitivity, frivolity, and commercial pursuits, which is the opposite of how the majority of ayahuasca tourists act. However, my informants are aware that their being in Peru is a form of tourism, despite feeling uncomfortable with the label. Continual discussions over 'authenticity' are had to relieve feelings of anxiety over the participation in a touristic experience, also felt by Kaell's pilgrims (2014, p. 133). My informant Vicky explained that to drink ayahuasca in Peru she had to overcome her own prejudice against the common 'tourist' ('I don't want to go to the

Amazon as some New Age spiritual tourist') and accept the tourism industry as her vehicle (interview with Vicky, January 2014).

In conclusion, in many ways journeys with ayahuasca support the theoretical shift away from religious definitions of pilgrimage as well as stress the need for a theoretical shift away from commercial definitions of tourism. Nelson Graburn (1977 in Picard 2011, p. 9) defines tourism as a ''sacred journey' to a realm outside everyday life from which tourists come home 'recharged', renewed.' In contrast, Collins-Kreiner states a definition of pilgrimage that describes a journey used for religious, spiritual, or secular reasons, and characterised by a large-scale movement of people, resources, and information is necessary (ibid., p. 440). Those who travel to Peru could be conceptualised as either, and future research should explore how to combine the two effectively.

Tourism for Transformation

Ayahuasca tourists travel to Peru for a range of reasons that most often fall under drug, medical, and spiritual headings. These categories capture and help describe some of the motivations for ayahuasca tourism well, but their separate labels and scholarship implies mutual exclusion. Evident in both Leila and Bo's examples, each individual has a complex set of beliefs about the world which influences their motivations for travel to an ayahuasca centre and resulting experience. To label tourists a 'type' disregards the interwoven experience of their journey. Missing from ayahuasca scholarship is a concept that encapsulates the reality of the varied motivations and experiences.

Considering the shared hope for change, growth, and insight whether from a drug, medical, spiritual or other perspective, I suggest ayahuasca tourism is best understood as 'tourism for transformation.' Transformations can be of any form – physical, psychological, spiritual – and both highly personal and difficult to articulate; or simple and

clear. Tourism for transformation encapsulates the variety of intentions and experiences of ayahuasca tourists, while simultaneously highlighting the shared hope for transformation among them. This more comprehensive label also indicates the tourism industry is an important force in the formation of the tourist's hope to transform. Understanding ayahuasca tourism in this way helps turn a new gaze on the industry as a whole. People feel transformed in a number of ways; they feel like their lives have changed, they feel refreshed and renewed… but how, and why? What creates this feeling of transformation, and is it maintained? Most importantly, what happens when tourists go home, and the industry is no longer supporting them? It is time to examine the ayahuasca journey from start to finish; from the formation of expectations, to being in Peru, and returning home with new insights, lessons and ideas about life.

Chapter 2: Hopes and Expectations

Vicky first heard about ayahuasca fifteen years ago from a close friend of hers, an older man. He had drunk the brew multiple times and kept his experience to himself, only years later to share it with Vicky. He described ayahuasca as having the ability to heal problems from the core, not just to treat the symptoms as other activities such as meditation, energetic work, and yoga do. 'It's like cutting off a piece of a tree, but the tree grows back, and the problem is still there.' He told her that ayahuasca goes deep inside of you and finds your 'corrupted file'. Eventually your problems disappear and you can manage yourself better. Too scared to try ayahuasca at first, Vicky read about the brew from a number of sources and toyed with the idea of one day going to Peru to drink it. Fifteen years on, Vicky hit a point in life where she was lost, tired, stuck, and unable to figure out what to do in her draining relationship. She had lost the certainty she once had about who she was, and what she wanted to do. Still scared that ayahuasca would make her lose her mind, Vicky planned the trip to Peru with a friend claiming that 'I was at a point in my life where I decided it didn't matter anymore – I couldn't continue living the way I was. Better to die or become crazy.'

The first stage of an ayahuasca journey is the development of intentions and expectations. It begins with an individual who is searching – searching for insights into why they get 'crazy depressed'; searching for guidance as to what to do next in life; searching for proof of a spiritual world; or searching for alternative healing on a physical, psychological or spiritual level. Ayahuasca tourists in this first stage are hungry for information and open to learning. They view themselves as a malleable 'self' to be worked on and improved. While perhaps hearing of ayahuasca through mass media or those around them, tourists in this early stage invariably turn to the Internet to explore.

In this chapter I will examine the role of each subgroup within the ayahuasca tourism industry in shaping expectations: the commentators, workers, and tourists. Each subgroup is intertwined and overlapping, but by defining them I hope to bring clarity to my analysis. Firstly, the 'ayahuasca commentators': the journalists, scholars, artists, documentary makers, and writers who contribute to the production of knowledge surrounding ayahuasca through books, articles, and online sources. Secondly, the 'ayahuasca centres' or 'workers': the shamans, centre owners, volunteers, and staff who run the centres in Peru. Thirdly, the 'ayahuasca tourists' or 'guests': the people who have or who plan to travel to Peru to drink ayahuasca. An individual can belong to one, two, or all three of these labels separately or simultaneously throughout their lives. The ayahuasca 'industry' includes all three subgroups as it encompasses everyone involved in all aspects of ayahuasca tourism. These subgroups are by no means mutually exclusive; their purpose is simply to help describe the multidirectional influences of the overall industry. Those using ayahuasca outside of the Peruvian tourism industry, in Australia or America for example, are not a part of this analysis.

I will bring clarity to how tourist expectations of transformation are formed prior to their departure, largely via information available online. Travelling to Peru, tourist's minds are filled with images and discussions of natural beauty, transformational success, and mysticism. Archeological evidence, and the variety of preparation techniques and names that exist for ayahuasca indicate it has been used in various ways historically (Dobkin de Rios & Grob 2005, p. 120; Tupper 2008, p. 298; Shanon 2010, p. 263). Considering the different roles the brew has held it is unsurprising its meaning and use are continually being reconstructed today – a phenomenon that is likely to continue (Saéz 2014, p. xxi).

This chapter will demonstrate that those running the ayahuasca centres do not, in fact, hold all the power. There is a continual discussion between tourists, workers, and commentators, most predominantly online that is shaping tourist's hopes and expectations

and hence impacting the industry for all. As Reader found in his recent study of modern day pilgrimages, the different options available for pilgrims to choose from gives them 'real market power to determine whether pilgrimage sites and routes develop, flourish or fall by the wayside' (2014, p. 115). Even if some ayahuasca centres are opportunistic and driven by the economic gain available through medical and spiritual tourism, as Dobkin de Rios (2005, p. 203) and Buzinde and Yarnal (2012, p. 784) suggest, the centres do not hold all the power.

The Discussion Begins

Since the 1990s ayahuasca has been referenced more and more frequently in the media, stirring Western interest in the shamanic medicine (Beyer 2012, p. 2). As previously mentioned, the 1991 publication of *Ayahuasca Visions* initiated public interest in the brew (Beyer 2012). Popular television shows followed; with *Weeds* (2008) and *Nip tuck* (2009) (in ibid., p. 2), and the Hollywood film *Wanderlust* (2012) all referring to the hallucinogenic brew. In response to the growth in the industry, 60 Minutes Australia did a special ayahuasca feature they titled *Jungle Fever* in February 2014. A few months later Hamish and Andy, two Australian comedians, were seen drinking the brew on their TV series *Gap Year South America.* While undoubtedly introducing ayahuasca to the masses, these media releases provide a limited insight into the ayahuasca industry. For a more in depth discussion, one must turn to the Internet.

Countless websites, online forums and YouTube videos are devoted to ayahuasca information and it is, by far, the most used medium in the discussion of ayahuasca. Subjects range from the historical use of ayahuasca, how best to prepare for a trip to the Amazon, to whether or not sexual abstinence before a ceremony is beneficial. The use of the Internet for ayahuasca information is not unique with the pilgrimage and New Age

industries also providing online manuals and informational sources (Ivakhiv 2003, p. 104). The online interaction between commentators, workers, and tourists provides insight into the purposeful formation of tourist's expectations of transformation.

Ayahuasca Commentators

One of the three ways people learn about ayahuasca before their trip to Peru is through ayahuasca commentators. These scholars, journalists, writers, and artists publish material and contribute to online resources. They disseminate information and provide insights for those interested in drinking the brew, and in turn create expectations. Ayahuasca.com is an established website with multiple contributing authors including Steve Beyer (scholar in religious studies and psychology), Morgan Maher (writer and researcher), and Daniel Mirante (writer and artist). This comprehensive website, along with many others, covers a range of topics and provides book reviews, interview transcripts, and gives links to online discussion forums, further reading material, and ayahuasca art works. However, this website does not include information on where to access and consume ayahuasca due to varying drug laws in different countries.

Many of my informants claimed a strong and long-term interest in ethnobotany, alternative medicines, or shamanism. They had researched substantially prior to traveling to Peru. One of my informants, Rory, explains what he knew before his trip:

> Like many people, I first heard about ayahuasca, other plant medicines, indigenous shamanism and psychedelic ethnobotany through the writing and audio lectures of Terence McKenna about six years ago. In the years hitherto, I had filled my head with as much information as I could about the ethnography of indigenous shamanism, its history, contemporary manifestations, implications of the DMT experience etc., trying to bear in mind the consequences of psychedelic tourism on native peoples and what my presence here might mean (email correspondence with Rory, January 2014).

The commentator's purpose within the ayahuasca discussion is to bring scholarship, knowledge, seriousness, and legitimacy to the industry so those interested in ayahuasca understand the intensity of the experience, and respect the Shipibo culture from which it has stemmed.

