

UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA
SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS

MASTER'S THESIS

**AN ASSESSMENT OF THE CROSS-CULTURAL DETERMINANTS
OF PREFERENCES FOR ECOTOURISM**

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

sl. – Slovene

ASEAN – (sl. Združenje držav jugovzhodne Azije); Association of Southeast Asian Nations

Covid-19 – (sl. Koronavirusna bolezen); Coronavirus disease

ECO – (sl. Ekološko); Ecological

EU – (sl. Evropska Unija); European Union

PEB – (sl. Okoljsko/okolju prijazno vedenje) Pro-environmental behaviour

TIES – (sl. Mednarodno ekoturistično društvo); The International Ecotourism Society

UK – (sl. Združeno Kraljestvo); United Kingdom

UNWTO – (sl. Svetovna turistična organizacija Združenih narodov); United Nations World Tourism Organization

USA – (sl. Združene države Amerike); United States of America

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has been evolving faster than ever before. With rising living standards, more and more people got the opportunity to travel. Since its beginnings in the 17th century, international tourism has become one of the world's most important economic activities, and its impact is becoming increasingly apparent (Walton, 2018). Thanks to fast industrial development, the modern traveller was travelling more frequently and leaving behind a bigger carbon footprint. Lenzen et al. (2018) suggest that in past decade the increase of the carbon footprint in the tourism industry was four times greater than previously estimated. If two years ago tourism industry contributed 10% of global gross domestic product, employed every 10th person (United Nations Environment Programme, 2020a) and was responsible for nearly one-tenth of the world's carbon emissions (Gabbatiss, 2018), today this is no longer the case. With coronavirus disease outbreak these numbers have dropped significantly. With social distancing and travel restrictions in place, or in some cases a complete closure of borders, the tourism industry was one of the hardest-hit industries. This includes all sectors that support the tourism industry, from air travel to sales of souvenirs. The pre-pandemic growth rate of approximately 5% a year (Noboa, 2019), has turned into a 4% decline. The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (hereafter: UNWTO) estimates that last year global tourism suffered its worst year on record, with international arrivals dropping by 74%, which accounts to 1 billion fewer international arrivals than in previous year, which represents an estimated loss of USD 1.3 trillion in export revenues (UNWTO, 2021).

Nevertheless, tourism industry is still one of the most polluting industries and it is expected to return to pre-pandemic figures in years to come. Before the tourism industry surpassed other industries in carbon footprint emissions by far. With this rate, some estimated that tourism could be one of the top three global polluting industries in 10 to 20 years (Noboa, 2019). Thankfully, Western society awoke from the era of environmental decay in industrial civilization and has experienced the beginning of a new environmental movement, which advocates a green paradigm. Originating from this movement, environmental awareness has also spread to the tourism sector. This movement is known by many different names, but ecotourism is the term most frequently used. The International Ecotourism Society (hereafter: TIES) defines ecotourism as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education” (TIES, 2015), where education is meant to be inclusive of both staff and guests. Other recent industry nametags include sustainable tourism, green tourism, nature tourism, responsible tourism, ethical tourism, mindful travel, conscious travel, pro-poor tourism, and many others. Regardless of the name and definitions, the core shared concept is that the industry should adopt more environmentally friendly practices, protect nature and cultural heritage, and support local communities (Green Global Travel, 2020). Ecotourism not only led people into returning to nature but also helped people break away from the imprisonment of technology (Wen & Ximing, 2008), contributing to bigger environmental protection. Ecotourism is today one of the most important and developed sub-sector in tourism industry

(Altunel & Bugday, 2019). With some experts estimating that ecotourism now represents 11.4% of all consumer spending, these sorts of questions have become more significant, and finding answers to those questions has become increasingly more vital (Green Global Travel, 2020). Some experts even suggest that ecotourism is growing faster than the tourism industry as a whole (Perkins & Grace, 2014).

The growing research on ecotourism has shown that there are cross-cultural differences in the extent to which people in different cultures perceive the importance of environmental sustainability when travelling. Many factors influence people's perceptions. Milfont's (2012) research on cultural differences in environmental engagement showed that there are many both individual-level and country-level variables, suggesting that affluence and value orientations are the main determinants of the differences in people's environmental engagement. Another influential study about environmental attitudes and behaviours across cultures argued that people from individualistic countries tend to be more focused on local issues that are related to the individual, while people in collectivistic countries tend to develop broader attitudes (Schultz, 2002). In their study of environmental behaviour across 30 countries, Pisano and Lubell (2017) also point to the effect of wealth and post-materialism in facilitating the emergence of environmental behaviour, suggesting that a nation's wealth is positively related to environmental behaviour (Pisano & Lubell, 2017).

Some of the most important theories in explaining the cultural dimensions of tourism include Geert Hofstede's framework, Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behaviour and Stern's value-belief norm theory. Dutch scholar and researcher Geert Hofstede provided us with arguably one of the most important and widespread models – Hofstede's Six Dimensions of Culture Framework (Agodzo, 2014). In 1980 and 2001 he wrote two important works on the multidimensional measure of cultural values, that many scholars are still using today. Despite criticisms, most cross-cultural studies still heavily rely upon his typology and find it to be one of the most important theories of culture types (Yoo, Donthu & Lenartowicz, 2011). Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior suggests that behavioural intentions are the main determinants of behaviour and distinguishes between three types of beliefs (behavioural, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control) (Ajzen, 1991). This theory allows a researcher to generalize the findings by studying multiple determinants simultaneously. It can be applied to a specific group of behaviours or some more general environmental behaviours (Morren & Grinstein, 2015). Using this theory, Mancha & Yoder (2015) found out that people's intended behaviours are also strongly influenced by perceived social pressures.

Despite the theories described, there is not a lot of literature focused specifically on how culture affects attitudes towards ecotourism. Many articles point out that there is still not enough research made in regards to this topic, even though the demand for tourism today is strong and still growing: "[...] Little is known in relation to tourist differences (or commonalities) regarding preferences for mainstream (ie. mass tourism) as opposed to ecotourism tourism experiences" (Perkins & Grace, 2009). Yet, in the future, ecotourism

will not only be a growing trend, but it might also become a new norm in the industry. Therefore, this thesis will bring together two very important dimensions of tourism: culture and the environment. The purpose is to get insight into what are the factors in preferred destination selection among different tourist nationalities and to better understand cross-cultural differences in tourist preferences towards ecotourism, which could help tourist agencies and hotels in the ecotourism sector better understand their customers' needs and eventually adopt their services to achieve better customer satisfaction and stay compatible. Accordingly, the goals of this thesis include:

- reviewing existing literature on national differences in tourist preferences,
- exploring whether specific ecotourism offers are better suited for tourists from different countries, and
- determining the crucial factors tourists take into consideration while choosing among various types of ecotourism currently available on the market.

The master thesis relies on descriptive and empirical research. First, I conducted a literature review on ecotourism and cultural differences using secondary sources, obtained from research papers, reports, journals, and other publications from different organizations, scholars, and academics from the industry. After the literature review, the empirical part of the thesis follows, which includes both primary and secondary data. The primary data include qualitative research collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with industry specialists.

In the first chapter, I will look at the global problems that sparked this movement and made people think about their effect on our planet, which became even more present. I will follow the blueprints to its origin and examine the stages of its development: the early days, through a steady increase of ecotourism, to ecotourism we know today. Different definitions of ecotourism will be explored, mainly focused on Western ecotourism definition in comparison with the Chinese concept of shengtai lüyou and how they relate to each other. Because of the current global developments with the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and its effects on the tourism industry, I could not leave this unmentioned. The last subchapter is therefore reserved for examining the effects of the global pandemic on ecotourism in general and what this crisis represents for ecotourism's further development.

The second chapter will focus on the cultural aspect of this thesis. Here the culture and cultural differences that affect the decision-making process and preferences for certain tourism services will be explored. The link between culture and tourism will be established and I will look into individual and collective factors that influence certain pro-environmental behaviour (hereafter: PEB) and try to understand what motivates people to make a decision, that results in pro-environmental tourist behaviour. Next, I will compare the theory findings between different tourist nationalities and see what other researchers found out about different nationalities. With division to East and West I examined the differences and

similarities between Eastern engagement in shengtai lüyou and Western engagement in ecotourism.

My research of these differences will be presented in the next chapters, where the data from in-depth interviews with five industry specialists will be dissected and analyzed. Here, I will present and compare the decision-making processes, preparedness, points of interest, and other behavioural properties of different tourist nationalities and explore how a specific culture practices tourism and the criteria for destination and hotel selection of specific tourist nationalities. I will discuss how different nationalities see ecotourism, what they think of it, to what extent they practice it, and what are their preferences and points of interest for ecotourism. And at the end, I will reveal eco-friendly tourism trends that respondents have been noticing while working with different tourist groups in the past few years. The limitations I encountered during the research, recommendations, and the implications that this research can have will be looked at in the last chapter.

1 ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES AND TOURISM

Over the years, many ecologists and most developed countries started prioritizing environmentally friendly industries. Scientists discovered the effects of pollution on our planet, the impact, and problems it might present for future generations and expressed a serious concern about our irrational exploitation of natural goods. Climate change is one of the major challenges modern society is facing and it is adding considerable stress to our cities and the environment. From rising sea levels that are threatening coastal cities to shifting weather patterns that are threatening food production – “the impacts of climate change are global in scope and unprecedented in scale. Without drastic action today, adapting to these impacts in the future will be more difficult and costly” (Adedjei, Reuben & Olatoye, 2014).

The term ‘sustainability’ was first used in 1713 and referred to the sustainable development of forest maintenance, representing the relationship toward natural resources that is directed to the future (Veljković & Colarič-Jakše, 2014). Only in the 20th century we became witness to the first warnings about the harmful development that threatens the environment we live in. Stockholm hosted the first international conference about the negative human impact on the environment in 1972, followed by Rio de Janeiro in 1992 (Veljković & Colarič-Jakše, 2014). Soon, sustainability got associated with tourism, as the First International Conference on Climate Change and Tourism took place under the sponsorship of the World Tourism Organization in Djerba, Tunisia, in April 2003. The Djerba declaration called upon all interested parties to continue research efforts, encourage sustainability in tourism, and raise awareness of the issues involved (World Tourism Organization, 2003). Like this, the term sustainability became part of our everyday life and started to represent “the balance between the rate at which a particular system is depleted and the rate at which it replenishes itself. Human use of nearly every natural resource is currently occurring at unsustainable rates. Our

use of natural resources must change, and our throw-away society where products are used only once and then discarded cannot continue for much longer.” (Schultz, 2002).

One could argue that only in recent years these environmental problems have become widespread matters of concern among the public. In Europe, it started in 2007, when the issue of climate change was at the forefront of the debate on global environmental problems. This concluded in the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize being awarded for change in this area. Eurobarometer report in 2008 points out two tendencies that can be linked to this phenomenon. “Firstly, there is an ever-greater need for a global response to global problems. This is already underway in numerous international environmental agreements and legislation. Secondly, citizens are becoming more aware of both the potential effects of these problems in their daily lives and the role they could play in protecting their environment.” (European Commission, 2008).

The quality of the natural and man-made environment is essential to tourism, let alone ecotourism. However, the relationship between tourism and the environment is very complex. It involves many activities that can have unfavorable environmental effects (Sunlu, 2003). Ecotourism strives to lower the impact on the environment as much as possible but sometimes it is hard to prevent the consequences of tourism. In theory, the concept predicts small tourist groups, that minimally interfere with the environment. But in practice, it is often the other way around, due to economic reasons. Besides that, even if the group is small, there will always be some impact on the environment, even if it is small (Fink, 2017).

Tourism does not have big centralized points of pollution, but it is rather spread out and moderate. Nevertheless, with mass tourism that is increasingly motorized pollution slowly starts to accumulate and can have a severe impact on the environment (Pogačnik, 2008). Many of these impacts are linked to the construction of general infrastructure to support tourism (Sunlu, 2003). All combined consumes a lot of energy (transportation, illumination, heating/cooling of hotel rooms, swimming pools, etc.) and produces a lot of waste. And to make the situation even worse, much of this waste is single-use plastic that ends up in our oceans (Pogačnik, 2008). These negative aspects of tourism development can slowly destroy environmental resources on which the tourism depends so much. However, tourism has the potential to create beneficial effects on the environment by raising awareness of environmental values and it can serve as a tool to finance protection and conservation of natural areas and increase their economic importance (Sunlu, 2003).

1.1 Origins of ecotourism

The origins of the term ecotourism are not entirely clear. Anandaraj (2015) suggests that the evolution of the term took place in Western society to experience wild nature. Beautiful places and sceneries were declared natural areas for protection in the form of national parks. It is a concept that evolved over the last 30 years, as people living in and around protected areas noticed the increase in nature tourism and realized a mutual interest (Anandaraj, 2015).

But the phenomenon that we call ecotourism existed much earlier in history, only it was named differently. So-called world explorers, who travelled to find new cultures, flora, and fauna were the first ecotourists (Veljković & Colarič-Jakše, 2014).

Ecotourism as we know it began to take shape back in the 1970s, but its earliest origins date back to the Sierra Club Outing program in 1901 (Green Global Travel, 2020). One of the first to use the term ecotourism appears to have been Hetzer, who in 1965 referred to a form of tourism based principally upon nature and archaeological resources (Higham, 2007) and identified four principles of responsible tourism: minimizing environmental impacts, respecting host cultures, maximizing the benefits to local people, and tourist satisfaction (Anandaraj, 2015).