Ayahuasca Centres

Another means of gaining knowledge about ayahuasca, and a strong medium for the creation of expectations, is ayahuasca centre marketing. In comparison to the information provided by commentators, ayahuasca centre websites and Facebook pages explain where to consume ayahuasca and the practicalities of planning a trip to Peru. These websites include summaries of their shaman's spiritual and healing ideology, and the treatments available at their centre. Primarily, these websites are for marketing purposes, set up to appeal to and shape tourist's expectations. Accordingly, both the medical and spiritual dimensions of shamanic healing are emphasized to suit the varying interests of tourists.

Centre websites are suggestive, providing guest testimonies of radical transformations whether psychological, ecological, medical or spiritual (Holman 2011; Fotiou 2010, p. 290). These stories either produce or enhance interested reader's hope for their own transformation. The following guest's testimonial from The Shaman House website, and many others like it, confirm to readers that transformations do occur.

> The plant medicines taught me a lot about myself and my problems. They taught me in a manner more convincing than anything I've ever experienced back home. Since being home I have change my lifestyle quite significantly, which has been both challenging and incredibly rewarding. My focus is now on how I can take care of myself better in order to be a stronger person for those around me. I now feel an incredible link to and respect for nature. I have always cared for nature, but this is the first time in my life in which I have

> felt connected. I am more aware of the energies around me, and the interconnectedness of my mind, body, and spirit. I have found an even greater appreciation for the beauty in life than I had before.

In a long-term study focusing on the psychological integration process of ayahuasca tourists, Quevedo found that: 'Those participants seeking psychospiritual insight and healing may have more success integrating the experience than those seeking a hedonistic recreational experience' (2009, p. 98). Hence understanding how tourist's expectations for healing and transformation are developed is valuable. The above trend of explicitly stating the possibility of transformation is found in both island tourism and pilgrimage studies as well. Kaell found in her study of Christian Holy Land pilgrims that: 'Promotional flyers and guidebooks invariably promise lasting transformation, and in pre-trip interviews pilgrims express this hope cautiously but optimistically' (2014, p. 162). Similarly, Picard found in his study of La Réunion island tourism: 'Most texts used to advertise or otherwise visualise tourist destinations are, indeed, quite explicit about the idea that tourism is able to 'transform' tourists' (Picard 2011, p. 2).

Aiding in the growth of ayahuasca tourism's popularity is the clever use of visual and written material on ayahuasca websites. A dichotomy between an ayahuasca centre and the West is created. An idealistic, natural environment with an atmosphere of ritual, spirituality, and magic represents the healing centre. In comparison, there is the West – stereotypically a stark, consumerist, productivity driven place. Holman analysed the Blue Morpho Tours website, finding it to be explicitly idealistic: 'spiritual', 'mystical', 'magical', 'transformational' (2011, p. 96, p. 100). Similarly, on the home page of The Shaman House website, the following statements are accompanied by breathtaking images of the landscape surrounding the centre: 'Shipibo medicine, a treasure of humankind; Discover the miraculous world of shamanism; A healing experience in the heart of the

Amazon; An invitation to reconnect with mother earth.'

These statements and their accompanying pictures provide interested tourists with the imagery of what they may be looking for and it builds their expectations of a heavenly place connected to nature and humanity, an open invitation to heal and explore something beautiful, mysterious and magical. Again, island tourism marketing has a similar objective, claiming the journey will 'have an impact on their body, to allow them to reconnect to 'what really is important in their life', to rediscover 'nature' and search – and hopefully find – 'their soul' (Picard 2011, p. 2). Dean MacCannell contributed to tourism studies with his comprehensive research into tourism as a modern phenomenon (1999 in Picard 2011, p. 9). He claims that 'tourism gives access to sites believed to have been 'preserved' from historical contact with the First World and thus being capable of bringing concepts of authenticity alive' (ibid., p. 9). As has been shown, ayahuasca tourism marketing plays into these assumptions of purity, mysticism and authenticity.

Obviously, such idealistic marketing has raised ethical concerns among commentators. Buzinde and Yarnal (2012) claim ayahuasca tourism is a form of neocolonialism, with the rich West taking advantage of the poor periphery countries. 'It was outsiders who characterized Amazonia as a world without history, indistinguishable from its natural environment' (Saéz 2014, p. xix). Holman (2011, p. 93) also argues cyber imperialism is occurring in ayahuasca tourism marketing with the use of binaries: West/Indigenous; normal/exotic; civilized/uncivilized. In addition, clichéd pictures of indigenous shamans are used, with the male and female shamans in traditional ceremonial clothes, working with plants, or performing a healing ritual over a Western guest. He highlights that pictures of local indigenous people used throughout centre marketing lack the names and details of the individuals (Holman 2011, p. 101). The locals simply become a symbol of the exotic other. Ayahuasca tourism seems to rely on voyeurism and the socio-economic disparity between tourists and workers (Holman 2011, p. 91). This raises the

question of whether the dignity of the indigenous people is maintained or destroyed through centre marketing (Buzinde & Yarnal 2012, p. 785). However, the problem of indigenous peoples portrayal is not so simple.

Many ayahuasca centre websites used 'strategic essentialism': when a person 'choose[s] essential aspects that define them rather than having them defined by Eurocentric logics' to help reduce negative or detrimental stereotyping (Buzinde & Yarnal 2012, p. 786). Strategic essentialism plays into the neocolonialist expectations of the tourists, but also gives those working at the centres power and agency as they control how they are viewed. They are able to harness their own cultural identity in order to benefit socially and economically from tourism. While it is fair to assume many centres are not run by the indigenous shamans themselves, at The Shaman House, the head shaman Patrick seemed to have equal, if not more power in determining what happened at the centre, and how it was portrayed online. As Ivakhiv (2003, p. 99) explains, 'places like India and Bali are imagined to be more 'authentic', representative of timeless tradition, sacredness, and spiritual wisdom; they offer restoration and salvation to the progressive, rational, but dispirited West.' Picard (2011) similarly found this neocolonialist representation of La Réunion island in his tourism study, and the Amazon is certainly viewed as such by tourists, and simultaneously marketed so by the centres.

From my experience, many Westerners who travel to healing centres do not see Amazonian shamans as 'primitive' or 'backwards' in a culturally imperialist manner. Rather the indigenous people are viewed with great respect, believed to be mystical and connected with culture, spiritual life, and their land – more knowledgeable and sensitive than the Western self (Buzinde & Yarnal 2012). Perhaps this is a result of the dissemination of information from the ayahuasca commentators.

Similarly used to increase and shape tourist interests is the openness to spirituality

found in ayahuasca centre marketing. On the home page of The Shaman House website, the following phrases were found: ‘sacred plants’; ‘reunite with Mother Earth’; ‘a chance to awaken your mind and access a spiritual experience’. This language is used to encourage spiritual thinkers or those wanting the chance to connect with a spiritual world to travel to the centre. Dobkin de Rios (2005, p. 204) claims the West is undergoing a spiritual crisis and attributes the growth of the ayahuasca industry to people trying to reconnect with a spiritual realm. Similarly, Fotiou (2012, p. 8) and Dobkin de Rios (2005, p. 204) claim many ayahuasca tourists believe there is a spiritual disconnect in the West and hence they desire the chance to reconnect with nature and the spirit realm. While I agree that some tourists hold this belief (because it is easy to blame ‘the West’), I disagree with the claim that the Western world is somehow devoid of spiritualism. My discussion with informants in Peru made clear to me the abundance of spiritual thinking among Westerners, and the variety of spiritual activities available in the West. Hence I would like to propose that ayahuasca tourism is appealing to Westerners simply because it is yet another spiritual avenue to explore, and a very powerful one at that. The spiritual language used in centre marketing helps shape the tourist’s ideas of the quality of an ayahuasca experience, imbuing the brew and the industry with a sense of mysticism.

Ayahuasca centres continually work on publishing and disseminating new guest testimonies and advertising material that emphasises the spiritual, medicinal, and transformative experiences to be had. While there may be some ethical concerns that need further analysis, the Internet has allowed each centre to promote their service through language and imagery in a manner that most appropriately addresses and shapes the interests, hopes and expectations of tourists at any given time.

Ayahuasca Tourists

The final way those interested in ayahuasca tourism can learn is through discussions with past and present tourists, which take place mostly online. Information shared between tourists commonly includes personal experiences, discussions, and critiques of different aspects of the industry. One outlet for these discussions is private Facebook pages. To be a part of a private page you must be invited by someone in the group, ensuring everyone involved has a genuine interest and respect for the controversial topic of ayahuasca consumption. This is particularly important in places, such as Australia, where ayahuasca is illegal. Some users in these private groups are more active than others, sharing information about shamanic healing and related topics daily, keeping the group members up to date on recent studies and media releases. Most of the discussions have a positive spin on healing centre tourism, although warnings about the dangers of the industry are shared. Within these private pages, an underground ayahuasca community in Australia is forming.

Personal recommendations from friends, acquaintances, or someone on an online forum are hence considered best practice. Differences in opinion are clear. On one of these private pages, I have seen particular ayahuasca centres praised and damned by different past guests, with strong debates had over the authenticity and safety of each centre. Such discussions lead to shifts in the industry as those interested in travelling to Peru base their choices on the personal advice of previous tourists. For those I met in Peru, having a personal recommendation of where to go was highly valued, although some tourists did base their decisions solely on the centre websites.

Also valued by interested tourists are the wealth of transformational stories found online. YouTube videos, trip reports, and blogs are all available and aid in developing a strong interest in the use of ayahuasca. Despite the discussion of dangers, the anecdotal

evidence in the form of personal transformation stories is convincing, exciting, and inspiring. For some of my informants, a transformational story they read or had relayed to them was what sparked their initial interest. For Vicky, an old friend told her of his transformation through ayahuasca 15 years ago, and she claimed it has been on her mind ever since. Once an ayahuasca tourist claims a form of transformation, it becomes a possibility for others.