Since the 1970s, when the first environmental movements began, tourism has become more mindful and respectful towards the environment. Suddenly, tourists have started expected to follow dedicated forest paths, passive observation from viewpoints took hold, photo safaris replaced hunting safaris, skiing with the help of helicopters became less and less common (Pogačnik, 2008) and many more changes took place in order to minimize our impact.

1.2 Definitions of ecotourism

Historically the term was adopted to describe the nature-tourism correlation. An early example of first formal and widely adopted ecotourism definition from 1987 stated: “Traveling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring, and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural manifestations (both past and present) found in these areas.” (Donohoe & Needham, 2006). Although this definition has been applauded, critics suggest that it lacks foresight and disproportionably focuses on what tourists do, rather than what they should do (Donohoe & Needham, 2006). Since then, the industry provided us with many definitions of ecotourism. One of the most commonly recognized and widely used is the definition provided by The International Ecotourism Society which defines ecotourism as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education” (TIES, 2020), where education is meant to be inclusive of both staff and guests. If we would look into a dictionary, we would find ecotourism explained as “the practice of touring natural habitats in a manner meant to minimize ecological impact” (Merriam-Webster, 2021). “In other words, ecotourism entails the responsible travel to natural areas, conserving the environment, as well as sustaining the well-being of the local people through education and interpretation of local social, environmental, and political matters.” (Conserve Energy Future, 2021). Ecotourism is uniting conservation, communities, and sustainable travel. Meaning that those who implement, participate in and market ecotourism activities should adopt the basic ecotourism principles. Those are: To minimize physical, social, behavioral, and psychological impacts. To build environmental and cultural awareness and to provide

positive experiences for both visitors and hosts, with direct financial benefits for conservation, local people and private industry. And to design, construct and operate low-impact facilities that provide memorable interpretative experiences to visitors that help raise sensitivity to host countries' political, environmental, and social climates (TIES, 2020).

The essence of ecotourism does not start with tourism providers but with individual travellers. Responsible tourist studies about the environment and culture of the destination beforehand. Respects local people and their customs. Protects environment, local species, and their habitat. Never buys souvenirs made from endangered species. Supports local providers instead of global service providers (Fink, 2017). "Ecotourism believes that when travelling, one should not only minimize their carbon footprint and harmful environmental effect to the places they travel to but also contribute positively" (Daxue Consulting China, 2016). As a concept, it represents a subcomponent within sustainable tourism. It is a form of travel based on nature, that nurtures an ethical ideal – strengthening knowledge and awareness of the environment using methods of long-term planning. It displays a different relationship between a tourist and the environment and, above all, emphasizes the need for more a human approach, spiritual enrichment and a respectful approach toward natural and anthropogenic resources (Veljković & Colarič-Jakše, 2014). And that is what separates ecotourism from other forms of tourism.

Ecotourism considers three distinct components of sustainable development, that do not exclude but complement each other. The number one concern is environment protection, which prevents degradation of a natural area due to increased tourist activity, with minimalizing human impact on natural resources. The economic aspect of ecotourism also comes in the balance between environmental protection and fulfilling the needs of the local population, which are the other two components of sustainable development. It raises awareness, educates the traveller and provides financial basis for conservation efforts, and increases the role of the local population (Fink, 2017).

Besides many definitions, ecotourism also has many names. Ecotourism is the oldest and most used term, while more recent industry nametags include sustainable tourism, green tourism, nature tourism, responsible tourism, ethical tourism, mindful travel, conscious travel, pro-poor tourism, and many others. Regardless of the name and definitions, the core shared concept is that the industry should adopt more environmentally friendly practices, protect the nature and cultural heritage, and support local communities (Green Global Travel, 2020). Ecotourism is most often referred to as sustainable tourism, which is actually a hypernym to ecotourism. Sustainable tourism takes into account the needs of all stakeholders, including tourism businesses and tourists themselves. It has a strong emphasis on community aspects and encourages everybody to take responsibility for their roles and actions in tourism. Sustainable development can therefore be defined as a "process to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." (Hardy, Beeton & Pearson, 2002).

Even though ecotourism and sustainable tourism both apply to types of travel, both take care of the environment, both have no internationally recognised overseer, they also have some differences. If ecotourism focuses more on ecological conservation, educating the travelers, and providing direct financial benefits to conservation and local people, sustainable tourism focuses on travel that balances the socio-cultural, environmental and economic aspects of tourism, that has as minimal impact on the environment and the local communities as possible. Sustainable tourism best suits and describes business strategies and is mostly aimed at profiting the business. Ecotourism, on the other hand, will best apply to businesses dedicated to the conservation of wildlife, and most of them, surprisingly, work actively to support and empower local communities. Also, ecotourism is a form of tourism or can be seen as a category of vacation, whereas sustainability applies to all types of tourism (Conserve Energy Future, 2021).

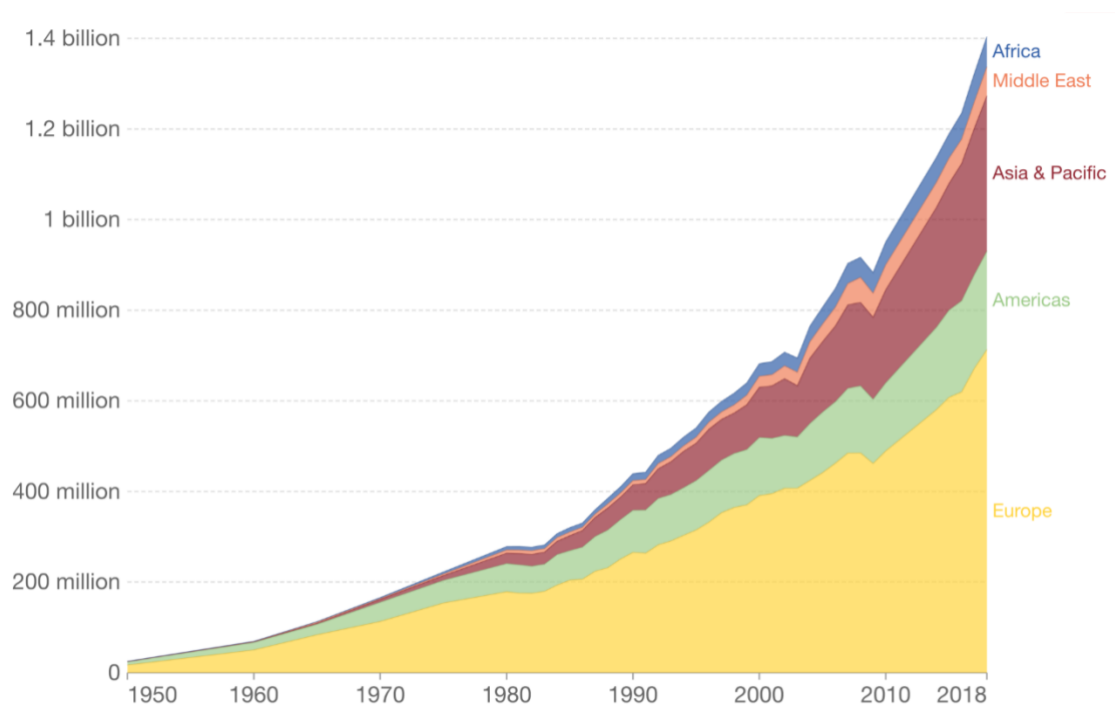
1.3 Ecotourism trends

As we continue to see the negative impact of mass tourism on the nature and environment at destinations around the world, we start to ask ourselves, what can we do to stop or areduce this negative impact to preserve the integrity of nature for future generations. With some experts estimating that ecotourism now represents 11.4% of all consumer spending, these sorts of questions have become more significant and finding answers has become more vital (Green Global Travel, 2020). Some experts even suggest that ecotourism is growing faster than the tourism industry alone (Perkins & Grace, 2009).

Till recently, the tourism industry has seen continuous expansion ever since the Second World War. Despite occasional shocks and global crisis in 2004 and 2009, the sector has managed to provide exponential growth over the years, which shows industry's strength and resilience (United Nations World Tourism Organisation, 2019). Figure 1 shows international tourist arrivals over the years by world region up to 2019 coronavirus outbreak.

Roser (2017) estimates that tourism arrivals have increased 56-fold since 1950. In 68 years, we came from 25 million tourist arrivals to 1.4 billion international arrivals per year. Even though Europe's tourist arrivals dropped from an estimated 66% to 50%, it is still the most important tourist region, with France being the most visited country to date (Roser, 2017). With this tourist influx, comes the potential for ecotourism development. But as we know, this is not the case in every country. Whether a country with a large international tourist influx has developed ecotourism or not, does not depend on the influx of ecotourists. It depends on people's and government's engagement in sustainability and consciousness about the environment. Those countries would also have more ecotourism offers, eco-hotels, and other services that foreign tourists could resort to.

Figure 1: International Tourist Arrival by World Region



Source: UNWTO (2019).

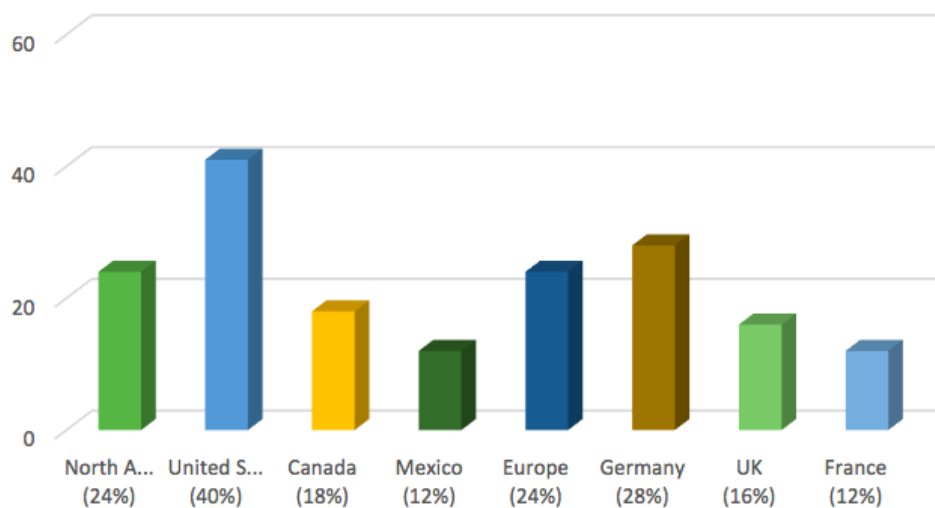
In late 2019 and early 2020's tourism industry faced its biggest challenge yet. With coronavirus disease outbreak these numbers have dropped significantly. With social distancing and travel restrictions in place, or in some cases a complete closure of borders, the tourism industry was one of the hardest-hit industries. The pre-pandemic growth rate of approximately 5% a year (Noboa, 2019), has turned into a 4% decline. The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (hereafter: UNWTO) estimates that last year global tourism suffered its worst year on record, with international arrivals dropping by 74%, which accounts to 1 billion fewer international arrivals than in previous year, which represents an estimated loss of USD 1.3 trillion in export revenues (UNWTO, 2021). There is no doubt that this pandemic will leave the consequences both within the industry and beyond. The entire global economy is expected to fall between 1.5% and 2% due to the impact on tourism, and an estimated 120 million people will lose their jobs (El-Haj, 2021).

But despite grim predictions, the ecotourism seems to be doing better than the tourism industry as a whole. The idea that the pandemic put the world on halt has become something of a cliché, yet there is some truth to it. As the world stopped travelling, we had time to stop and think about what it meant to us and how it was impacting the world. Many are saying that the new world of travel is likely to be slower and more conscious than before. Be it ecological or health-wise, people are more conscious of the fragility of our environment and our responsibility to look after it than ever before (Barry, 2021).

Ecotourism is not just an option anymore, but a pre-requisite with a large proportion of travellers favouring holidaying with organizations that teach a commitment to greener, environmental and socially friendly practices. Moreover, after enduring months of isolation, tourists would exploit on the opportunity available to them to travel to popular destinations as well as less known or commercialised places (Murali, 2021).

In the following chart, we show how different regions in the west managed to keep a high percentage of ecotourism share during the Covid-19 pandemic. Figure 2 considers all the updates such as mergers and acquisitions, new entrants in the market, various technological developments, and the impact of virus outbreak (Ample, 2020).

Figure 2: Covid-19 Outbreak Global Ecotourism Industry Share, by Region (%)



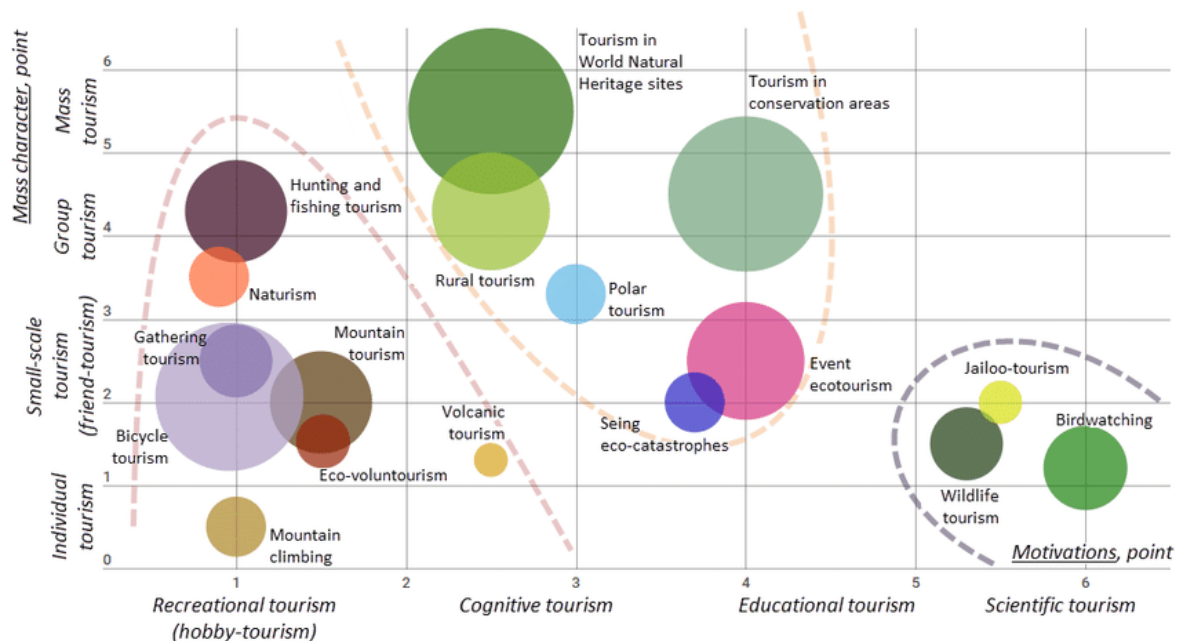
Source: Ample (2020).