Many public online forums allow anonymous users to discuss the ayahuasca industry and how best to prepare and go through an experience (see DMT Nexus 2014). These forums are public and hence open for all three subgroups to access, and I suggest influence people's expectations greatly. It is apparent that the wealth of information shared online between the commentators, workers and tourists' aids in the development of a hope for transformation and creates expectations of experience. Having an understanding of the expectations of tourists in turn helps us analyse the transformation process both at the site and back home.

Chapter 3: The Site

Vicky jumped off the wooden boat onto a soft, muddy ground, a cloud of mosquitoes and a wave of dense hot air surrounding her. The thirty-minute peki-peki *ride had been uncomfortable but pleasant, with the beauty of the surrounding jungle drawing her attention away from the strong, repetitive sound of the crude engine. Graciously thanking the driver, Vicky turned around to three smiling faces, her nerves and excitement surging slightly as she smiled back. The workers welcomed Vicky and helped carry her bags up to the kitchen where she sat down for a glass of fresh* maracuyá *juice. The children of the workers came to gawk, and laughing at their own personal jokes, ran past yelling out a welcome. Vicky was sweating already, itching mosquito bites already, but wide-eyed and ready to learn she smiled and took it all in. After meeting a few of the guests and workers as they walked in and out of the kitchen, Vicky was given a basin to wash her clothes in, then taken to her room. The pace was slow, the people comfortable and relaxed, and Vicky could already feel a deep sense of calm overcoming her. The smell of different plants, beating hum of insects, tapping of woodpeckers, and shrill call of birds penetrated Vicky's senses and said one thing: you are in a place full of natural energy.*

Wandering back to the kitchen, Vicky took her time, noticing the leaf-cutter ant trails, the young ayahuasca vines, and patting the three dogs who appeared to live there on her way. Sitting back down in the kitchen, in a less grubby pair of clothes, her hair tied up, Vicky's sense of transformation had already begun. How could she not have a beneficial experience in such a beautiful setting? A young guest who had been at the centre for two weeks sat down with Vicky, offering her half a pepino, and the two women began discussing the purpose of their stay. Vicky listened to the young women's story in awe, thirsty for confirmation that her own hopes and desires would soon be fulfilled. Within the first hour, the physical and social landscapes of the site were taking effect.

While the effects of drinking ayahuasca are undeniably powerful, I will discuss the commonly overlooked impact of the surrounding physical and social landscape to add to my discussion of the forces of transformation within ayahuasca tourism. These environmental factors develop trust between guests and workers, aid in confirming expectations, create an atmosphere of healing and support, and encourage a sense of transformation. By extending the enquiry outwards I will demonstrate that the power of ayahuasca tourism does not solely lie in the effects of the ayahuasca brew, but rather, is a result of a complex and fluid combination of factors.

Lessons From The Brew

Authors such as Benny Shanon (2010, 2014) and Rick Strassman (2001) have spent years closely examining what occurs chemically and phenomenologically while in the altered ayahuasca or DMT state. In summarizing what is already known about the quality and style of learning through ayahuasca, I will add some examples from my own informants. This summary encapsulates how and what people can learn from the brew.

Having collected a large corpus of experience recounts from his own and other's ceremonies, Shanon has analysed the type of knowledge gained from ayahuasca, and how it is learnt, in a number of published books and articles (see Shanon 2010, p. 265 for recount). A highly regarded cognitive psychologist and ayahuasca researcher, Shanon (2010) claims that everything people see in an ayahuasca trip is a depiction of what already exists in the mind, dispelling the idea of paranormal activity (ibid., p. 277). While I do not wish to squander the possibility of a spiritual realm existing and impacting on tourists, Shanon's study provides an excellent framework for understanding the types of knowledge and quality of learning that takes place.

In his 2010 article, Shanon first examines the type of knowledge that comes from ayahuasca experiences. To summarise, one feels as if they are telepathically learning about their own life and psychological state, the environment, philosophy, well-being and consciousness (Shanon 2010, p. 266-272). Ella, who spent 15 minutes crying in one of her ayahuasca ceremonies explained to me that she had been crying with Mother Earth, and that it was beautiful. Her ecological consciousness was telepathically enhanced and created a deep connection with the natural world.

Secondly, Shanon discusses how ayahuasca teaches those who consume it: through the overall impact or content of visions, the sense of being an animal or plant, the feeling of being taught, and the ability to reenact lessons (2010, p. 256, 273-274). My informant Dana, while vomiting into the provided bowl, watched a giant, shiny, colourful slug happily eating what she was throwing up. Dana said while it should have been disgusting, it was beautiful and she immediately understood that her waste was someone else's nourishment – a sign from the content of her visions that she could help others. In comparison, Sally did not worry about the content of what she saw, or try to remember every detail. Instead, she would feel the impact of the visions and take note of how she dealt with them, how she reacted, what she learnt. By taking a step back from the content itself, she could analyse her responses.

Finally, Shanon explains the underlying cognitive processes allowing an ayahuasca experience to feel the way it does. It feels as if your cognitive ability is improved, with higher speed and clarity of thought, higher sensitivity and intuition, empathy, a sense of direct knowing, and a sense of meaningfulness (ibid., p. 275-277). My informant Nick drank ayahuasca only once, but had one of the most intense visual experiences reported to me. With enhanced mental lucidity, Nick was able to draw meaning from the constant stimulus present. Nick spent time with his insecure teenage self in the form of a hedgehog, learnt about different forms of love and the impact of our actions on others, and was

periodically challenged by entities and intense feelings of fear. Nick and the hedgehog had many adventures together throughout his ayahuasca trip, and hence the hedgehog became the most important symbol. The little creature encapsulated Nick's insecurities. He articulately noted: 'Perhaps ayahuasca is good because it gives you a concrete vision to apply to your abstract problems.' For Nick, and many other tourists, this statement perfectly captures what they experience.

In addition, some people have entities act on their bodies, providing medical advice, fixing, cleaning, or transforming an organ or part of their brain (Schmid, 2011 p. 257). In one of my own experiences, two tiny white birds flew to my chest and gently took my heart out, then slowly flew it past my face and up into the sky until they disappeared from sight. This allowed what felt like pure love, joy, and blue light to shine out of the hole left in my chest. The birds were cleansing my heart of any heaviness I was carrying.

As previously mentioned, within the belief system of ayahuasca tourists is that the 'self' can be worked on, fixed, healed, and accepted. Accordingly, the lessons learnt, of any form, are interpreted as such. Tourists claim they are in Peru to 'work', reflecting their belief that they have the capacity to effect their own bodies and minds, using ayahuasca as the tool.

Despite the clarity of interpretations described above, some people see and feel many things throughout an ayahuasca ceremony that makes no sense to them in the moment. The ways of learning that Shanon (2010) describes in his article cannot be applied in these cases. If a tourist does not understand what they see or feel during a ceremony, the next day is often spent thinking, writing and speaking to others to try and find the meaning. It is in these instances that the influence of others at the centre, the social setting, is especially significant. In one case, an Eastern European man in his mid twenties, named Andy, saw the logos of commercial enterprises repeatedly. The McDonalds and Coca Cola signs were just two examples he could recall, flying towards his face at high

speed, confusing and annoying him. Andy expected profound insights, not commercial junk. The next day, the owner of the centre he was staying at told him that the visions were not useless hallucinations, but ayahuasca beginning to cleanse the man's mind of the everyday irrelevant stimulus he had absorbed. After this discussion, Andy was relieved, and impressed that ayahuasca could do that, but also disappointed he had not experienced more. The interpretation and support he gained from the centre owner were important in ensuring Andy did not feel like his ayahuasca ceremony had been a waste of time and money.

Similarly, Dana, one of my informants in Iquitos, relayed to me that during one ceremony she saw countless entities in the form of many different animals and beings running throughout the maloka. They would come up to her, gaze, and then run away again. Dana said she desperately wanted to interact with or speak to the entities; she wanted them to 'fix' her body, but they just ignored her. She was confused by this at the time, but the next day when told by her shaman that she was special, a person with no problems but rather a healing power herself, she was able to interpret the previous night's experience. Dana came to understand that the entities were avoiding her because she did not need any help – they were checking to see if she was fine, and when she was, they moved on to someone else who needed attention. For Dana, the transformation she felt once her visions had been interpreted was significant. She shifted from feeling run down and tired of being the person who always helped others, to happily resigning to her role in life as a caregiver and healer. The interpretations and support of the shaman gave Dana peace of mind that learning was taking place.

Shanon asserts that the act of drinking ayahuasca is an art that needs mastering, and over time this can be achieved, giving the drinker a more insightful experience (2010, p. 273). I suggest that because the tourist experience is limited to a small number of ceremonies, they are often unable to master this skill. Therefore, the social setting of the

site is important, as guests rely on each other to help interpret the ayahuasca effects as part of their transformation process. The expectations created and hence resulting interpretations are just as important in creating a sense of transformation as the drinking of the brew.

Physical Factors

Therapeutic Landscape

The physical setting of the site, both natural and constructed, plays a large part in the overall sense of healing and transformation experienced by guests. According to Kaell (2014, p. 17) 'how pilgrims [to the Holy Land] engage with a particular place is framed by discourse, but it is also by the physical objects and geography around them.' Despite the overwhelming presence of the environment at an ayahuasca centre, an analysis of the impact of this setting has not been presented within the ayahuasca literature. Using Gesler's (1992) theory of 'therapeutic landscapes' I will examine the site in which I lived.

In 1992, Gesler coined the term 'therapeutic landscape' for the longstanding belief that the natural environment has an impact on one's physiological and psychological state (Thompson 2011; Gesler 1992). Defined as: a place in which the 'physical and built environments, social conditions, and human perceptions combine to produce an atmosphere which is conductive to healing' (Gesler 1996, p. 96); therapeutic landscapes are created by owners of ayahuasca centres in the jungle setting to attract potential visitors, and impact their stay.

While technological advances throughout history have drawn attention away from the connection between nature and healing, a resurgence of interest in the impact of the environment on health has occurred in the past 25 years (Velarde, Fry & Tveit 2007). The concept of therapeutic landscapes no longer just denotes places of healing, but also

incorporates ‘places that promote wellbeing and maintain health’ (ibid., p. 200), which includes ayahuasca centres. Thompson (2011) and Williams (2010) found that time spent in green space, gardens, and in landscapes with water is beneficial for one’s wellbeing. ‘Restoration’, defined as ‘the process of recovering physiological, psychological and social resources that have been diminished in efforts to meet the demands of everyday life’, occurs in such landscapes (Hartig 2007, p. 164 in Thompson 2011). Ulrich (2002) claims significant restoration occurs within less than 5 minutes of viewing a natural landscape. ‘Changes in blood pressure, heart rate, muscle tension and brain activity’ were used as his measures (in Velarde et al. 2007, p. 210).

Even before guests arrive at a healing centre, their attachment to the physical environment can begin, beneficial for their overall experience. Rose (2012) found that viewing a landscape image (e.g. on the internet) before physically travelling to the site creates a sense of security. The creation of this pre-departure connection is important in the case of ayahuasca tourism as it contributes to the creation of a positive ‘set’ and ‘setting’, widely known factors to have an effect on an individual’s experience a hallucinogenic substances (Zinberg, 1986; Leary, Litwin & Metzner 1963). The Shaman House website provides guests with a good indication of the beautiful setting in which they will stay, as analysed in Chapter 2.

The Shaman House was situated an hour’s boat ride outside of Pucallpa, a small jungle city in the east of Peru. The lush Amazon surrounded the centre, and the bedrooms all looked out over a wide river, without another building in sight. The land was a mix of grass and trees of varying ages, with many new plants being cared for each day by a small team of local maintenance staff. A number of large areas were devoted to densely packed medicinal gardens, and the infrastructure was kept to a bare minimum to allow for as much green space as possible. The vast beauty of the site was frequently spoken of, and one’s sensory existence within the jungle heat, under the beating sun, and amongst the frequent

thunderstorms was visceral.

The mental and physical restorative feeling that occurred in guests who stayed at The Shaman House was evident. Bo spoke of how rested he felt at the healing centre, while another informant, Ella, spoke of how she had lost weight and felt physically healthy and energetically light by the end of her stay. Friends and family back home commented on pictures of guests posted online, saying ‘you have a glow’ or ‘you look so healthy’. The individual improvements in each guest’s demeanor and appearance were monitored and discussed daily, and one lady in particular, Gina, was thrilled that her feelings of transformation were visible to others.

As Hartig (2007 in Thompson 2011, p. 193) demonstrates, the mental shift away from normal life worries is also important. Rarely discussed at The Shaman House were the stresses of everyday responsibilities, giving guests time and space to restore the energies usually applied to life at home.

In Picard’s (2011) book on tourism to La Réunion, the ‘magic’ and impact of the island landscapes on tourists is emphasised. However, Picard does not turn to the idea of therapeutic landscapes to explain his findings. Instead he examines how the sense of ‘awe’ felt in response to different landscape scenes is socially constructed, has historical ties for individuals, and a positive impact on the tourism industry. Our contrasting approaches are indicative of the different purposes for our research, but neatly highlight the importance of the physical environment in the experience of travel.

In comparison to the natural environment is the constructed physical landscape. As the beliefs about wellbeing in society continually evolve over time (Buzinde & Yarnal 2012), Smyth (2005) claims it is possible to alter and reinvent therapeutic landscapes to match social expectations. For ayahuasca tourists, wellbeing is linked to healing, and healing dependent on how ‘real’ a center’s services seem. The centres have to continually adjust

their image to match these expectations of ‘authenticity’. At The Shaman House structures were built using the local indigenous people’s designs, which had two purposes. First, the design was most practical for the weather conditions; allowing heavy rain to easily run off the palm leaf roofs, while also keeping the rooms cool under the sun. Secondly, the natural materials, and mimicry of local architecture gave the centre a sense of ‘authenticity’, and in turn the possibility of effective healing. Many guests mentioned their choice of centre was partly based on how authentic it seemed, and the availability of appropriately constructed spaces for the experience was highly valued. Each room – bedrooms, kitchen, maloka – had walls predominantly made from mosquito netting, allowing the guests to experience the sounds and conditions of the surrounding jungle at all times.

A number of my informants noted how special the sense of being immersed in the jungle was for them, coming from homes in Europe, America and South America. As Kaell notes: “authenticity” relies on how places *feel*’ (original emphasis, 2014, p. 77). The guests wanted an experience close to nature, not in a stark, built setting that would oppose their idea of traditional plant medicine and shamanism. The room designs emphasized the locality of The Shaman House and allowed for a beneficial multi-sensory experience of the environment (Velarde et al. 2007, p. 200). Guests were continually immersed in the sounds of insects, birds, storms, and wind; the temperature changes; and the sounds and smells of the lake, plants, and animals. Their experience felt ‘real’.

Symbolic Actions

A therapeutic landscape is not just produced by the physical environment though. As Williams stated: both physical and symbolic factors of a place provide ‘affective spaces of peace, rest and contemplation, contributing to an atmosphere that offered healing and health’ (2010, p. 1639). In his pilgrimage case study (to the shrine of St Anne), Williams

found that the ritualized actions of the pilgrims contributed to the symbolic environment. The symbolic environment includes the techniques and activities used by pilgrims to obtain healing and protection from St Anne: the way they dress, behave, and what they participate in (ibid). This case study aligns with what I saw and experienced at The Shaman House. Generally, guests acted similarly. They wore white or local Shipibo clothing everyday, they went on the optional wildlife spotting boat journey, and they put up with the discomforts of the jungle – making jokes about the unrelenting mosquitoes and lack of electricity. They all attended the early morning yoga classes I ran. Considering the eclectic group of individuals at The Shaman House over the three months I was there, these similar behaviour stood out as significant.

In contrast to established pilgrimage theory, Kaell (2014, p. 57) states that pilgrims' having a shared and positive experience does not necessarily mean the production of 'communitas'. Instead, it may be a result of each pilgrim, having saved all their money to go on the journey and hence wanting their experience to be worthwhile, avoiding conflict with others (ibid., p. 59). In addition, Doughty (2013) found in her study of walking pilgrimages that shared movement with shared intention was conducive to the creation of a therapeutic atmosphere.

Using Kaell's explanation and Williams' (2010) idea of the symbolic environment, the common actions of the guests indicate they were behaving similarly in order to gain the most therapeutic experience possible, and to contribute to the atmosphere of healing, health, and transformation for themselves and as a result, others. Considering ayahuasca guests share both their daily activities and transformational intentions (similarly seen in Doughty's (2013) study) respect for everyone else's purpose for being there was created and each person's chances of having a beneficial experience enhanced.

From this overview and application of the therapeutic landscape literature, it appears physical and mental feelings of healing, restoration, and transformation can take

place through the construction of and setting within a natural environment. The site becomes special, sacred, imbued with power and meaning – just like being in the Holy Land where Jesus lived 'makes Jesus real and overwhelmingly present' (Kaell 2014, p. 76). While one of my informants claimed they would drink ayahuasca back in their home country if they had the chance, most tourists stated they would not want to drink ayahuasca anywhere other than the Amazon.

Social Factors

Workers Set The Scene

The people running the ayahuasca centres in Peru hold much power in shaping the experience of guests. Quinn, the owner of The Shaman House, lived at the site nine months a year. He welcomed guests into his home, inviting them to view it as a home of their own. Quinn told personal stories in a manner that made guests feel he was sharing something special with them. His role seemed to be to make the experience feel 'real', whether intentionally or not. Quinn also participated in ceremonies, dietas, and activities at the centre, using himself as an example of the effectiveness and safety of the shamanic medicine available.

When new guests arrived at The Shaman House Quinn would hold a tobacco welcoming ceremony once the sun had set. Sitting in a circle around a few candles in the middle of the maloka, Quinn would explain the power tobacco has to protect humans from dark energies and spirits. Quinn described how The Shaman House and the relationship between himself and Patrick was establish, and told stories of his own personal, spiritual, and physical healing achieved through ayahuasca and other plant medicines. Notably, Quinn told a story of a potentially cancerous stomach ulcer has was diagnosed with being cleared by a plant medicine that Patrick made. Quinn's story was inspiring, and a

confirmation that the guest's transformations were possible.

After explaining his story, Quinn performed a tobacco ritual on each guest. This is something that occurred frequently before and during the ayahuasca ceremonies. Quinn, or the shamans, would inhale from their pipe, then cup their hands over the top of a guest's head and blow the smoke down onto their hair. The workers would do this two or three times, then place their hands on either side of the guest's head, and gently pull upwards with short, strong tugs. To conclude, they placed their lips on the top of the guest's head and blew their final puff of smoke straight onto the guest's skull. At The Shaman House, this ritual was conceptualized as protection from negative energies, although the reasons behind the individual movements were not explained. Fotiou found in other ayahuasca centres the same ritual was used for healing and called *soplos* or *sopladas* (2012, p. 13).

The ceremony created a mystical atmosphere for guests and instilled in them a sense of trust, wonder, and respect for Quinn, the shamans and the plant medicines available at the centre. Quinn explained shamanic medicine with such reverence it was easy to be carried away into the magical world of shamanism as he spoke; his face dimly lit by the flickering candles, the insects outside the only audible sound. Quinn took excited guests full of nervous energy, and calmly, seriously, welcomed them into the world of shamanic healing. The guest's hopes were playing out in front of them.