As we can see, the United States (hereafter: US) and some European countries have kept the highest share of the ecotourism industry even during Covid-19 pandemic. In addition to the growth of eco-friendly travel companies, cities and regions are also adapting to the latest demands from travellers to become more sustainable, since eco-travel is becoming increasingly big business in Europe and conscientious travellers demand more choice (Euronews, 2018).

The segmentation of the market is done by regions, while segmentation by the type of ecotourism includes cultural, rural, and other types of tourism. Those are just basic divisions of ecotourism types. One would think that ecotourism does not have many types, but that is not the case. There are many types of ecotourism. Tourism in world heritage sites, tourism in conservation areas, and rural tourism are more popular. Hunting and fishing, bicycling, and mountain tourism are also very popular types of ecotourism. The list goes all the way to birdwatching, polar tourism, volcanic tourism, and visiting eco-catastrophes sites. All those types belong to a certain classification. Each classification belongs to one of the two primary

dimensions, which are scale and motivation. The scale dimension is straightforward: it displays the number of travellers from individual ecotourism to mass ecotourism. The motivation dimension displays the depth of the information the tourist is seeking from the ecotourism experience. Recreational or hobby tourism is the classification where tourists seek little to no information. Cognitive and educational tourism already provide more information and teach the tourist, while the motivation behind scientific tourism is only to learn new information and discover new things. Figure 3 perfectly depicts various types of ecotourism within the classification model.

Figure 3: The types of ecotourism: a classification model



Source: Korstanje (2017).

1.4 Ecotourism in the West

The demand for nature and ecotourism in majority of Western countries is high and will continue to grow. In recent years, tourists have become more aware of leaving a positive impact on the destinations that they visit. Research have shown, that European travellers increasingly want to travel more sustainably, with a more responsible vacation and an easier way to identify a green holiday. It is not only the way of travel that shows signs of change, but accommodation types as well. “Interest in an sustainable accommodation increased from 62% in 2016, to 65% in 2017 and 68% in 2018.” (Centre for the Promotion of Imports from developing countries, 2020). But this is not just a recent trend. In the European Union, there is a continuous, broadly felt, and strong consensus on the importance of environmental protection (European Commission, 2014). Eurobarometer report finds that the environment is indisputably crucial in the lives of European citizens. It also finds that Europeans are generally concerned about the environment, with 76% of European Union (hereafter: EU)

citizens believing that environmental problems have a direct impact on their everyday lives. However, while they agree that protecting the environment is principal, the attitudes toward environmental issues and the knowledge regarding this subject vary considerably among EU member states. Most have environmentally friendly attitudes and they are aware of their role as individuals in protecting the environment, although their green attitudes do not always translate into environmentally friendly behaviour and concrete actions (European Commission, 2008). But big majority of countries in the European Union take their future seriously. Many countries are environmentally conscious and have different initiatives and laws regarding sustainability in place. Ireland, Norway, United Kingdom, Iceland, Sweden, Denmark and Germany are one of the greenest destinations, not only in Europe, but in the entire world. In 2016 report, the top 10 greenest countries in the world were all in Europe, with one exception – Costa Rica (Glazier, 2016).

When talking about top European ecotourism destinations, we must not forget Slovenia. Slovenia is the garden of Europe that has a beautiful landscape and biodiversity. It ranks as one of the greenest countries in Europe, and its capital Ljubljana was awarded the title of The European Green Capital in 2016. As much as a third of our tourist destinations are in mountainous areas. The coastal area is in second place, even though we have a very short coastline. And on the third place are Thermal spas rank third (Lobnik, 2001). With the big environmental responsibility that our government is facilitating and the school educational system that stresses the importance of nature preservation, Slovenian people are among the most eco-conscious nations in Europe. Environmental education is crucial in learning the values and norms of the human relationship with the environment. An important form of environmental education for Slovenian elementary school children is overnight field trips, where they learn the different aspects of ecotourism (Pavšer, 2001).

The approach to ecotourism and environment protection in the United States is very different from the European and especially Slovenian. America's national parks are wide open for motorized mass tourism, but the infrastructure (roads, parking lots, etc.) and designated areas (picnic, camping, etc.) are strictly defined. Designated hiking, riding, cycling, and other paths are neatly maintained and there are few to no violations. They educate visitors about geological, plat, animal, ethnographic, and other features in information centres. With this discipline, they manage to protect the nature despite the mass tourism (Pogačnik, 2008).

Unlike other countries where tourism development has a considerable role in their economic development, the US does not have a federal tourism policy to address sustainable tourism on a national scale. Sustainable tourism initiatives are gaining a foothold through other creative and coordinated partnerships at the federal, state, and regional levels (Bricker & Schultz, 2015). Same goes for ecotourism definition. Although it has been widely accepted, it does not serve as a functional definition for gathering statistics in the US, since only nine US government tourism agencies provided written definitions of ecotourism. Majority of them were homegrown definitions, that agencies have written themselves or adapted to meet their need or understanding of ecotourism. (The Ecotourism Society, 1999). Nevertheless,

ecotourism in the United States represents a large percentage of the tourism industry. Tourism in America is a crucial industry in many states, thus ecotourism initiatives are important to the overall sustainability of this country's tourism industries. Among the top ecotourism destinations are Alaska, Hawaii, California and Colorado (My Natour, 2021).

1.5 Ecotourism in the East

Not everybody perceives ecotourism in the same way. That is why I will look at how the Eastern world understands ecotourism in the following sections and get a better understanding of cultural differences from my research presented in the last chapters.

1.5.1 Unity of Man and Heaven

The Chinese have more than five thousand years of the glorious history of civilization. Through the development, they gradually formed a set of traditional Chinese values that are essential to people to this day. At the core of these values is the 'Unity of Man and Heaven' that is a basis to study the universe, society, and life with the relations of heaven, earth, and man as the centre. This concept originates from the 'Book of Changes' in ancient history. After it was carried on by generations of thinkers, it matured and became the essence of the main thought of the Chinese fine traditional culture (Chen, 2016).

If the Western cultures perceive nature and man as divided entities, each going its way, the view of the Unity of Man and Heaven in China, the natural landscape, and cultural landscape are hardly separable (Wen & Ximing, 2008). "It is to achieve the harmony and development of the human society through the harmonious coexistence between Man and Nature, Man and society, Man and Man, Man and himself, which is a kind of lofty ideals pursued by the human society since ancient times." (Chen, 2015).

While the human behaviour in the West was restricted to ensure the sustainable use of natural resources, China, however, regarded nature as an absolute authority, and Chinese utilize nature with reverence. Some famous mountains and great rivers in China are combinations of natural and human resources that are neither independent natural resources nor cultural resources absolutely, but organic combinations of both (Wen & Ximing, 2008).

The Unity of Man and Heaven contains Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and other ideologies, that reflect the fundamental value and the spiritual essence of the Chinese traditional culture. It anticipates that every individual follows the law of the universe, respects, and protects all things natural, and is aware that this harmony can produce many great things. Every individual should practice their self-cultivation of original nature, find one's true self, and foster the temperament of a calm mood. And finally, individual should be with mutual respect and courtesy, to abide by the principle of affability, not adulation (Chen, 2016).

1.5.2 Shengtai lüyou

China is the world's most populous country that has especially long and uninterrupted written history and a cultural tradition of nature appreciation. It is no surprise that there is extensive Sinophone academic literature employing the term shengtai lüyou, comparable in scale to the entire English-language literature on ecotourism. And while most of the English literature on ecotourism is translated into the Chinese language, the same cannot be said for the other way around (Buckley, Cater, Zhong & Chen, 2008).

Just as the concept of ecotourism in the West is greatly influenced by the environment and arose from a long history of outdoor recreation and nature conservation, the concept of shengtai lüyou evolved within the context of the Chinese idea of the Unity of Man and Heaven. Both in principle and practice, shengtai lüyou has a great deal in common with the Western concept of ecotourism. This may have to do with the fact that the term shengtai lüyou first appeared in the Chinese-language academic literature in the early 1990s as a direct translation of the term ecotourism in the English-language academic literature. “Shēng tài is translated as ecology, lü yóu as tourism, so the direct translation is ecological tourism.” (Buckley, Cater, Zhong & Chen, 2008)

Even though Shengtai lüyou is used to translate the English term ecotourism, it might represent a slightly different concept. Despite many similarities, the terms also have some differences in cultural beliefs, history, and some political and socioeconomic factors. Key differences are: “a role in promoting human health; a predilection for human art and artifacts to enhance nature; and no limitations on a scale.” (Buckley, Cater Zhong & Chen, 2008) Ecotourism in China tends to be larger in the number of tourist visits and the size of the attractions. “Health benefits such as clean air are also heavily advertised as part of the ecotourism to lure in more Chinese travellers who hope to escape from the air pollution of the city. In addition, Chinese travelers tend to value man-made structures as equally as the natural scenery itself, which are often not the case in western travellers.” (Daxue Consulting China, 2016)

The concept of ecotourism in the Western world calls for minimal impact on protected landscapes since it considers humans primarily as a nuisance to nature. The concept of shengtai lüyou on the other hand regards humans as an integral part of the landscape, the beauty of which is enriched with artifacts (Li et al., 2019). It is common for the Chinese protected areas to include a wide variety of man-made structures which are not used only as infrastructure to allow visitors to enjoy the natural environment but are themselves considered as part of the attraction. “Examples include temples, pagodas, scenic bridges, and arches, sculptures, inscribed and painted calligraphy, and so on.” (Buckley, Cater, Zhong & Chen, 2008)

1.5.3 Shengtai lüyou in practice

“Tourism, let alone ecotourism, is still a relatively new phenomenon in China.” (Doole, 2005). Since opening up to foreign trade and investment with several free-market reforms in 1979 (Morrison, 2019), more and more ordinary Chinese have the disposable income to take holidays. In the 1990s, vacation was still a luxury for most Chinese people. If they took one at all, they mostly visited world-famous man-made tourism sites within their country, like The Great Wall or Forbidden City. Nature-based sustainable tourism was not yet fully appreciated, which may have to do with the fact that during China’s Cultural Revolution, the environment was considered a resource and not something that needed protection. Today, adventure travel and the environment became a popular way for young people to seek tranquility and personal development – something that their parents and grandparents would never consider as an option. It was only in 1994 that we started to see the first Chinese environmental organizations that could be set up under the watchful eye of the government. Even though any criticism of government policy is held to a minimum, those organizations have a positive impact in raising environmental awareness, which in turn is raising interest in ecotourism (Doole, 2005).

In recent years, we can see the surge in the number of scenic sites under the labels of ‘ecotourism’, reflecting the positive perception of the concept by the Chinese population, which has treated it as a huge marketing opportunity (Li, et al., 2019). The trend is catching up in China and we might see a substantial change in China’s tourism industry. It might be difficult to imagine China as the new ecotourism destination, especially with its infamous smog and pollution problems, but it has tremendous potential. The rich natural landscape and beautiful natural scenery that tourists long for can be found all around the country. According to The Chinese Ministry of Environmental Protection, there are 2,541 nature reserves on 147 million hectares or 14.7% of China. The majority (80%) of those reserves practice some form of ecotourism (Daxue Consulting China, 2016).

Even though it seems that China has embraced ecotourism, “recent research has revealed several cases of ecotourism destinations in China focusing more on increasing income from a larger number of visitors than a full embrace of ecotourism principles.” (Li, et al., 2019) Li et al. (2019) also found that some scenic areas and tour operators do not satisfy the basic requirements to be fully classified as ecotourism sites. They only gain benefits by labelling their business as such. This can be linked to a lack of binding laws in China and the ad hoc certification system for ecotourism sites. The consequence is that consumers hardly distinguish between genuine, partially genuine, and completely fake tourism enterprises. All the evidence proves that China still has a long way to go to develop genuine ecotourism, one that differs from conventional forms of tourism (Li et al., 2019).