A few days after each tobacco ceremony, Quinn took the guests on a walk around the site to explain the use of each plant, whether medicinal or spiritual, and pointed out the plant that cured his stomach ulcer. Patrick had told Quinn his ulcer would be clear once the plant medicine stopped feeling like fire when ingested. After some weeks this did occur. Interestingly, no one in the group I was with asked whether Quinn had been to any other doctor to confirm his health. Apparently, the healing was quietly accepted to be true. This acceptance could have been for a number of reasons: guests wanted to believe Quinn's story as anecdotal evidence of the possibility of their own transformations, guests did not

want to undermine him by suggesting Western medicine as superior, or the guests did in fact believe him.

Quinn's role as the owner and permanent resident was one of authority. He provided insights into what individual's experiences could mean from a spiritual or shamanic perspective, and how they were a part of each individual's transformation. Everything was given meaning, from headaches, to strange dreams, and unexplainable emotions. By request, guests could also speak to Patrick who would share with them what he saw their illness to be. He told Vicky that the reason she felt so run down and emotionally drained was a whirlwind of black energy in her stomach.

> When Patrick said to me 'you have a tornado in your stomach' all I could think was: thank you. I have always felt this sensation, always struggled to understand it, and now there is someone confirming that there is a black spirit that eats and eats and eats my energy, and makes me feel so crazy… Wow… confirmation (interview with Vicky, January 2014).

This discussion instilled in Vicky a deep sense of trust in Patrick. She was in awe of his wisdom.

While the tobacco welcoming ceremony seemed to be unique to The Shaman House, others centres had their own techniques to ensure guests felt safe and supported. Nick's centre was intimate and only accommodated three or four guests, the shaman and his wife. They hence spent much time together forming a strong bond. Leila previously stayed at a centre that required her to be in isolation for the majority of her stay. She was visited by her shaman three times per day and treated as an individual patient. Poppy attended a centre that had two Western mediators who translated between the shamans and guests, and organized group discussions the morning after each ceremony. Feelings of support and trust are continually forged as the workers skillfully mold guest's reality.

In her psychological study, Quevedo emphasises the importance of a sense of

safety for tourists:

> It is noteworthy that, in this study, all of the participants reported emphatically that they felt safe and supported. Many participants also commented on the high quality of the retreat facilitators. It cannot be overstated how important this factor is for a positive outcome (2009, p. 99).

The atmosphere created by those running ayahuasca centres has a large impact on how the guests experience their journey as transformational. While coming across as genuine, the actions of workers can be seen as framing strategies used to shape guest's experiences to suit their hopes and expectations. Similarly, to provide pilgrims with the experience they want, strategies are used by the tour guides in Kaell's (2014) study of Holy Land pilgrimages. Guides shape their behaviour and information presented based on the denomination of the pilgrims. For example, the DJ on a boat tour on the Galilee Sea determined what denomination the pilgrims were in order to play appropriate music and, pleasing the pilgrims, was successful in the choices he made (Kaell 2014, p. 82).

The pilgrims travel to Israel with pre-existing ideas and images, gleaned from their religious upbringings and research into their trip, and were pleased when their expectations were fulfilled (Kaell 2014, p. 29). The Holy Land guides, as well as Quinn and Patrick, benefit financially when they provide their clients the experiences they expect. The workers are hence driven to meet expectations and set the scene appropriately, or convince guests otherwise. In my experience in Peru, the workers were highly capable of both due to their own skill and the openness of guests.

Sharing Transformation Stories

Guests, shamans and workers shared successful transformation stories to reiterate the

possibility of each individual's hopes being realised. Patrick, the head shaman at The Shaman House, shared stories of transformation that emphasized his powers of healing, and ethic of hard work. One afternoon, Bo and I went to Patrick's house to collect a treatment for Bo's bad dreams. Here we found Patrick, on his day off, sitting in his garden with friends. Seemingly unprompted (although Bo was acting as translator and perhaps did not relay his question), Patrick explained to us that bad dreams occur when a negative spirit or demon attaches to a human. Having had vivid nightmares from when he was young, and frequently waking up screaming, Bo had a demon who would not leave him be. Patrick told Bo that his case was mild, and he simply had to have two saunas with a mix of plants and broken glass – the treatment we had gone to collect. He then told us of a priest who came to stay for many months, and the ongoing battle Patrick had to rid this man of the multiple demons inside of him. This extreme story was told to demonstrate Patrick's power and persistence, and help Bo feel at ease about his own case. Bo has not had one bad dream since.

Guests obsessively discuss past transformations in order to maintain an atmosphere of hope and possibility. Whether their own, someone else's, extreme or subtle, all transformation stories have a positive ending. Transformations could be as small as learning to love yourself, as my informant Thomas experienced; or as big as overcoming a serious drug addiction. One of my informants, Meg told me that she was nursed through months of hardship, pain, and emotional release in her time at The Shaman House, and in the process overcome an addiction to marijuana which she threw up in the form of a green blob. A year later she was convinced by a friend to smoke again but after one puff, Meg's throat closed up, causing her to choke momentarily. For Meg, this was proof that she should not and could not smoke again. Whenever a guest doubted the likelihood of his or her own transformation, an impressive story was told to 'prove' it to be possible.

Interpretations

In my three months in the field I did not hear any negative interpretations of the effect of ayahuasca or plant medicine. In fact, everyone (including myself) continually found the silver lining in guest's experiences, especially when the experience was confronting, challenging, or emotionally draining. 'The hard experiences are often the best, the ones you learn the most from' was the first response to anyone struggling to make sense of a difficult ceremony or their emotions; it became a mantra. While the support of others present at the site is usually enough to help guests find a positive interpretation, Lewis (2008) focused her study on the more rare, extreme cases. She called these traumatic ayahuasca experiences 'spiritual emergencies' (Lewis 2008, p. 3). Claiming trauma is not necessarily bad, and can in fact be overwhelmingly positive, spiritual, and profound, she urges that appropriate social and cultural support be made available to tourists who have these particularly challenging experiences. My informant Sally, who got caught 'on the other side' some years ago, feeling like she was stuck in a spirit world and seeing endless visions for a week, certainly would have benefited from a trained psychologist being available for support. While I did not meet anyone who was traumatized by their stay in Peru, I did spend much of my time there in discussions about what guests were 'meant' to learn from what they saw, experienced, or felt. As explained in the discussion of ayahuasca effects above, for some people, the message attached to their visions or feelings is not clear and hence this process of interpretation is important.

The power of interpretation is clear in the stories of people who have disappointing or negative experience, but massage out a silver lining. Two girls I met in Iquitos had a bad experience with a city shaman who locked one girl outside while he tried to sexually assault the other while they were both experiencing the effects of ayahuasca. With the inappropriate behaviour of the shaman, neither girl could settle into or focus on the effects taking place. While this shaman was unsuccessful in harming the young woman, he sent

the girls home in a *tuk-tuk* (open, 3 wheeled motorbike) while still hallucinations and vomiting. Despite the unnerving experience and disrupted effects of the brew, the girls were both able to find positive messages out of what ayahuasca had shown them through discussions the following day. Amy, who thought about her family during the ceremony, concluded that after many years travelling it was time to return home. She bought a ticket back to America a few days later. Issy, the girl who had been caught inside with the shaman felt she had gained insights into her own personality and relationships with her family. Issy was excited to have the chance to drink ayahuasca again in a safe environment, and left for a month long stay at an ayahuasca centre one week later. Both girls were determined to find meaning out of their experience, no matter how upsetting and disruptive it had been.

As previously discussed, the shamans and workers of each centre play an important role in interpreting and offering legitimacy to each guest's experience. As Baker (2005, p. 185) suggests, the use of a shaman's established belief system can help reduce the risk of a guest having a negative experience with ayahuasca. The shamans and workers in Peru are viewed as wise and knowledgeable, despite often not knowing much about guest's lives, and are turned to when serious psychological or spiritual advice is needed. A young French woman I met in Iquitos, named Tanya, relayed her incredible story to me. Tanya, had just returned to the city after two weeks with a shaman in the jungle. At this centre, Tanya had lived in a small room on her own, called a *tambo*, and was encouraged to keep her interactions with the other guests to a minimum. She had a strict diet of banana, rice, and fish twice per day, once on ceremony days, and drank strong plant medicines daily. She lost a significant amount of weight in the two weeks. Her three ayahuasca ceremonies were extreme in nature, with her second being most significant.

During this ceremony, Tanya physically hit her head and feet against the chair in

which she sat until she was bleeding from the scalp and heels. She experienced extreme negative emotions – anger and hatred – while the shaman sang an icaros to her, and placed her hand between Tanya's head and the chair to try and reduce the damage being done. The next day, physically torn up, Tanya was confused as to why she had felt so much anger and physically hurt herself. She was scared and overwhelmed. The shaman explained that Tanya had been so aggressive because ayahuasca was drawing out the anger she had bottled up throughout her life, reassuring her that it was meant to happen. When I spoke to Tanya and her sister, they claimed with much certainty that the shaman's interpretation was true. They described Tanya pre-ayahuasca as an angry person, easily annoyed and defensive. Tanya said she often had aggressive fights with her boyfriend, and always felt suspicious and spiteful of others. Tanya's sister claimed her face and eyes were different – more gentle, kind, and open, and Tanya explained that she could feel this change. She was making friends more easily than ever before.

Tanya's third ceremony with the same shaman was also extreme; Tanya lost control, was unable to move, and vomited on herself countless times. Despite these traumatic sounding experiences, Tanya was pleased with her stay at the centre. Peeling the bandage off her torn up heels, her breath catching from the pain, Tanya told me she felt new, fresh, and excited to try and repair her damaged relationship with her boyfriend back home. The interpretation the shaman had provided her was evidently convincing and, considering the long term calm Tanya has reported since, effective in helping her transform.

The role of the tour guide in Kaell's (2014) study is similar to the role of the shaman at ayahuasca centres. Kaell found that tour guides in the Holy Land, while playing into pilgrim's expectations to keep them happy, also took the opportunity to influence their group's understanding. For example, one Palestinian guide, Yusef, 'pointed out every poor

Arab village we passed, while Gilad, the Jewish guide on Jim's trip, drew our attention to modern Israeli farms and towns' (Kaell 2014, p. 49). Similarly, shamans at ayahuasca centres have extraordinary power to shape the interpretations of guests who are in an extreme state of openness, wanting their journey to become a success. In the process, the shamans teach guests about the shamanic perception of illness and healing. For Vicky, healing was a personification of her feeling of exhaustion; for Bo, an expulsion of a demon; and for Tanya, a cleansing of negative energy.

It was difficult not to get swept up in the repetitive search for a silver lining among ayahuasca tourists. No matter how challenging an experience is, something valuable can always be learnt, especially when all the workers, shamans, and guests are simultaneously searching for a positive interpretation. As Tupper (2008, p. 300) explains, ayahuasca is a substance that has a biochemical reaction, but the 'rich symbolic and social meanings' attributed to it also heavily influences the effect it has (see also Jauregui et al. 2011). As discussed, tourists who drink ayahuasca are aware of its potential transformative effects through marketing and online media, and their expectations are fulfilled when positive results are found. The symbolic meaning of ayahuasca is that it is a force for change.

Group Dynamics

As guests rely so heavily on discussing their experiences with each other, the group dynamic of an ayahuasca centre has an impact on one's stay. The dynamic varies with different combinations of guests, sometimes enhancing and sometimes impeding the transformation process of individuals.

One of my informants mentioned earlier, Bo, booked in for two weeks at The Shaman House, but by the end of his fortnight decided to stay an extra week. I asked him why he didn't just come back another time, considering he lived only a short plane flight

away, in which he confidently responded that ‘the group dynamic and energy will never be the same’ (personal communication, February 2014). Bo’s claim was made more clear to me the longer I stayed at The Shaman House – some combinations of people worked better than others, providing more positivity and support for each other throughout the days of interpreting and validating their experiences. For example, Sally gained much respect for her open spirituality, which she often suppressed at home; and Poppy in Iquitos expressed her pleasure in acting the way she wanted, without the judgment of her normal friends.

Kaell similarly found a positive group dynamic present among Holy Land pilgrims (2014, p. 118). On the pilgrimage it became clear that certain people, such as her informant Ken, were able to overtly express their religiousity without feeling judged or misunderstood as they did at home. Even when pilgrims had opposing beliefs, arguments were not had, but rather quiet acceptance of difference occurred (ibid., p. 59). While there were some heated discussions between guests at The Shaman House, guests were generally peaceful, no matter how different their views were. Open discussions revolved around ayahuasca being an entity that can interact with humans, about ghost spirits that visited a number of guests one night, about the existence of aliens, and the caring nature of plants.

The atmosphere created for the ayahuasca ceremonies was also important. During the first few ceremonies I attended everyone arrived and quietly lay down on their mat, with few words shared. The ceremonies felt cautious, tense, and private. After the arrival of a new, bubbly and confident volunteer worker, the beginning of each ceremony was filled with hugs, well wishes, and quiet chatting, a much more communal and relaxed atmosphere. The opposed dynamics impacted guests differently. For some, their experience with ayahuasca was private, controlled and almost solemn, and hence a serious atmosphere going into ceremonies was preferred. During one ceremony one man even hushed another, feeling disturbed by his quiet talking. In contrast, other guests felt supported and calm when the beginning of the ceremony was light-hearted. Considering

the importance of one's 'set' and 'setting', a positive group atmosphere before drinking ayahuasca is important.

Unfortunately, sometimes the group dynamic is not so good. At a centre outside Iquitos where two of my informants stayed, a troubled young man was a part of their group and acted in a way that disturbed and annoyed many of the guests. His energy was considered angry and attention seeking, a negative force in the ayahuasca ceremonies where he was loud and disruptive, and a negative force during the days where he stirred the other guests. While one informant made an effort to get to know this man and as a result was no longer bothered by his behaviour, the other did not, claiming the entire experience would have been better without him there.

Evidently beneficial for guests is the time available to work on themselves, without the responsibilities of home life. Considering the mutual respect between guests, people were always given appropriate time and space on their own. In fact, all guest's had to do was exactly what they needed to do – a rarity in normal life, but also a challenge. As my informant Ella explained: 'When you don't have to do anything, you have to be with yourself, and this is the difficult part. It's hard work.'

This chapter has shown that a number of social and physical, symbolic and constructed actions, behaviours, and settings aid in the overall experience of an ayahuasca tourist. Trust is developed between guests and workers through the workers compelling narration skills – whether it be sharing success stories or providing interpretations for feelings of guests. Expectations of a beautiful landscape are met, and the landscape has a physical and mental impact on guests, aiding in the feeling of transformation reported by so many tourists. Importantly, a positive group dynamic is commonly achieved as each guest shares in their intention for transformation, and those present at the site provide support for each other. Interpretations are often a communal effort and positive messages are always found.

The effect of ayahuasca works in conjunction with the impact of being at the site and creates an overall sense of transformation.

Chapter 4: Going Home

The final day had arrived, and Vicky was in high spirits as she sat down to a breakfast of freshly baked bread, muesli, fresh fruit, and The Shaman House specialty – banana pancakes. The weight of further plant medicine was off her shoulders, and while looking on her few challenging weeks at the site fondly, Vicky was excited to break her ayahuasca diet and have a glass of wine once home. After breakfast, Quinn gave her a shot of a thick, dark liquid – a remedy used by elderly Shipibo people for energy. It tasted like straight alcohol, and Vicky laughed as it gave her a tingle and a buzz. As the peki-peki arrived to drive Vicky back to Pucallpa, the other guests, workers, and worker's children gathered on the kitchen balcony for a photo. The numerous dogs that lived at the site wandered over to see what all the fuss was about. Warm hugs, encouraging words, and kind blessings were shared, then in the sticky heat the group walked the few hundred meters down to the river to meet the boat.

Vicky was leaving the site in a state of refreshed exhaustion. She was psychologically and emotionally tired after a few weeks of deep thought and challenging insights; but simultaneously, she was leaving with a 'glow' having found her strength and clarity again. Due to the dense foliage in the river, the goodbye went forever. Vicky sat in the long wooden boat, smiling back at the guests and workers as the driver, a man from a local village, slowly shifted the boat out of the shrubs. Gradually the small group staying behind drifted back to the kitchen or their bedrooms, a lull in energy hanging over them. Guests leaving always made those still present think of home. For many in the group losing Vicky was hard, as she had provided such motherly support for the other guests. Feeling low, the guests and workers who had returned to the kitchen made a cup of tea, grabbed a piece of fruit, and lounged around discussing how positive it had been having Vicky around. The next phase of her journey had only just begun…

In her study of American Christian pilgrimages to the Holy Land, Kaell noted that most studies into pilgrimage look at the actual event, not the aftermath, a left over 'influence of the Turners' foundational account. Influenced by Van Gennep's stages of rites de passage, they focused on the journey's ritual "meat," the liminal stage set apart from the everyday' (2014, p. 162). Supporting Kaell's idea, anthropologist Nancy Frey (2004) 'believes there is a related problem of scholars' Western bias, which favors metaphors of progress and breaking new ground ("going to" or "being at" the shrine) over descriptions of return or "going in circles" (in Kaell 2014, p. 162). This trend is similarly found within ayahuasca tourism, with the majority of literature focused on the details of the ayahuasca ceremonies, the effects of drinking the brew, and the individual's interpretations, ignoring the ongoing process of transformation once guests leave the site. However, scholars such as Lewis (2008), Trichter et al. (2009), Barbosa, Cazorla, Giglio and Strassman (2009), Kjellgren, Eriksson & Norlander (2009), and Quevedo (2009) have begun to turn their gaze towards the final stage of the ayahuasca experience.

There are two streams of knowledge about the integration phase available. The first is the discussions and advice given online between commentators, centres, and past guests. Suggestions of staying close to nature and listening to one's heart are presented (see The Sunrise Centre 2014), with some people claiming to be able to help one integrate their lessons from ayahuasca into daily life (see Nanice Ellis 2012). Just as ayahuasca tourists are able to turn to the Internet for guidance pre-departure, they can find information on what to do post-ayahuasca, although the integration discussion is significantly less comprehensive.

The second stream is scholarly research. These studies are often similar in nature, with many using psychological questionnaires and surveys immediately before, and up to 6 months after tourists have an ayahuasca experience (see Barbosa et al. 2009; Kjellgren et al. 2009). The transformations described are categorized into general terms, such as

developing ‘A greater self-awareness and a sense of being more present in oneself’ (Kjellgren et al. 2009, p. 313).

In comparison, Quevedo’s (2009) long-term study provides psychological data as well as comprehensive case studies of how individuals psychosocially integrated their time at two Brazilian ayahuasca retreats. Quevedo claims that overwhelmingly people have positive experiences and manage to integrate their new insights into their psyche well. She focuses on the psychological factors that aid or hinder one’s integration stage, such as ego inflation (2009, p. 26-27), and analyses the ‘spiritual emergency’ type cases also referred to by Lewis (2008). My thesis extends on Quevedo’s (2009) research by providing additional ethnographic case studies that highlight the challenges that can arise from losing the social and physical support of the site.