From what we can see, the view of the Unity of Man and Heaven only exists as a thought in China today and is rarely put into social practice. During industrial times, the desire for creature comforts was dominant in China, so the ancient green paradigm that was cultivated

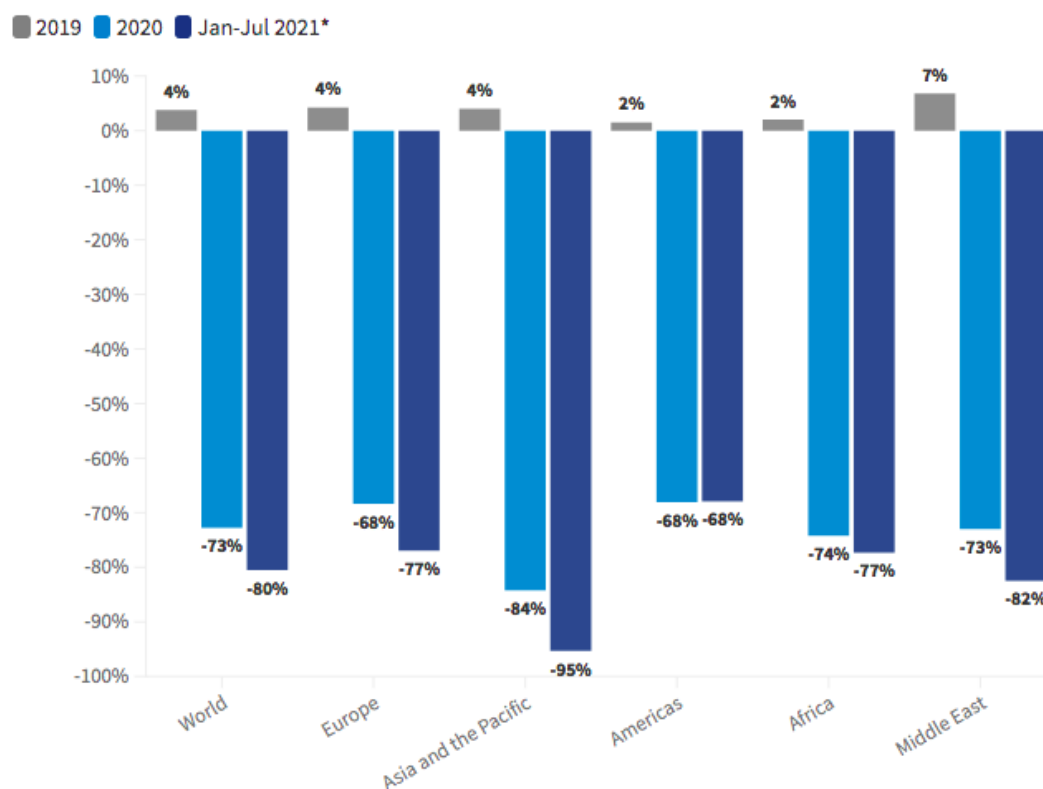
in times of agricultural society was more vulnerable and got pushed away. The development of Chinese ecotourism must pay attention to the rebuilding of the original values (Wen & Ximing, 2008).

Furthermore, as Li and others point out, China still has a long way to go to develop genuine ecotourism, one that is clearly distinct from conventional forms of mass tourism. One that offers ecotourism services in the areas that provide the most suitable natural features and that need it the most. Not the one in the richer provinces with limited natural features which appears to offer an excessive number of ecotourism sites, just to attract more visitors. This shows there is still a lack of proper regulation enforcement, quality certification, and education that is slowing down the development of shengtai lüyou (Li et al., 2019).

1.6 Covid-19 and ecotourism

Today, the world is facing an unprecedented global health, social, and economic emergency with the Covid-19 pandemic. Travel and tourism are among the most affected sectors with airplanes on the ground, hotels closed, and travel restrictions put in place in virtually all countries around the world. The UNWTO is reporting alarming figures in the tourism sector for the last two years. Figure 4 shows the change in international tourist arrivals for the first half of 2021 compared to last year and the year before the pandemic.

Figure 4: International Tourist Arrivals, World and Regions (% change)



Source: UNWTO (2021)

International tourist arrivals in the first seven months of 2021 were 40% below the levels of 2020, and still 80% down when compared to the same period of pre-pandemic year 2019. Asia and the Pacific continued to suffer the weakest results, followed by Middle East. Small islands in the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia and the Pacific, together with a few small European destinations recorded the best performance in June and July 2021, with arrivals coming close to pre-pandemic levels. This small improvement was underpinned by the relaxation of travel restrictions to vaccinated travellers and reopening of many destinations to international travel, mostly in Europe and the Americas. Despite the relative improvement over the low levels of 2020, international tourism figures remained well below 2019 levels. With these figures, international tourism is back to the levels of 30 years ago. To put things into perspective, let's look at how global crisis in recent history affected tourism in the past. With the SARS outbreak in 2003, less than 1% decline of international tourist arrivals was recorded. The Global Economic Crisis in 2009 caused a 4% decline, which was before the 2020 biggest decline in tourist arrivals in decades. Today there is no destination that has not introduced some form of travel restrictions, while 27% of all destinations worldwide are keeping their borders completely closed for international tourism (UNWTO, 2021).

The raging pandemic is not impacting just the tourism industry and its workers, but the field of biodiversity conservation as well. Over the past decades, conservation programmes have come to rely more on the financing from the tourism industry through ecotourism strategies, developed around the world to generate revenues for the conservation programmes funding. Once the ecotourism tap dries out, the important economic incentive comes to fall out all the more (Pille-Schneider, 2020). The Covid-19 repercussions have already impacted the world heritage sites, such as the Aldabra coral atoll in Seychelles, The Great Barrier Reef, the West Norwegian Fjords, and the Galápagos Islands which mostly or exclusively rely on the income from tourism to fund monitoring of the corals (Charlotte, 2020).

Ecotourism destinations are coping differently with the impact of the pandemic. One would think that nature and wildlife at tourist destinations would benefit from the absence of tourists but that is not the case. Although animal sanctuaries and rescue centres are now closed for tourism; animals still must be fed, operations cannot be stopped. At the same time, they must accommodate new animals, pushing many centres to the edge of their capacities (United Nations Environment Programme, 2020b). Meanwhile, wildlife safari parks and some endangered species are now in more danger as hunting and poaching of wildlife in the natural parks are on the rise again; plantation workers and local villagers took advantage of the situation since these kinds of areas are a nightmare to police. Today, tourists are important because just by being present in the parks they actually act as police to stop the hunting (Wong, 2020).

For instance, studies have shown that the virus could unravel years of hard work in the conservation process of the mountain gorilla across two habitats- the Virunga National Park in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and the Bwindi Impenetrable National Park in Uganda. If extensive precautions are not taken, the gorillas are at significant risk of

catching the virus, since they share 98% of their DNA with humans. Introducing the virus into their populations could have severe outcomes. Sadly, the “economic consequences of the suspension of gorilla-related ecotourism, however, are just as likely to result in a decline in populations as Covid-19 itself. Ensuring that the local communities profit from ecotourism is the key measure against poaching to which locals often have no option but to turn to if other means of income cease.” (Charlotte, 2020). These are just a few of past year examples of negative impact pandemic has on ecosystems and wildlife.

The pandemic has changed many aspects of our lives. In tourism, we noticed changes in traveller behaviour in times of Covid-19. Unsurprisingly health & safety measures and cancellation policies are consumers' main concerns. These concerns drive tourists to make last-minute bookings, due to the volatility of pandemic-related events and travel restrictions. But all is not grim; it seems that the pandemic encouraged people to more responsible travel, which is what ecotourism is all about. Travellers have been giving more importance to creating a positive impact on local communities, increasingly looking for authenticity in destinations close to their home. Domestic tourism has shown positive signs in many markets since people tend to travel closer as they prefer 'staycations' away from urban centres. Nature, rural tourism, and road trips have emerged as popular travel choices in the quest for open-air experiences. Only time will tell whether these changes are short-lived trends or here to stay (UNWTO - United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2021).

2 CROSS-CULTURAL DETERMINANTS OF TOURIST PREFERENCES

The importance of studying culture and how it relates to tourism activities was already well-established in the literature. The first studies examining culture's effect on tourism focused on understanding how to cater tourism services to people from different cultures. Reisinger and Turner (1998) argued that one of the best ways to secure the long-term growth in international tourist arrivals is to understand each tourist market as an individual group of customers and their distinct cultural characteristics. This provides a basis for development and application of marketing strategies that can effectively target a specific tourist market to facilitate development of inbound tourism more successfully. That is why a comparative analysis of the cultural differences between different nationalities of tourists regarding ecotourism is a necessity. Without an adequate and sufficient understanding of the tourist market and its cultural conditioning, the industry cannot expect a significant influx in tourist arrivals (Reisinger & Turner, 1998).

One of the first steps in understanding ecotourism is understanding the motivation for a trip perceived as an eco-friendly trip. Every human decision is based on conscious realization that it is not good to act contrary to our formed belief. Tourist motives are internal, conscious impulses, that drive people to enroll into tourist activities to fulfill their need for a temporal change of the living environment. These tourist motives vary greatly from person to person

and are ranked differently. The nature of someone's preferences will determine different tourist motives for choosing a specific form of tourism and consequently tourist destination. This may lead to a conclusion that is not possible to talk only about one motive as a reason for someone's decision, but multiple motives that affect tourist behaviour. With that being said, tourist behaviour is a very complex process that is defined by different circumstances at the tourist destination and cannot be applied to different cultures or generalized within a specific culture (Veljković & Colarič-Jakše, 2014).

However, research has tried to understand whether some factors help explain differences in motivations for specific tourist preferences (such as ecotourism). In previous research on tourist preferences, most studies have focused on understanding individual-level determinants, such as age, gender, occupation, etc. Most studies conclude that pro-environmental consumers are more likely to have better general environmental knowledge and information, have more experience with PEB, are more liberal, and are more concerned about the future. They are also more likely to have higher social status, education, and income, live in larger households and are more likely to be female (Cvelbar, Grün & Dolnicar, 2016). Their age range from 35-54 years old, 82% are college graduates and are willing to spend more money than the regular tourists (Altunel & Bugday, 2019).

2.1 Pro-environmental behaviour

Human behavior has a certain influence on the environment – greater or smaller, positive or negative. As people are in an interaction with their environment almost constantly, all human behavior could be called environmental behavior. This term would include all activities regardless the fact, how insignificant their impact on the environment is. Most cases of environmental behavior can be judged according to their impact on the environment, and then labeled as environmentally friendly or unfriendly. The evaluation of certain cases can be judged easily, while the others can be doubtful. The main criteria for PEB evaluation can be divided into four criteria: issues of environmental aesthetics (litter, distortion of natural monuments etc.), issues connected with health (air pollution, toxic material in environment or the level of radiance), natural resources issues (exploitation of natural resources such as coal, petrol, water etc.) and life protection and its dignity (mass agricultural breeding, testing the cosmetic products on animals, destruction of natural biotopes and creation of migration barriers). Therefore, we can define PEB as "...behavior which is generally (or according to knowledge of environmental science) judged in the context of the considered society as a protective way of environmental behavior or a tribute to the healthy environment." (Krajhanzl, 2010). Other definitions describe PEB as "behavior that consciously seeks to minimize the negative impact of one's actions on the natural and built world" (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002) and the behaviour that directly or indirectly causes environmental change (Stern, 2000). It is mostly defined as an international attempt to minimize the human negative impact on the environment, explained through altruistic motivation (Bilynets, 2021).

Due to the variability of the types of PEB and contexts, no framework can be applied universally and predictions of PEB is behaviour-specific. The most common approaches to predict PEB include using psycho-social predictors. Normally, predictors can be divided into the categories of motivation, context and habit (Bilynets, 2021). Now let's take a look at some of the most important theories and models that were developed to research PEB.

2.2 Determinants of preferences for pro-environmental behaviour

The two main streams of research on PEB focus on socio-demographic variables and social-psychological constructs. Studies have shown that education and age have a bigger effect on sociodemographic variables while values, attitudes, and beliefs have been more successful in predicting PEB in studies on social-psychological constructs (Oreg & Katz-Gerro, 2006). In addition to empirical studies, the most important theories regarding PEB are the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), the value-belief-norm theory (Stern, 2000), and the norm-activation model (Schwartz, 1977). In the following paragraphs, we will take a closer look into these theories to better understand tourist's determinants of preferences for specific ecotourism decisions.

Ajzen's theory of planned behaviour suggests that behavioural intentions are the main determinants of behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). It is the most applied theoretical framework used to predict PEB and it was primarily aimed to explain rational behaviour (Bilynets, 2021). The theory distinguishes between three types of beliefs (behavioural, normative, and control) and between the related constructs of attitude (positive or negative evaluations about performing the target behaviour), subjective norms (i.e., the judgment of the opinions of others), and perceived behavioural control (often labeled as self-efficacy and refers to perceptions regarding the ease or difficulty of performing the target behaviour) (Ajzen, 1991). It offers a more holistic approach by studying multiple determinants simultaneously and can either be applied to a specific group of behaviours or to a more general environmental orientation which allows generalizing the findings (Morren & Grinstein, 2015). Following this theory, Mancha & Yoder (2015) among other scholars found out that people's intended behaviours are also strongly influenced by perceived social pressures. When one understands that the people close to them expect them to behave in an environmentally friendly way, it is likely to result in a substantial change in one's intentions toward the environment (Mancha & Yoder, 2015).

Another important theory on PEB is Stern's value-belief norm theory. It provides a conceptual framework with classifications and the causes for the environmentally significant individual behaviour, while heavily relying on value-belief-norm theory. "Environmentally significant behaviour can reasonably be defined by its impact: the extent to which it changes the availability of materials or energy from the environment or alters the structure and dynamics of ecosystems or the biosphere itself." (Stern, 2000). Environmental impact has always been a by-product of human actions. Only in recent years, the protection of the

environment has become an important consideration in the human decision-making process, which gives environmentally significant behaviour a second meaning: “It can now be defined from the actor’s standpoint as behaviour that is undertaken with the intention to change (normally, to benefit) the environment” (Stern, 2000). Stern divides environmentally significant behaviour into the following types: environmental activism, non-activist behaviours in the public sphere, private-sphere environmentalism, and other environmentally significant behaviours. Some behaviour affects environmental change directly, such as clearing forests or disposing of waste. Other behaviour affects environmental change indirectly and can be as significant as direct behavioural intents. In some cases, even more significant. For example: accepting new international environment development policies, tax regulations, and commodity prices change can have greater impact on PEB than direct behavioural intents (Stern, 2000).