This thesis contextualizes people’s experiences in order to better understand the reality of going home post Peru, and helps demonstrate the interconnected and complex nature of the formation of expectations, existence at the site, and going home phase. As Picard (2011, p. 22) found is his island tourism study, some tourists ‘seemed so deeply affected that they changed jobs, reconnected to religious practices or moved on with their lives, accepting that they had entered a new cycle.’ It is thus important to examine what concrete effects ayahuasca tourism has had on the people I met in Peru.

Picard explains a common problem with tourism studies and a challenge he experienced himself. While he stayed in contact with his informants, and even visited them in their homes, missing was ‘the process of ‘coming home’, the journey home and the reintegration into the home environment’ which he claims is ‘a moment of crucial importance for any anthropological understanding of tourism’ (2011, p. 19). My own study is also limited by not being able to physically follow informants home, although I was able to stay in contact with many over the months after their journey. Continual discussions with my informants have allowed me to hear of how their sense of transformation is being

integrated and lived out in a multitude of ways – an important step towards more in depth, longitudinal studies on the home-coming of ayahuasca tourists.

This chapter will provide detailed examples of the techniques used by ayahuasca tourists to integrate their experiences back into their everyday lives, the challenges they face, and the impact this has on their daily existence. It will be shown that transformations are lived out in various ways, and despite some unfulfilled expectations, tourists invariably go home with a positive story to tell. Without the supportive social and physical setting of the site challenges do arise, and tourists have to create their own techniques for integrating their transformations into their daily existence. For some people, ayahuasca tourism leads to a change in their demeanor and behaviour, for others it impacts their working relationships, and for others still it is something they can draw on in times of need. The transformations tourists undergo are open-ended; continually impact their lives and informing their thoughts and actions.

Integration and Impact

The lessons ayahuasca tourist's learn and the transformations they feel are on a continuum from subtle to extreme. When I first learnt previously unknown things about myself from an ayahuasca experience I had a sense of anxiety that I would loose these lessons once back home in Sydney. This made me question how people integrate their experiences back home, and highlighted a gap in the literature on ayahuasca tourism. How does one apply an abstract lesson learnt in a spiritual context in the middle of the jungle, back into a busy, city life? How does one try to maintain what they've learnt when those around them may not understand what they've been through?

Considering the immense support and guidance provided to tourists before embarking on their journey and once at the site, integrating an ayahuasca lesson into

everyday life is not always easy.

Blake

Blake, a young Australian man in his late 20s has spent two weeks at an ayahuasca centre outside Iquitos twice in the past three years. He described his first experience with ayahuasca as overwhelmingly profound. He felt his mind expand as he learnt about how everything we do as humans has an impact on the environment and entire cosmos – the expansion of his mind a great example of the ayahuasca tourist perception of the 'self'. Blake claimed he felt very different after his first trip, and spent a lot of time writing and thinking deeply about how life works once he was home. I fist met Blake in between his first and second trips to Peru. We sat for a number of hours discussing our perceptions of how the mind works. Blake went to Peru for a second time with the hope of learning even more, but without specific questions. Everything he learnt the first time was reiterated, but he was disappointed by the lack of new insights ayahuasca provided him. Blake said he was still amazed by the visions he saw and emotional range he felt, but his transformation was not as significant the second time.

As an auto electrician in the mining industry in Western Australia, Blake's everyday reality lacks ecological consciousness, and he describes his work mates as being particularly sheltered from learning about things outside their mining world. While he said he doesn't talk about ayahuasca or the deep philosophical and psychological questions he has to many people at work, he does run a few ideas past the friends he feels comfortable with. He enjoys pushing their boundaries. In response, Blake gets: 'What are you talking about mate? You must be on drugs.' While Blake did not explicitly state this, it appears that to these men, ayahuasca is considered a drug that will make you 'crazy'. As he spends so much time at work, integration for Blake has been challenging and hence internal. Back

home he has neither the physical or social support that was present at the site. He is unable to discuss spirituality, shamanism, or plant medicines openly with those around him, so he turns inwards to contemplate, write, and think about what he has learnt from his experiences with ayahuasca. Kaell (2014) similarly found a feeling of isolation experienced by the Holy Land pilgrims she stayed in contact with (see p. 161).

Speaking with him two months after he returned home, Blake felt that his most recent trip to Peru was starting to have an increasing effect on his life – the impact of his experience crystalizing with time. More and more Blake feels detached from other people, going into his own thoughts about how life works – a shift he claims he is comfortable with. He states his contemplations are deeper, and he feels he has a greater mental capacity to work through and find the answers to his existential questions. For example:

> Time is measured by significant events or moments – when something significant happens on Tuesday and Thursday, it means over time the time in between those events will disappear, and Tuesday and Thursday will gravitate towards each other. If your year has flown past it's because you haven't had experiences that lengthen it.
>
> What is different from before and after I went to the jungle I think is the ability to be able to follow the thought process, one or two steps deeper. Rather than just going 'yeah time has gone past so quick' and then moving on, these days I'm really starting to unwind all those thoughts until I have sorted it out (interview with Blake, June 2014).

When I asked whether he wanted to return to drink ayahuasca he explained that he had a drive in life to continually challenge himself and his ayahuasca experiences had been a part of that. For now he feels no need to return, his next plan is to do a Buddhist silence camp in which there is no speaking for 10 days.

> I ask myself: 'Who are you going to be at the end of those ten days?' You're not going to be the same person as the person who arrived; there are two different people.

Blake's desire to challenge himself through a different spiritual experience reconfirms the New Age mentality shared by many ayahuasca tourists, and highlights the belief that the Western 'self' can be altered through different means.

Sally

Sally, a Chilean psychologist in her late 30s, spent three weeks at The Shaman House while I was there. She had consumed ayahuasca and other psychoactive chemicals to help induce spiritual and psychological insights occasionally for many years. Having only ever experienced one-off ayahuasca ceremonies after which you go home immediately, hence with no importance placed on the site, Sally came to The Shaman House to experience the additional plant medicines on offer, and have a series of ayahuasca ceremonies in the jungle setting.

One of the main lessons Sally learnt from her time at The Shaman House was the importance of incorporating both her rational and spiritual lives into her everyday existence.

> Sometimes I feel I live multiple realities – I am two people. I'm this really rational and strong woman, and I'm also this really dependent, poor creature. I have both a very rational part and a very spiritual part, but I live everything separately.

Having had a tough year going through a divorce, Sally was at a point in her life where she didn't want to compromise herself anymore. At The Shaman House she had time for reflection and discussions with others about how to find the balance of her identity, and the other guests valued both her rational and spiritual sides. Explaining one of her ayahuasca experiences, she noted:

> I'm asking: "How do I find a new balance in my life?" and I get this chat with my rational mind, and I realize I need to explore, and give more space to my craziness and my intuition and my creativity, but I cannot leave behind my rational mind, it takes care of me, it's what's doing the job. So the new balance has to come from both (interview with Sally, February 2014).

Back home, Sally has been continuously working to integrate her new ideas. When giving a workshop in mid June this year she decided to test out her new balance. Unsure of how her spiritual ideas would be received by the other psychologists, Sally decided to incorporate only a little spirituality to gauge the other therapist's boundaries. She set up an alter, used meditation, spoke of alchemy and magic. It was a test run for both Sally's confidence in sharing her spiritual side, and for the colleagues in hearing a new perspective. The therapists all responded positively and Sally was overjoyed at the result. Sally's transformation is a change in her behaviour and approach to her work. She has also been successful in shifting her reliance on the site in Peru as a safe place to explore her identity, to her work place, where she can now continue her transformation.

Sally does not share her ayahuasca experiences with many people, but does continue to work on herself through additional spiritual retreats and drinking ayahuasca on her own back home. She has also been attending and hosting gatherings of guests from The Shaman House who live within driving distance of each other. Since leaving The Shaman House she has attended three or four of these lunch events – a nice way to stay connected to the experience. I have spoken to a number of the people who attend these events though and it seems ayahuasca and their trip to The Shaman House is not regularly discussed. Instead, they catch up as a group of friends normally would.

Nick

Nick, the young man who saw his insecure self in the form of a hedgehog, has had a different integration stage to Sally and Blake. For Nick, learning that he shouldn't let his insecurities anger him or impact his life was a valuable lesson, and was put to the test soon after returning home. Nick is studying journalism in Denmark and went through a competitive intern application process a few months after his trip to Peru. He didn't get the job with the company he wanted, falling back into the habit of doubting himself and feeling insecure. To help pull himself out of this slump, Neck effectively drew on the image of his hedgehog. Unlike Blake and Sally, Nick's lesson in the form of a visual cue can be drawn on when needed and it is not necessarily a part of his daily life. His transformation has been an extension of his coping mechanisms. As a result, his behaviour and views are not particularly noticeable to others and he has not suffered from losing the support and atmosphere of the site. Perhaps this is because he only spent two nights at an ayahuasca centre, or perhaps the way in which he learnt did not require the social and physical support available at the site.

The Home Scene

Quevedo's (2009) study which assesses 22 international tourist's psychospiritual integration of their experience at two Brazilian ayahuasca centres also provides three case studies she has compiled from quantitative and qualitative data. Similar to my own findings, Quevedo's (2009) subjects had lucid dreams in the weeks after returning home (p. 88), stayed connected with a like-minded community (p. 86), and turned to quiet introspection at home (p. 89) as well as reporting an overall increase in happiness and comfort with themselves (p. 90). However, distinguishing our two studies is my focus on the ayahuasca industry and impact of landscape, and the effect of losing it once home.