The norm activation model by Schwartz (1977) explains altruistic and environmentally friendly behaviour. Altruistic behaviour is when people act for the benefit of others, even if it presents a burden to them. The Schwartz’s theory consists of three fundamental propositions: an obligation proposition, an activation proposition, and a defense proposition (Schwartz, 1977).

- Altruistic behaviour is influenced by the intensity of a person’s moral obligation that they feel to take specific actions.
- Feelings of moral responsibility are formed in different situations and are influenced by the individual's cognitive norms and values.
- Feelings of moral responsibility may be neutralized before the instinct action by defenses against the relevance of the obligation.

From the first theory proposition we can draw conclusions that individual differences in personal norms are closely related to differences in altruistic behaviour. When an individual becomes aware of the situation, they would act in accordance with their moral compass. The second proposition suggest that the impact of personal feelings of moral obligation is a function of factors, which influences the activation of personal norms and the tendency to become aware of the consequences of one's behaviour. If an individual perceives the situation from their point of view in a form of the consequences that their actions will have on others, they are more likely to feel the obligation to act according to their norms. And the third proposition suggests that even when a person feels a moral obligation, they may not influence this behaviour. If a person anticipates consequences for their actions that they feel obligated to perform, they may engage various defenses against this obligation (Schwartz, 1977).

2.3 Hofstede's cultural dimensions

Arguably one of the most important and widespread models for the development of the cultural dimensions framework, on both country and individual level, is the work of a Dutch scholar and researcher Geert Hofstede (Agodzo, 2014). Hofstede provided us with two renowned works (1980 and 2001) in the multidimensional measure of cultural values. His model is an overwhelmingly dominant metric of culture to this day, thanks to several reasons. First, its cultural dimensions, thanks to a comprehensive review of related literature, fully cover and extend major conceptualizations of culture developed through time. Second, his cultural dimensions were empirically developed, using a survey of about 100,000 IBM employees in 66 different countries. And third, there are more than 2,700 referred journal articles that cite Hofstede's work – the overwhelming majority of these cross-cultural studies heavily replicate the typology and find it to be the most important theory of culture types (Yoo, Donthu & Lenartowicz, 2011).

The most recent one is Hofstede's Six Dimensions of Culture model, which has developed through the decades from its elder (outdated) versions, for example, a set of four or five cultural dimensions (Dimitrov, 2014). The following six dimensions of the latest Hofstede's model are based on extensive research done by Professor Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede, Michael Minkov, and their research teams. "The cultural dimensions represent independent preferences for one state of affairs over another that distinguish countries (rather than individuals) from each other. The country scores on the dimensions are relative, in that we are all human and simultaneously we are all unique. In other words, culture can only be used meaningfully by comparison." (Hofstede Insights, 2021). We should keep this in mind while we interpret the following descriptions of the six dimensions.

Power distance is the first dimension of national culture. "It indicates the extent to which a society accepts the fact that power in institutions and organizations is distributed unequally." (Hofstede, 1980). It also indicates "the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally." (Hofstede, 2011). Some societies are more unequal than others, but at the end of the day, power and inequality are aspects of every society (Hofstede, 2011).

Uncertainty avoidance as the second dimension indicates society's tolerance for ambiguity (which is not the same as risk avoidance). "It indicates to what extent a culture programs its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured situations." (Hofstede, 2011). Countries where uncertainty avoidance is strong, usually do not tolerate deviant ideas and behaviours, have established more formal rules, and try to avoid uncertain and ambiguous situations by providing greater career stability. Unfortunately, these societies are also characterized by higher levels of anxiety and aggressiveness that creates a strong inner urge to work hard (Hofstede, 1980).

Collectivism vs. Individualism “describes the relationship between the individual and the collectivity that prevails in a given society. It is reflected in the way people live together.” (Hofstede, 2001). This is one of the most important dimensions and we will discuss this dimension more extensively in the next chapter.

Masculinity vs. Femininity is another societal dimension that measures “the extent to which the dominant values in society are ‘masculine’ – that is, assertiveness, the acquisition of money and things, and not caring for others, the quality of life, or people.” (Hofstede, 1980). These are considered ‘masculine’ values and can “from one country to another contain a dimension from very assertive and competitive and maximally different from women's values on the one side, to modest and caring and similar to women's values on the other.” (Hofstede, 2011). The modest, caring pole on the other hand is called ‘feminine’ and does not vary much from country to country (Hofstede, 2011).

Long-Term vs. Short-Term Orientation is the dimension that was later added as a fifth dimension to the original four-dimensional model from 1980 and was first identified in a survey among students from 23 countries. Even though the primary survey included more than 50 countries, the student survey showed that the dimension is strongly correlated with the recent economic growth and proved to be relevant for this day and age. Values found at the long-term pole “were perseverance, thrift, ordering relationships by status, and having a sense of shame; values at the opposite, short-term pole were reciprocating social obligations, respect for tradition, protecting one's 'face', and personal steadiness and stability.” (Hofstede, 2011).

Restraint vs. Indulgence is the last dimension and was also added later, this time following the ‘World Values Survey’. It is complementary to Long- versus Short-Term Orientation – in fact, it is loosely negatively correlated to it. “Indulgence stands for a society that allows relatively free gratification of basic and natural human desires related to enjoying life and having fun. Restraint stands for a society that controls gratification of needs and regulates it by means of strict social norms.” (Hofstede, 2011).

2.4 Collectivistic vs. individualistic cultures

One of Hofstede’s dimensions in particular is often used for the national cultural comparison of people’s perception when it comes to environmentalism. It is the balance between collectivism and individualism. Although there is a number of cultural models that have been introduced in an attempt to capture a set of core norms and values shared by the members of specific cultures, one common dichotomy studied by psychologists has made the difference between individualism and collectivism (Hofstede, 2011) when studying cultural differences on a more national level. Individualism-collectivism is already an old concept in social theory, that can be traced back to the nineteenth century. While individualistic societies emphasize ‘I’ consciousness, autonomy, emotional independence, pleasure-seeking, and

universalism, collectivistic societies stress ‘we’ consciousness, collective identity, group solidarity, sharing, and particularism (Kim & Lee, 2008).

In previous research on this topic, most scholars typically take the USA as a reference for strong individualistic culture and South Korea on the other side of the spectrum, regarded as a strong collectivistic culture (Culiberg & Gambier, 2015). Some scholars also take Japan as an example of strong collectivistic culture, but the Japanese collectivism has been attributed to characteristics that are assumed to be unique to the Japanese (Kim & Lee, 2008). Individualistic nations such as the USA, tend to have cultural values that encourage the expression of one’s personal beliefs, where collectivistic nations such as those of East and Southeast Asia tend to emphasize the importance of group goals over individual needs (Zaval, 2016). Reisinger and Turner predict that these differences come from the environment the people live. “In a high uncertainty culture as in Korea, people avoid uncertainty and ambiguity by not taking risks, avoiding conflict, disagreement, and competition.” (Reisinger & Turner, 1998). People in the kind of environment where foreign ideas and behaviour are not welcome, seek stability, security, and order. In a low uncertainty culture such as the USA or Australia, society tolerates ambiguity, uncertainty, foreign behaviour, and new ideas, so people are more willing to take risks (Reisinger & Turner, 1998). For example, opportunities for unplanned action and freedom from institutionalized regulations are distinctive characteristics of Western tourists who do not feel inhibited about what to wear and how to behave when on holiday. “On the other hand, people in collectivistic cultures think of themselves less as individuals and more as being members of some group. A long vacation away from the group means painful separation and a danger to psychic wellbeing.” (Kim & Lee, 2008).

Eom and colleagues found out that when behaving pro-environmentally was perceived to be an accepted social norm, participants from collectivistic nations were more likely to choose eco-friendly products (Eom, Kim, Sherman & Ishii, 2016). Schultz (2002) noticed clear differences across countries in the level of concern and the overall level of egoistic, altruistic, and biospheric attitudes. A considerable amount of research conducted in collectivistic cultures suggests that “...people should be more likely to engage in actions that address large-scale social issues like environmental problems, even when the problem does not directly affect them or when the action does not directly benefit the individual.” (Schultz, 2002).

Morren (2015), on the other hand, did not reach the same conclusions. His research finds that in individualistic countries attitudes toward the environment are linked with intention to behave environmentally more than in collectivistic countries. Furthermore, he acknowledges that the intention to behave environmentally is more likely to materialize to actual environmental behaviour in more developed countries. Assuming that in these countries people feel more empowered to act environmentally than in less developed countries. It seems that the growing pressure to be eco-friendly in developing countries is becoming a dominant force (Morren & Grinstein, 2015).

2.5 Previous research on cultural differences in pro-environmental behaviour

At the collective – societal or national level, research has also shown that certain collective or society-level factors affect individual pro-environmental preferences. Culiberg and Gambier's main finding is that individual PEB is influenced by perceived norms from relevant others (family and friends) which, in turn, are influenced by the perceived pro-environmental norm at the country level. If an individual believes that others will follow the norms and that others expect them to follow the norms, they will more likely behave pro-environmentally. That is why they think public policymakers should communicate the importance of environmental issues at the national level. "The government could be the first to set a good example, followed by municipalities and local communities. Also, mass media campaigns with pro-environmental messages could reinforce the norm at the country level in people's minds." (Culiberg & Gambier, 2015).

Furthermore, Bilynets and Cvelbar also stress the importance of the industry's engagement in a sustainable development approach, so that PEB is no longer limited to a niche product such as ecotourism. Environmental awareness, education, and the development of the tourist-place relationship are of great importance when striving for pro-environmentalism. Every individual plays a role in climate change mitigation to stimulate collective changes in society. With this approach, we can achieve collective behavioural change through a set of normative suggestions for an improved policy intervention from government top-down initiatives (Bilynets & Cvelbar, 2019).

Another research worth mentioning is Bamberg & Möser's (2007) extension of the Hines et al. (1986/87) analysis and synthesis of research on responsible environmental behaviour. They wanted to identify variables reliably associated with PEB and quantitatively determine the strengths of these relationships. The nine model variables they were assessing simultaneously were: problem, attribution, social norm, guilt, perceived behavioural control, attitude, moral norm, intention and behaviour. The information gathered from their research showed great differences from research concluded in the last decade towards the nine psycho-social constructs. Whereas a considerable number of studies have analysed the role of problem awareness/knowledge, attitude, perceived behavioural control, social norm, moral norm, and intention as behavioural predictors, the number of studies including 'moral' feelings like guilt or shame as predictors are considerably lower. Bamberg & Möser's results indicate a strong heterogeneity of the pooled primary correlations, which confirms a high temporal stability of the association between psycho-social variables and proenvironmental behaviour. They found out that pro-environmental behavioural intention facilitate the impact of all other psycho-social variables on pro-environmental behavior. Besides, this indicates that problem awareness is an important but indirect determinant of pro-environmental intention. In other words, people who have stronger feelings of guilt when not behaving in a pro-environmental way also tend to view the performance of the pro-environmental option as easier and associate more positive personal consequences with choosing the pro-environmental option (Bamberg & Möser, 2007).

In her doctoral dissertation, Bilynets used mixed-method approach to identify key constructs responsible for cross-contextual behaviour and key factors impacting tourist PEB in different cross-contextual scenarios. She found out that people are less likely to act pro-environmentally when going on holidays. “Tourists do not downgrade their pro-environmental behaviour intentionally, however, due to the change of the context additional barriers arise, and tourists are more likely to find justification for worsening behaviour than try to act pro-environmentally.” (Bilynets, 2021). Another crucial finding is that people perceive their experience differently. The extent to which one feels like a tourist in a destination impacts their behaviour. If people feel like a stereotypical tourist and will be approached obtrusively by service providers, they would downgrade their behaviour at the destination. Also, service providers that have environmental initiatives in place, which are visible to tourists, are more likely to be perceived as environmentally friendly and motivate tourists to also act pro-environmentally. There are many determinants, but one thing is for sure – people who behave pro-environmentally in their daily lives are more likely to behave pro-environmentally also at the destination (Bilynets, 2021).

So, who behaves the most pro-environmentally? In the following paragraphs, we present studies that focused on specific cultures and their differences in pro-environmental behaviour at the destination. Surveys in the past have provided us with an important insight into the distinct differences between Eastern engagement in shengtai lüyou and Western engagement in ecotourism regarding travel patterns and on-site activities. A survey of 687 domestic and international visitors to Yunnan Province by Ye and Xue (2005) found that Western international tourists in China had bigger environmental awareness and greater respect for traditional culture. Their Eastern counterparts learn about their destinations principally from newspapers and television, rather than their own inquiries, and are more likely to travel in organized package tours (Buckley, Cater, Zhong & Chen, 2008).

When comparing the priorities of three-way value orientation (egoistic, altruistic, and biospheric) between Western and Eastern tourists, results show that Malaysian tourists possess egoistic values more than tourists from Europe and other developed countries. Consequently, they are less concerned about the environment compared to their international counterparts. “Furthermore, egoistic values have a strong negative relationship with environmental concern, whereas altruistic and biospheric values are positively related to this variable.” (Ghazvini, Kian & Sarmento, 2016).

Özdemir and Yolal (2016) conducted a cross-cultural examination of tourist behaviour in guided tours. They found that German tourists were most knowledgeable about the destination and interested in ‘real things’ (not staged attractions). American tourists scored little less on these two criteria, while Japanese tourists did not know much about the destination and are not interested in local food at all (Özdemir & Yolal, 2016).

In Thailand, they discovered profound differences in tourist preferences for elephant riding entertainment camps. While many Chinese tourists are still patronizing elephant riding,

Western tourists are gradually distancing themselves from such activities. Some argue that these preferences originate from tourist environmental knowledge and values before their visits, while others argue it is people's absence of pro-environment values. Long (2019) thinks that the Chinese lack of relevant environmental knowledge is an oversimplification. He found out that there are many Chinese tourists with sufficient pro-environmental knowledge but refuse to participate in any elephant-related activities from totally different reasons – limited access to sanctuary information and their unfamiliarity with Thai elephant tours. However, “Chinese tourists’ desire for elephant riding activities is informed by the degree of human intervention in Chinese shengtai lüyou and reinforced by media and anthropocentric traditional philosophies.” (Long, 2019).

The study conducted by Kim and Filimonau shows that when travelling, Chinese and Korean tourists are unlikely to consider lessening their environmental impacts. Furthermore, it shows that most Chinese and Korean tourists are not familiar with some fundamental concepts signifying the environmental impacts that are not likely to be used on an everyday basis, such as carbon footprint. They also failed to establish the connection between specific tourism activities and climate change (Kim & Filimonau, 2017).

In general results suggest that western tourist groups show more interest in local life at the destination, as well as ecotourism goods and services. Investigation whether preferences differ between domestic and international tourist groups showed statistically significant differences between the two groups. Western tourists seem to have a higher interest to purchase the ecotourism goods and services that destination can offer. For instance, a research of tourist preferences for ecotourism in rural communities adjacent to Kruger National Park concluded that only 48% of domestic tourists would purchase an ecotourism village tour compared to 63% of the international tourists (Chaminuka et al., 2012).

We can see that different nationalities see ecotourism in their own way. How environmentally conscious the tourists are depends on multitude of factors. From their internal factors such as motivation, norms and beliefs to the external factors. Some examples of external factors are: the geographical location, government's involvement in sustainability, educational system in the country, friends and family circles and so on. Some research also stress the importance of a person's income and educational level. Which of these factors is the most important is hard to say.

3 RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

In addition to collecting and reviewing secondary data by exploring the existing literature on culture and ecotourism in the first part of the thesis, I decided to also collect primary data with a study that will capture data on the tourism industry trends and differences in various cultures around the world in the best way possible. When designing research framework and deciding on the research methodology, I considered both qualitative and quantitative

methods of collecting data. Both have their advantages and disadvantages that I considered. After some debate and method comparison, I decided that qualitative research would be more suitable for my master thesis topic since I try to understand the motivational factors that influence different people from different nations to choose a particular ecotourism services or destinations. My empirical study included interviews with industry professionals who have long-term experience in the industry and have extensive insight into people's preferences for specific tourism services and have worked with many different tourist nationalities over the years. The most suitable interview type for collecting this kind of data was a semi-structured in-depth interview with high-ranking industry professionals, also called expert interviews. This data will complement the theory from other scholars and industry specialists reviewed in the first part.

3.1 Research design and objectives

The purpose of this research is to find out the factors in preferred destination selection among different tourist nationalities and to better understand cross-cultural differences in tourist preferences towards ecotourism. This would help tourist agencies and hotels in the ecotourism sector better understand the needs of their customers and eventually adopt their services to achieve better customer satisfaction and stay compatible in these difficult times.

The goals of the thesis include:

- Reviewing existing literature on national differences in tourist preferences
- Exploring whether specific ecotourism offers are better suited for tourists from different countries
- Determining the crucial factors tourists take into consideration while choosing among various types of ecotourism currently available on the market

In line with the goals above, the empirical part of the thesis tackles the following research questions:

- Research question 1: What are the cultural determinants of preferences for tourism in general?
- Research question 2: How do different nationalities understand what ecotourism means?
- Research question 3: What are some of the reasons for the preference of certain nationalities towards certain tourism offers?
- Research question 4: How are tourism companies adjusting products based on perceived cultural differences in these attitudes?
- Research question 5: Are there emerging trends in national preferences for ecotourism?

3.2 Research methodology

For this research, I first conducted a literature review on ecotourism and cultural differences using secondary sources obtained from research papers, reports, journals, and other publications from different organizations, scholars, and academics from the industry. For the second part of the research, I decided to collect primary data with descriptive and qualitative research. The primary data includes the qualitative research collected through semi-structured interviews with industry experts that I carefully chose. I was looking for industry experts with extensive experience, occupying relevant positions in tourist agencies from different geographic areas around the world. More precisely, my respondents are from a selected tourist agency (referred to as 'X' tourist agency below), its sister tourist agency, subsidiaries, and its other branch offices around Europe and Asia.

3.3 Data collection method

In qualitative research, interviewing is the most common way of collecting research data. "Most of the qualitative research interviews are either semi-structured, lightly structured or in-depth" (Jamshed, 2014). They are mostly used when the researcher wants to collect qualitative open-ended data of respondent's thoughts and beliefs about a particular topic and get insight into their perspectives. "The overall purpose of using semi-structured interviews for data collection is to gather information from key informants who have personal experiences, attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs related to the topic of interest" (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019).

This type of interview comprises of preset open-ended questions with follow-up questions where the individual (or sometimes a group of people) expresses their personal view on the topic. The questions are systematically designed to get the most relevant information on the topic explored by the researcher. They must be comprehensive and systematic with a focus on the desired line of action, to collect useful information and to achieve optimum use of interview time. They are usually 30 minutes or more than an hour long and carried out only once. Recording the interview is a common practice in this type of research to capture interview data more efficiently. Of course, the interviewee must agree to this. Written notes in this type of research can be relatively unreliable since key points can be missed (Jamshed, 2014). I chose this type of interview because of its personal approach, flexibility, and conversational tone which makes the respondent feel more comfortable and consequently shares more useful information. This type of interview is designed to encourage conversation between the researcher and the respondent and allow some deviations from the questions prepared for the interview. Sometimes, the researcher prepares only the topics that will be discussed or prepares more questions that will ultimately be asked at the interview. The researcher selects them during the interview according to the flow and the direction the conversation is heading which allows a comprehensive discussion (Doyle, 2020).

For my research, I chose to do interviews with experts, also called expert interviews, which include gathering data about a specific field of interest from people who are considered experts as they have a specific knowledge in their particular field. According to Bogner, Littig & Menz (2018), there are three types of expert interviews. The first type is *the exploratory expert interview*, for gaining knowledge in unknown or hardly known topics. The interviewees can either be directly involved with a particular field or have extensive knowledge. The second type is *the systematizing expert interview* which is like the exploratory expert interview and aims at the structured and comprehensive collection of data. Both types are based on technical and processual knowledge where technical knowledge represents a highly specific knowledge field and process knowledge represents the knowledge that is based on practical experience. The third type is *the theory-generating expert interview*, which gathers information from the field experts as persons with specific knowledge who hold a certain status or hold a certain function. The experts are chosen because of their in-depth knowledge or experience with a specific subject, the position they occupy, or their status. It has an analytical and interpretative perspective that links connections in the empirical data and develops theoretical approaches (Döringer, 2020).

The second interview method is *problem-centred interview*, which is a qualitative face-to-face interview method that comprises central principles of qualitative research (openness, flexibility, and process orientation) and specific explorations by the structured theoretical framework. The interview has a narrative beginning with an open dialog and a more structured ending with precise follow-up questions. During the interview the researcher actively encourages participants to tell their stories but after the interviewee had finished the narrative episode, the interviewer moves on to the structured questions that aim to enquire about aspects, details, and personal opinions that are of potential research interest. These questions are based on previously gathered information or from the topics that emerge during the narrative part. “Its purpose is not to establish a rigid question-answer scheme but rather to support the researcher with a thematic framework that serves as an orientation to the premeditated research questions.” (Döringer, 2020).

The theory gathering expert interview defined by Bogner and Menz (2009) and problem centred interview by Witzel (1982, 2000) have proven to be an effective approach for investigating the implicit dimensions of expert knowledge and their personal experiences. One takes into account the specificity of interviewing experts and the complexity of their knowledge, and the other derives the person’s perspective and provides a structure for the interview with an open narrative (Döringer, 2020). This is why I chose expert interviews for collecting my secondary data for this research.

3.4 Sample description

For my respondents, I chose industry specialists from different parts of the world that have extensive experience working with tourists with different nationalities. This way I was able

to collect as much of the relevant information as possible and compare the findings. The respondents I interviewed were managers, managing directors, and leaders from several different international tourist agencies that all originated from a mother company that I refer to as tourist agency X. It was established in the year 2000 and started as a family business that “gradually evolved into one of the most important and fastest-growing incoming tour operators in Europe” (Tourist agency X, 2021). Today it is the largest national inbound operator in Slovenia. As a DMC (Destination Management Company), their main scope of work is planning, organizing, and managing incoming groups from all over the world. The company’s international staff members come from more than 10 different countries, communicate with local tour operators in their native language, and act as an extended arm of local tourist agencies. They “excel as the market leader when it comes to group travel in Southeast and Eastern Europe, dynamically spreading towards covering all of Continental Europe” (Tourist agency X, 2021). The majority of their incoming tourist groups come from Southeast Asian countries. They have sales and operational offices in Shanghai, China; Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia; Pune, India; London, United Kingdom; Athens, Greece; and Pula, Croatia. I managed to get in touch with directors of the international offices listed in Table 1:

Table 1: Sample description

	Region/ market	Gender	Age	Nationality	Job position at the time of the interview	Cultures of interaction
Respondent A	United Kingdom	Male	43	Slovenian	CEO of the X tourist agency and managing director of London office	Western Europe, Scandinavia, USA, and ASEAN
Respondent B	India	Female	39	Indian	Sales and marketing director of Pune office	India
Respondent C	China	Male	45	Chinese	Managing director of Shanghai office	China
Respondent D	South-east Asia	Male	47	Malaysian	Managing director of Kota Kinabalu office	Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei
Respondent E	Greece	Male	48	Greek	Managing director of Athens, Greece office	England, Italy, and USA

Source: Own work.

All my respondents have eighteen or more years of experience in the tourism industry. Through the years, they have all worked with many different tourist nationalities but for the

interview purposes, they were asked to pick the nationalities they work with the most. When conducting the interview, each respondent was asked to have in mind these nationalities and answer accordingly. This way I got valuable and relevant data for ASEAN countries (China, India Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Singapore, etc.) representing Eastern block of countries and the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Italy, Greece, and Scandinavian countries representing Western block of countries.

3.5 Interview questions

Before conducting the interview, I collected some basic information from respondents for statistical purposes to understand the demographic characteristics of the sample. Some of this information is presented in Table 1.

The main interview was divided into two parts. In the first part, there were general questions about ecotourism – expert’s opinions about the industry. Those questions were directed to them directly, where respondents were asked how they feel about ecotourism, its impact, and emerging trends in the industry. The second part consisted of questions regarding their professional experience (with tourist groups they were working with). Here we went deep into their long-term experience working with specific nationalities and asked questions that help us understand the culture, their way of thinking, and their tourism preferences. This way we can discover people’s preferences in choosing one tourism service over another. In this part, the respondents were also asked about the trends that they might have noticed during the last few years in the industry and about the future projections for the industry and ecotourism. These questions were divided further into four smaller parts and consisted of the main following questions:

- Questions about tourists planning behaviour
 - How the tourists behave before, during, and after vacation
- Questions about eco-friendly tourism trends
 - What are the main new trends that are emerging in ecotourism
- Questions about culture and tourism
 - Cultural determinants for preferences in tourism destination selection
- Questions about culture and ecotourism
 - Cultural determinants for preferences in ecotourism destination selection

3.6 Data analysis method

Qualitative research “encompasses a diverse collection of approaches to inquiry intended to generate knowledge actually grounded in human experience” (Sandelowski, 2004). Each approach has specific techniques for conducting, documenting, and evaluating data analysis processes that must be carried out rigorously and methodically to yield meaningful and

useful results (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017). They can be incredibly diverse and complicated. Therefore, a method that would adequately outline the theory in a clear, flexible, and widely accessible way is needed. This approach is called the thematic analysis. It offers an accessible and theoretically flexible approach and should be regarded as a fundamental method to analyze qualitative data in the eyes of many. It provides core skills that are useful for conducting many other forms of analyses. One of its main benefits is the flexibility as it is appropriate for all types of interviews (in-depth, structured, semi-structured, etc.) and all types of data (binary, ordinal, binominal, etc.) (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Thematic content analysis is divided into the inductive and the deductive approach. The inductive or the ‘bottom-up’ approach uses raw data to generate themes and is closely related to the data collected from participants. But on the other hand, it might not be strongly related to specific questions that the participants were asked. The inductive approach is therefore “a process of coding the data without trying to fit it into a preexisting coding frame or the researcher’s analytic preconceptions.” (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017). In contrast, the deductive approach draws themes from theory, previous research, and conceptual framework. This approach is driven by the researchers’ theoretical or analytic interest and may provide a more detailed analysis of some aspect of the data (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017). This thesis uses deductive approach of thematic content analysis.

4 FINDINGS

In this chapter, we will analyze and interpret the data gathered from the interviews with 5 high-ranking industry specialists. During the interviews, some topics turned out to be a common belief that most the respondents agreed with and therefore emerged as important themes for further analysis. These topics, together with those that emerged from the theory will be analyzed to see if there are any differences in perceiving cultural determinants in preferences for ecotourism.