The challenges people face going home differ based on their friendship group, family, and workplace. This is evident in both Sally and Blake's cases. For someone like Ella, who is known to be spiritual and working as an alternative therapist, going home and sharing her experience was not challenging: 'For me, everything is spiritual. All my friends know me as spiritual, and all my friends love me in this way' (interview with Ella, February 2014). In comparison, Poppy claimed all of her friends would laugh if they saw her dressed the way she was dressed in Iquitos after her visit to the ayahuasca centre. Poppy was wearing hiking boots, short black shorts, a white single, and an ayahuasca necklace. Her hair was wild, and she had no makeup on. This was the only Poppy I knew, but she implied this was not her normal self. Speaking to Poppy after she returned home, she seemed to be struggling to integrate her experience. Ayahuasca had told her how important her relationship with a girlfriend was, and Poppy felt sure she would nourish that friendship, but when I spoke to her later in the year, she reported:

> And about Angela, the girl that ayahuasca told me I was connected to... Well... I still believe it. But it also doesn't feel like anything catastrophic is going to change between us any time soon. Which is fine, neither of us is going anywhere (email correspondence with Poppy, June 2014).

Reframing Expectations

What is most interesting about ayahuasca tourism's home coming phase is the way in which disappointments or unfulfilled expectations are reframed to fit into each person's narrative of a positive transformation.

When the guests at The Shaman House were surprised by Patrick's casual manner they openly shifted their image of the shaman. Expecting a god-like shaman, they instead got a man who insisted he was no different from everyone else. The guests incorporated

this into their narrative by claiming it was their fault for expecting the wrong thing, are for relying on stereotypes – Patrick's behaviour actually showed that he was the 'real-deal'. Bindy and Vicky also narrated away their disappointments about not seeing many visions during their ayahuasca ceremonies. The two women claimed they had learnt a lot through the emotions they felt in their ceremonies, stating that their time in Peru was just the beginning of their spiritual journey and that they would be back.

Dana travelled to Peru to ask ayahuasca why she was in so many relationships where the other person couldn't love her back because they were either emotionally, physically, or mentally unavailable. She was emotionally drained when she arrived to Peru, tired of giving all her love away with no reciprocal care from those around her. As previously mentioned, Dana was told by her shaman that she was a healer; that caring for others was her role in life. This was contradictory to what Dana wanted to hear but she took this insight on board and took on the responsibility of being the group mother at her ayahuasca centre. Guests fought over lying next to her in the ayahuasca ceremonies, and opened up to her about their own problems, showing and telling her how much they appreciated her support. Ayahuasca and the shaman quite literally told Dana the one thing she didn't want to hear on arrival, but rather than feeling bitter or angry, she turned it around and said 'heck, if I'm meant to be a healer, I'm meant to be a healer!' and proceeded to tell me how she was commonly praised for her caring skills. The shaman's interpretation and group dynamic provided Dana with the recognition she desired in her everyday life and allowed her to reshaped her understanding of her relationships back home. Dana took home an acceptance of her identity and skills, and has since been interpreting her new romantic relationship with what she learnt in Peru.

The tendency of ayahuasca tourists to reframe their personal experiences to be meaningful, beneficial, and positive has a big impact on the creation of the shared hope for transformation and helps explain why the ayahuasca industry is growing in popularity…

it is almost impossible not to transform.

Conclusion

The ayahuasca tourism industry is alive. Growing in popularity, growing in size, and continually evolving, the industry is a life force in and of itself. Commentators from different backgrounds disseminate information daily; shamans and workers within Peru market their experience to an eager audience; and thousands of tourists, future, past, and present discuss and critique their experiences creating an atmosphere of mystical hope. These subgroups inform each other, learn from each other, and respond to each other in a complex, entangled way – and the process continues.

It is from within this powerful life force that I chose to examine the transformational experience of ayahuasca tourists. 'Ayahuasca changed my life' is too often stated without explanation; the act of drinking the brew too often examined as the focus. Before one embarks on their journey to Peru, intentions and expectations are formed and the tourist becomes a part of the industry. The pre-departure hopes impact the following phases of transformation as they shape the process of interpreting one's experience and in turn shape the lessons and stories taken home. Ayahuasca tourists go to Peru to learn and heal and use the framework of 'transformation' as their guide - whether drug, medical, or spiritual in nature. While the New Age tendencies of ayahuasca tourists was clear in my study, examining ayahuasca tourism provides insight into more than just the spiritual tendencies of the guests. Ayahuasca tourism is a window into the way Westerner's perceive the 'self.'

Tied into the assumption that ayahuasca itself can help one transform, is the tourist's assumption that through using ayahuasca as a tool, they have the ability to work on, alter, heal, and 'fix' their internal problems. The 'self' is considered malleable, damaged, and in need of attention; the journey to Peru a means of entering a space in which such work can be done.

Through an examination of the ayahuasca tourists experience the connection between the tourist's Western 'self' and spirituality, nature, and social relationships can be seen. As my informants experienced: spirits can act on one's body to cleanse negative energy; the natural environment is full of energy that physically impacts how one feels; and the social relationships held between people are dependent on how one understands their identity. An individual's 'self' defines their place in the world, but is also fluid, impressionable, and flexible.

The belief in a supple form of the Western 'self' may be the reason behind an unusual thought process of ayahuasca tourists that was immediately noticeable. While the industry is based on the expectation of transformation, transformations are believed to be open-ended. In contrast to common Western thought that relies on linear narratives with distinct beginning-middle-end structures; the ayahuasca transformational narrative is circular in nature. My informants did not expect to be entirely healed and often critiqued the Western reliance on 'quick fix' medication. Time at an ayahuasca centre was considered work that will continue throughout one's lifetime. The trip to Peru is just one step of many.

When I asked Quinn if one could ever reach a limit of learning from ayahuasca, he smiled and said 'No.' While the lifestyle of living at an ayahuasca centre on a strict diet may not be sustainable for long periods of time; he believes that you can always learn more about your 'self' and your place in the world. There is no end.

This concept of open-ended transformations is what Kaell (2014) and Picard (2011) were emphasising in their pilgrimage and tourism studies. The assumption of an end point has seen years of research into both forms of travel ignore what happens when someone gets home from a journey, as if a geographical shift back to the starting point implies a new beginning. This study adds to the growing critique of pilgrimage and tourism studies by demonstrating that what happens to tourists once home is both a product of the journey,

and a continual influence in their life. When conducting ethnographic research, the experience of informants is key, and hence I suggest the examination of the integration stage and long term actions is necessary.

Future studies should use the idea of a circular, never-ending transformation as a basis for their analysis. If the ayahuasca tourist experience is just one step in learning about one's self in life, then what comes next? My informants experiences differed, with some returning to Peru for more ayahuasca a year or two later, and others turning to alternative spiritual avenues, or simply continuing to manage their lives in their individual way. More long-term ethnographic research is needed, and scholars can refer to Kaell (2014) and Picard's (2011) studies for methodological ideas.

The value of examining ayahuasca tourism and similar transformational forms of travel in a holistic way has been revealed. The way in which tourists conceptualise their own journey and transformation is important in understanding their experience and resulting life changes. With such knowledge, a statement of 'ayahuasca changed my life' can be explored, and appropriate questions asked about the perception of the 'self', transformations, and long-term actions.

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Appendix

Macquarie University Research Ethics Approval

Dear Dr Timmer

Re: 'Syncretic guidance: How Peruvian plant medicine and personal beliefs merge to promote well-being'

The above application was reviewed by the Faculty of Arts Human Research Ethics Committee. Approval of the above application is granted, effective (1/10/2013). This email constitutes ethical approval only.

Please note the following special conditions of this approval:

1. In Appendix B (6), the researcher notes that a letter from the Peruvian retreat to Macquarie University, giving permission for the researcher to research there for four months, is pending. The committee requests that the researcher forwards the letter to the ethics committee at ArtsRO@mq.edu.au once she receives it.

2. In appendix B, the researcher has ticked 'No' to questions 4, 5, and 7 but hasn't 'given reasons' for 'No'. The committee requests the researcher to note briefly her reasons for 'No'.

The following personnel are authorised to conduct this research:

Dr Jakob Timmer
Miss Lily Kathryn Ainsworth

Please note the following standard requirements of approval:

1. The approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).

2. Approval will be for a period of five (5) years subject to the provision of annual reports.

Progress Report 1 Due: 1st October 2014
Progress Report 2 Due: 1st October 2015
Progress Report 3 Due: 1st October 2016
Progress Report 4 Due: 1st October 2017
Final Report Due: 1st October 2018

NB. If you complete the work earlier than you had planned you must submit a Final Report as soon as the work is completed. If the project has been discontinued or not commenced for any reason, you are also required to submit a Final Report for the project.

Progress reports and Final Reports are available at the following website:
http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/human_research_ethics/forms

3. If the project has run for more than five (5) years you cannot renew approval for the project. You will need to complete and submit a Final Report and submit a new application for the project. (The five year limit on renewal of approvals allows the Committee to fully re-review research in an environment where legislation, guidelines and requirements are continually changing, for example, new child protection and privacy laws).

4. All amendments to the project must be reviewed and approved by the Committee before implementation. Please complete and submit a Request for Amendment Form available at the following website: http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/human_research_ethics/forms

5. Please notify the Committee immediately in the event of any adverse effects on participants or of any unforeseen events that affect the continued ethical acceptability of the project.

6. At all times you are responsible for the ethical conduct of your research in accordance with the guidelines established by the University.
This information is available at the following websites:
http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/
http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/human_research_ethics/policy

If you will be applying for or have applied for internal or external funding for the above project it is your responsibility to provide the Macquarie University's Research Grants Management Assistant with a copy of this email as soon as possible. Internal and External funding agencies will not be informed that you have approval for your project and funds will not be released until the Research Grants Management Assistant has received a copy of this email.

If you need to provide a hard copy letter of approval to an external organisation as evidence that you have approval, please do not hesitate to contact the Faculty of Arts Research Office at ArtsRO@mq.edu.au

Please retain a copy of this email as this is your official notification of ethics approval.

Yours sincerely

Dr Mianna Lotz
Chair, Faculty of Arts Human Research Ethics Committee
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