4.1 Experts’ understandings of ecotourism

Respondents’ associations with the term ecotourism were green/sustainable/responsible tourism or development that bases on nature and environment and has a positive impact on the local flora and fauna, environment, and local communities. Often, we associate ecotourism with the ongoing climate change and the responsibility to act by limiting our negative impact on the destination, increase our positive impact, and to travel as simply as possible.

Despite the positive associations with ecotourism, almost every respondent agreed that ecotourism also has some negative impacts. Some of the most destructive impacts that were pointed out were ‘greenwashing’ and development of the infrastructure. Greenwashing is

the term used to describe the tourism providers that try to label themselves as green or sustainable to attract more tourists. Like two respondents said, they often pretend to be sustainable solely for economic reasons.

“Some tourism service providers see ecotourism from a business perspective and use it as a money-making tool, to provide fake ecotourism services to people who are not that aware and knowledgeable about ecotourism.” (Respondent B)

This problem was also found in the theory where we found out that some tour operators label themselves as sustainable or eco-friendly without satisfying the basic requirements to be classified as such, only to gain benefits from this label. The consequence is that ecotourism is becoming a blur.

Another problem with ecotourism is the development of local environment. No matter how ‘eco’ tourism services are, they still require some level of development of the infrastructure and facilities.

“Whenever you want to promote ecotourism you have to have infrastructure and development of basic facilities. And this development is not all bad, but sometimes you must interfere with nature, not to mention the influx of people and traffic in those areas. The ecotourism porpoise is to preserve nature, but this kind of development is against this principle.” (Respondent B)

On the contrary, two respondents think that it is difficult for ecotourism itself to have a negative impact. But even if the destination is eco-friendly, the means of getting to that location are far from sustainable and are leaving a negative impact. Transportation in general, mainly flights, emit a lot of emissions. Furthermore, there are non-recyclable items that are made of plastic and often get discarded after only one use. Many other factors, directly or indirectly linked to ecotourism, prevent it to be a fully sustainable way of travel.

4.2 Tourist planning behaviour

To better understand tourist determinants for preferences of tourism offers, we must understand their motivation and behaviour. Not only on the road but also during the time leading up to it. We must break apart the whole process – from the motivation and the idea at the beginning to the very end of the trip. Especially the planning period where the decision-making process comes into play. At this point, tourists make conscious decisions based on their previous experience, preferences, motivation, and personal beliefs that will affect the rest of their trip.

4.2.1 Idea, gathering information, and planning

The idea of where they want to go can be influenced by their preferences for activities, culture, history, climate, type of tourism, scope of interest, and ultimately it is also heavily influenced through the media, outer world, and countless other factors. This idea for tourism preference is therefore based on people's individual determinants and outside factors such as national culture, society, friends, family, etc.

Most tourists our respondents interacted with come prepared with a firm idea of where they want to travel. They pick their destination in advance and search for relevant information beforehand. Because of the internet, people are more prepared as it is easier to find information. This is evident in developed, highly educated countries such as America, Australia, Japan, and Western European countries. Their tourist groups and tours are often planned to perfection. But not only because of their education or development levels but other factors such as geographical area and consequently expensive transportation connections.

“The most prepared can only be one – Japanese. They are the most prepared and don't want any improvisation on the trip. They usually plan their trips meticulously a year in advance. Arabic and Middle Easterners, on the other hand, are the least prepared tourists I interacted with.” (Respondent A)

Indian people also don't plan long in advance. They might know where they want to go but actual planning of the trip starts no more than three months before and bookings are made no more than one month before. They usually have very basic knowledge about the destination.

“They don't have in-depth knowledge of how trip would really work. For example: I have a group of 200 people and they want a helicopter ride around the palace of Versailles. Realistically, the logistics of this is impossible and when it would come to picture, the thing will go haywire. We have to be very realistic when working with them, especially when we promise something to them.” (Respondent B)

ASEAN countries like China, Indonesia, Malaysia, etc. are somewhere in the middle on this scale, with some exceptions like Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Taiwan. Many of those countries are developing on a great scale and with it its people. China is changing rapidly, and even though older generations will probably never change their mindset, a shift in preferences can already be seen in younger generations.

“In China, more and more young people prefer self-service travelling and they plan their trips long in advance. Old travellers on the other hand don't plan to much. They hand all their preferences and requirements over to the local tourism service provider to organise everything for them. We also have a lot of special requests – they find one article online and want to change the whole itinerary just to visit that place.” (Respondent C)

4.2.2 Destination selection, travelling, and points of interest

Many tourists, regardless of nationality, usually want to travel to a destination that is very different from their home country. For example, Hong Kong people live in a densely populated area that does not have many natural features so they love to travel to natural places like canyons, lakes, mountains - this will pique their interest. Also, their tours are slow-paced with one activity per day or two. This can be also linked to the fast-paced style of living that big cities have.

“Hong Kong people would like to go to some place where not so many people have been to. They want something new to show off and say you never been there, but I have! Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore are another way around. They are very afraid of new places. They listen to friends and family who had been there and ask a lot of questions to make sure it is well developed and safe to go there and then they will think whether they want to go there. If the place is without shopping – forget it! They want well promoted kind of destination that everybody wants to go there.” (Respondent D)

The social stigma applied to Chinese tourists is that they just want to take a picture for their social media account and move to the next place without a meaningful experience where they would connect with local culture and people. Let's see if this rings true among our respondents.

Most Chinese tourists like to do classical sightseeing tours in Western modern style cities that also provide good shopping opportunities. Summer tourism on the beach is also popular among the Chinese but we must not forget about the natural wonders and protected areas. If we talk about tourist group travel, Chinese tourist groups are in Respondent's A opinion most disciplined, organized, and on time. The same goes for the Koreans. This might have to do with the fact that they live in a collectivistic society where people prioritize the needs of a group for a greater good before taking care of their personal needs.

We can all agree that food is an important aspect of travelling. For a vast majority of nationalities, food is not a difficult part of the tour to manage if you have meat and vegetarian options. But for one nationality it seems that food is the most important aspect. According to our respondents, Indians are the most complicated nation when it comes to food. Indian meat, Indian vegetarian, curry, no dairy, halal food, etc. These can be their common requests for food, and some are connected to their religion or traditions. But it also depends on the age group. Younger generations are not that rigid about the traditional rules and tend to break them when not travelling with their parents or older people. However, if they are around, they still feel obliged to follow the rules.

American and European tourists enjoy classical tourism – exploring the world but at a slower pace than Asian nationalities. Their itineraries are not packed with many activities and they contain more archaeological or cultural sightseeing and attending cultural events like opera or theatre. For them, shopping is also not that important except for souvenir shopping, of

course. Europeans are also big on outdoor tourism and like to take active holidays in nature where it is not so crowded. The same goes for hotel selection. A very big portion of European tourists chooses smaller, boutique hotels in the outskirts of the big cities. Big-branded hotels do not interest them. They want local, authentic experiences.

“Some English groups that I have are very interested to see local life and eat in local restaurants. For example: maybe I will find them a very small restaurant somewhere with a nice garden and a nice view and it will be the highlight for them. They would see the acropolis and everything and they would still say this restaurant was fantastic.”
(Respondent E)

They are very open and usually interested in learning new information about local life and customs. As Western societies are much more horizontal and find it normal to debate and discuss in public, they are much more outspoken than their Asian counterparts. Besides, they often speak the same language as the guide, as for the Asian people the knowledge of the English language is not that common. Chinese tourists usually cannot communicate well in English and they do not ask a lot of questions, unless they have a Chinese-speaking guide. A good tour guide is very important also for ecotourism because they can teach them about local traditions and customs.

4.3 Culture and tourism

In the following subchapters, I will further dissect the destination preferences of different nationalities, what hotels are they selecting, and what interests them at the destination.

4.3.1 Destination preferences

From all the different destinations Asian tourists most often choose (beach, natural areas, urban centres), all have one top preference in common – cities. Regardless of the nationality, all tourists most often choose big urban areas that offer many activities and entertainment opportunities. Not to mention the connectivity, logistical convenience, and larger number of tourism services. Even if the groups stay a day or two in nature, they still request accommodation in the cities and then drive to natural sites where they plan different activities throughout the day. Most groups from Asia do not stay in nature for long, not more than two or three days. This is more than enough for them. Therefore, urban tourism is on the top of our destination list.

Tourists that live in big cities like Beijing and Shanghai or the city-states like Hong Kong and Singapore are the exception that proves the rule. These tourists come from big developed cities, so when they travel, they wish to experience something different from what they are used to. They most often choose beach holidays and natural areas where they can connect to the environment and experience the wildlife. The case is similar to Western travellers.

“Here in Greece most tourists will come for summer holidays to enjoy the beach. This also has to do with the natural landscape of Greece. The big majority is the coastline and islands for which Greece is known for. Let’s say that long haul travellers prefer more archaeological and natural sites. For example: American clients will come to see most important famous sites while Europeans will come for summer holiday only to one island for one week and stay in all-inclusive hotel, not go anywhere, and swim in the pool.” (Respondent E)

Many predict that after the Covid-19 pandemic this situation will change and some of the respondents already noticed the change for these preferences. They noted an increase in environmental tourism where more people travel outside the urban areas. They have groups that are requesting more nature instead of urban centres. Many agree that beaches, mountains, and other less populated areas will be the next top destinations. Respondent B said that people in India now want to go away from heavily crowded places like the Taj Mahal and travel to less populated places. One thing is for sure: the ongoing global pandemic hit India hard, so it is easy to see why people act this way and change their preferences. But respondents agree that this is not only the seasonal trend that will disappear in time. This pandemic will likely leave such a big impact on people that it might change many aspects of our lives, including the way we travel.

“The new trend is emerging where more and more groups want to go to nature instead of urban areas. Hiking tours from Korea and Taiwan are on the rise and the Covid-19 pandemic will only speed up this process. The people will not only want to be more in nature but will try to avoid cities. At least initially, they will try to avoid cities.” (Respondent A)

Another force is accelerating the changing trend in cultural preferences for these destinations: global climate change. And nobody cares more about climate change than young generations: Generation Z and Millennials. These generations are, in our respondents’ opinion, the driving force in the ecotourism movement.

“There is a big split between older and younger generations. Old still like to travel in groups like twenty years ago and move through eight different countries. Younger generations are much more conscious about environment and they are the ones we should target. Since 2008 the itineraries have changed a lot. Before they had more packed itineraries that stretched through several countries, but now they have more normal ones.” (Respondent A)

During the interviews, we noted an interesting preference for destination selection with Chinese tourists. Respondent C said they had many groups that travelled to certain destinations due to political reasons. These clients are interested in ‘Red elements’ or ‘Red tourism’. This is political tourism that focuses on the political system of communism and often includes ex-Yugoslavian countries, countries from the former Soviet Union, or other countries with historical significance to Chinese Communism. They want to travel to those countries to see how people live in fellow communist countries around the world.

4.3.2 Accommodation preferences

When it comes to hotel selection, most Asian customers that our Respondents B, C & D have interacted with, liked staying in all-inclusive, full-service, luxury hotels from big international chains. To my surprise, most respondents stressed the importance of a big, glamorous lobby for Asian tourists, especially the Chinese. This emphasis is not entirely clear, but they presume it has to do with the status symbol and the feeling of staying in a luxury hotel.

One hotel, in particular, was pointed out during the interviews. Respondent D said that recently they received a lot of requests for Parkroyal Collection Pickering Hotel in Singapore. This is an eco-friendly hotel that is one of the kind and is on the top of the preferred hotel selection for Singapore.

These customers often request special rooms and specifically ask for twin rooms that have separated beds and not double (even if they travel with their significant other). This has to do with the culture and customs that they are used to at home. Chinese people often sleep on futons, which are usually single, but they are laid down next to each other.

As we mentioned before, these travellers are also demanding when it comes to air conditioning and do not easily accept a room without it. Like Respondent D said, this is especially true for the Philippine and Indonesian travellers. It is believed that there are two main reasons. The first one is the fact that people want to experience an unaccustomed level of service/perks when travelling. And the other one is climate. These customers often travel to destinations where the climate is very different from what they are used to. For the big majority of ASEAN travellers, peak summer months in Europe are not ideal and they try to avoid it. For them, the high season is shifted from the main holiday season in Europe to May or September. June, July, and August are too hot for them.

With Western travellers, hotel selection turned out to be much more diverse in comparison to their Asian counterparts. According to our respondents, it is hard to pinpoint one type of hotel that most tourists choose for their accommodation. This is especially true for European tourists. Europe is such a diverse continent that it is harder to generalise their hotel choice. With American tourists, it is a little bit easier. They are slightly more inclined to famous hotel chains, which often originate from America. This way they know what to expect from the accommodation facilities and service.

“It depends on nationality. For example: Italians will search for more eco-friendly boutique hotels on small (not famous) islands. But some other Balkan nationalities in north Greece will look for the budget to be small.” (Respondents E)

4.3.3 Interest preferences

To see how different nationalities care for the destination that they are travelling to, we asked our respondents to match and evaluate different nationalities in three categories. We asked about tourist interests in local food, people, and customs for the first category. The second category was the environment at the destination. And third, the lifestyle of the local communities.

First group of interests was the local food, culture, and customs. Here, Western travellers scored the most points. Westerners are generally interested in local life and the way people live at the destination. They like to connect with the local environment and get to know the local way of living. For food, Italians are on the top of this list, followed by English tourists. We could probably also include French tourists but unfortunately, we did not have any relevant mention from our respondents to draw conclusions.

In Asia, Malaysian tourists turned out to be the most interested in local food, culture, and customs, followed by Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. For Indian and Chinese tourists, this category was not on the top of their list. Even though Indians care about food, probably more than their Asian neighbours, they are not interested in trying local cuisine at all. They are strict on food and often request only Indian meals. This is very important to them and most of the time, they want to have detailed menus for the whole trip.

Our second category was the tourists' interest in the natural environment at the destination. Natural wonders and protected areas are to our surprise very interesting to Chinese tourists. Respondent A mentioned Plitvice as an example. China supposedly has a natural park that is like Park Plitvice in Croatia. They call the Plitvice waterfalls a 'western sibling' because of the many similarities that the two parks share. Also, at the top of this category are again English and American tourists and tourists from Hong Kong and Singapore. The nationality that again scored the least points in the category was Indian.

With the third category, where we were asking about the interest in the lifestyle of the residents, American tourists scored the most points by far. Especially when they travel to other Western countries, as they can relate to local people. Besides this, they are open and outgoing. European tourists also scored high in this category, followed by Malaysian, Chinese, and again, at the end of the list, Indian tourists.

4.4 Culture and ecotourism

Different nationalities have different opinions about ecotourism. And the definition of ecotourism is not the same everywhere. A clear example of this is China and their ancient concept of shengtai lüyou which is like ecotourism in practice and principle but has slightly different views on nature preservation and other aspects. That is why we asked our

respondents what connotation the word ecotourism has in their country and what people usually think of when they hear the word ecotourism.

“Rural tourism that is about the nature – back to the roots. And there is huge potential for this in India, but there is so much people in India, that it can get mainstream very fast.”

(Respondent B)

Nature and the environment are the basis of every nationality’s perception of ecotourism. When they think of ecotourism they think of nature or something that has to do with nature. ASEAN tourists also think about the limitations that ecotourism expects from a tourist. Things like limited facilities, limited usage of services, and the idea to travel as simple as possible.

“Recycle, reduce everything, and don’t leave any trace behind you. Only leave the footprint (and take a picture).” (Respondent C)

The term itself is associated with a more upscale, trendy (even luxury) connotation in most countries. Most of our respondents say that ecotourism has a more upscale sound to it in their countries. Except for India and Greece, where the respondents say it is somewhere in the middle. Except for abroad, where they think it is more luxury. This has to do with the higher prices that are usually in place for ecotourism services but nowadays the price is getting lower and lower.

“For the Greek people, not. I think who are interested in ecotourism, they will find ways to do it in even lower budget or any budget let’s say.” (Respondent E)

Some countries have more ecotourism providers than others. I think that this is directly connected to a government’s interest for a sustainable future. Many countries facilitate environmentally friendly behaviour by giving out subsidies and put in place other mitigating circumstances for ecotourism providers. Sustainability is very high on the English agenda, for example. Respondent A evaluates that ecotourism is so big in England that the local population is more inclined to choose sustainable tourism offers in the country than foreigners. Domestic ecotourism is booming and surpassing the foreign ecotourism overnight stays in the country. Respondent A estimates that the situation is similar in Scandinavia but cannot say for sure, due to lack of information.

“England is on the forefront in the sustainability and fighting climate change. They are pushing this eco-agenda hard.” (Respondent A)

This is not the case with other respondents. In other interviews, respondents answered the exact opposite. In India, China, Malaysia, and Greece, foreigners are the main guests at local eco-hotels. In India, most guests in sustainable accommodation facilities come from Europe, Australia, and America. Scandinavians in Europe being the leading group of eco-conscious guests.

“Also, Australian, and American, but Europeans are more about the nature. Because they live in cities and want to see more nature.” (Respondent B)

In Greece, most eco-tourists come from Northern Europe and England. According to Respondent B, people from these countries care for sustainable tourism more than others. Respondent C gave a similar answer and listed countries like Germany, Sweden or England, and Australia. And while Responded C agreed with this list, he added:

“Before, ten years ago, it was foreigners. The richer the guest, more inclined to ecotourism. But right now, you see more and more local people (choosing ecotourism services over regular tourism services).” (Respondent C)

When talking about the currently popular ecotourism destinations, we find that in Europe, northern countries are the top choice for today’s eco-tourists.

“Of course, there are destinations that try to be eco-friendly more than others. Slovenia for sure is at the front of this movement. Only Finland, Norway, and Iceland are better than Slovenia. These are the symbols of sustainable tourism in Europe.” (Respondent A)

Besides, other respondents agreed that European countries are now the top eco-destinations, but we must not forget about Asian eco-destinations in Malaysia, Thailand, Japan, and New Zealand which are just as popular if not even more. ASEAN tourists nowadays chose more sustainable ways of travel and ecotourism is booming because of their growing interest in neighbouring eco-destinations.

“Wood is their concept of ecotourism. Lakes, rivers nature and when it comes to food: local homemade traditional food. Also, local DIY (do it yourself) shops, hiking, snorkelling, or horse riding. This is the trend we are looking at when it comes to ecotourism. New Zealand is their first ecotourism destination. Second, Japan and if we talk Europe first thing on their mind is Switzerland.” (Respondent D)

From all the sustainable activities that eco-tourists like to engage in, hiking is probably the most popular one. Hiking or mountain climbing is widely popular in almost all countries. It does not require a lot of equipment; it is cheap, and everybody can do it. The Respondent from Malaysia pointed out an increase in hiking tours in recent years.

“There is a new trend in activities that have something to do with nature. Hiking along the spiritual path on Mount Kinabalu (biggest mountain) is on the rise. Also, snorkelling. Our coral reef is equivalent to the Great Barrier Reef in Australia. It is well protected and allows only a hundred people (or even less now) per day to enter this protected zone” (Respondent E).

Besides nature activities also involve social responsibility, like volunteering. Americans always liked volunteering. Some like to visit poor communities and help in the ways they

can. It is also common that tourists visit some minority groups abroad that they also belong to.

The only tourists who do not seem so interested in ecotourism are from India and the Middle East. Indian tourists still prefer city activities that are not eco-friendly but that is expected to change. Respondent B said that he is already noticing the shift from cities and that it is only a matter of time that it becomes the new norm.

“Maybe Middle east – I am not sure we would succeed with ecotourism there.” (Respondent A)

4.5 Emerging trends in ecotourism

Now, there are not many tourists that are prepared to pay extra to stay in eco-friendly accommodation. This is evident from my interviews with industry specialists. During the high seasons, it often happens that the primary hotel selection is not available, so an alternative option is needed. Sometimes, this alternative is an eco-friendly hotel that charges more than they originally planned. I asked the respondents how different agencies from all over the world responded to the change in hotel accommodation and paying extra.

“No. Not for the eco-label. They would only pay extra supplement if its more luxurious, has bigger rooms, or better food. But if you ask them to pay extra supplement because the hotel is sustainable, they won’t agree.” (Respondent C)

For Chinese and Indian groups, it turned out that this might present a problem. These nationalities already prefer big, international, famous global chains of hotels. If for some reason these branded hotels are not available, tour operators must find similar hotels. Many of those are not sustainable or eco-friendly. But even if they find one, they must first list other benefits and add the eco-friendly label at the end.

Ecotourism is a relatively new concept in India. It will take some more time for Indian people to choose this type of service over regular tourism services. Like shengtai lüyou, Indians have a similar ancient ideology as China. A version of the ecotourism concept has been present in the rural areas of India for ages. They live as one with nature in a very minimalistic way.

“They have lived with this ideology from the childhood onwards, so when they travel domestically, they feel it is nice to connect with their roots in a natural environment with minimalistic facilities. For domestic travels this kind of ecotourism is booming. But when they travel internationally, their mind-set changes. If they must pay, they will much rather go for luxury services instead of ecotourism services.” (Respondent B)

In *“Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Singapore groups are fine with extra supplement as long as you convince them that it is worth to pay more and can explain to them where the extra*

money went. Now, with the Covid-19 it is little easier because they are prepared to spend little more money for a smaller boutique accommodation that still has full facilities. Not the big ones with many people.” (Respondent D)

“The main markets that we work with now are all about the brand, location, price, and other standards. In Asia, it is about: how big is the lobby. In America: how small is the lobby. I certainly think and hope this will change. But we as tour operators should be the first to start with change and provide eco-friendly services.” (Respondent A)

4.6 Obstacles to ecotourism

Almost all the respondents agreed that the main reason for tourists not choosing ecotourism services over regular tourism is the higher price. True, ecotourism services can be more expensive and that can discourage someone from choosing a more sustainable option. But this is far from being the only reason. Sometimes, tourists don’t even know that there is an ecotourism option available due to lack of marketing or just plain ignorance.

“Usually it is related to their educational level. Less educated people don’t even know about ecotourism and for them it is only about the low price and high service. But highly educated people are aware of the danger and want their children well, so they choose ecotourism services over regular tourism service.” (Respondent C)

Another factor is comfort. Especially at the accommodation facilities, people expect some basic commodities like private bathroom and air conditioning. The general idea of ecotourism that is imbedded in many people’s minds is that ecotourism is not very convenient or comfortable and usually not in the city area but out in nature so they can be quite hesitant about it.

“They look for basic infrastructure at the destination. Their main concern is how convenient and comfortable it will be for them and their family at the destination. It is more about developed infrastructure in regular tourism are that lacks in ecotourism offers.” (Respondent B)

Ecotourism might indeed have some limitations and restrictions. Many eco-accommodations limit their footprint on the environment by limiting their number of services or limit their usage because they want to be sustainable. But people generally want to treat themselves when on vacation. An average tourist can go on vacation once or twice a year and during that time, they want to experience something new. They want to enjoy their trip without limitations.

“The most controversial thing is air conditioning. In the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand air conditioning in their home is a luxury item that very little people have. So, when they travel, they want to have it whenever they have the chance.” (Respondent D)

According to the interviews, the last reason for tourists not choosing ecotourism services over regular tourism services was connectivity. Many tourists do not like long travel, so their main concern is distance, connectivity, and whether there is a direct flight, or they have to transfer flights to reach their destination. But in many cases, it takes more effort to get to the ecotourism destination because they are situated in locations that are harder to reach.

4.7 Covid-19 and predictions for the future of ecotourism

Ecotourism will play a major role in the post-Covid-19 era. It is hard to predict how changes will apply to ecotourism, but one thing is certain:

“For ecotourism, the Covid-19 pandemic will have a big impact. Ecotourism will become more and more important.” (Respondent D)

During the pandemic, people started to avoid crowded places regardless of the health measures. Most respondents are already noticing the change in tourist preference for tourism offers. More people chose places that are not that populated so they can avoid massive crowds and lower their chance of infection. The trend of moving out of the city centres and choosing smaller eco-friendly locations in more rural areas is growing fast. People feel safer in less crowded areas where they can be connected to nature. This pandemic will make us realize how important it is to preserve nature and be sustainable for a better future.

Most respondents also noticed the change in preference in hotel selection. A similar trend for the change in preferences that we listed for the destination selection applies to the hotel selection. More and more people choose smaller, boutique hotels that are eco-friendly. Again, this has to do with the ongoing pandemic and the connected concerns. People try to avoid big, crowded hotels with big capacity and again – young generations are leading the way. They tend to choose more minimalistic hotels with fewer facilities that are often eco-friendly. But this has also to do with smaller budgets that young generations often have.

All the factors listed in the previous chapter are changing fast. With younger generations leading the way to a more sustainable future, ecotourism is gradually gaining value. Young people are at the forefront of the fight to minimize our impact on the environment and slow down global climate change. This is of great importance to them and they are the leaders towards a more sustainable way of living. Because of this, they are also more inclined to choose sustainable options when it comes to travel.

“We are moving to a time where more and more people will want to be sustainable and will be prepared to pay extra dollar. I presume, Scandinavians lead in this trend for now. They are willing to invest more time and money for sustainable ways of travel. China is not there yet, but it will change drastically in the future. China is like a jumping frog – they don’t evolve gradually like others; they are leaping forward much faster. Covid-19 is accelerating this process and I think the first to change in Asia will be Taiwan.” (Respondent A)

With the internet and the level of connectivity that we experience today, younger generations are much more internationally connected and seem to share the same universal ideologies. Older generations are much more restrained by the country's or region's borders. Fifty years ago, countries were not as connected as they are today, and people rarely travelled abroad. During this time, we experienced the rise of the internet that connected people around the globe on a whole new level that nobody could imagine fifty years ago.

"I think it is more about intergenerational differences than intercultural differences. Millennials and younger generations, regardless of where they come from, have much bigger awareness of climate change and therefore sustainable tourism is much more important to them than to older generations. In this regard, I think young Westerners and young Asians have much more in common than young Asians and old Asians. I think age is a much more relevant factor." (Respondent A).

5 DISCUSSION

Now that we analyzed the gathered data from the in-depth interviews, let's look at the implications these findings can have for tourism providers and ecotourism in general. After I have summarized the main findings, I will present the limitations I encountered and draw the guidelines for future research.

5.1 Summary of main findings

As previously mentioned, the findings from the interviews analyzed in the previous chapter will be summarized in the following paragraphs. These findings will be interpreted through the main research questions previously set in the methodology chapter.

5.1.1 General cross-cultural differences in tourist preferences

One common destination preference in all tourist nationalities around the world is city tourism. This is not a big surprise since large urban areas offer the best connectivity and convenience to travellers. For long-distance tourists that most often use air travel as their means of transport, these urban hubs provide the gateway to the destination country. Connectivity plays a crucial role in destination selection and cities provide the best transport connections to the rest of the world. What makes cities the number one destination selection is the convenience aligned with the best collection of different facilities tourists are looking for and the different activities that cities have to offer.

Another big preference is nature tourism. People from big cities often choose to go to the rural areas with small communities where they can be surrounded by nature. To relax and escape to a place where they can be at peace. The number one activity among the tourists in nature seems to be hiking, followed by various other sports like cycling and swimming.

Chinese tourists are also attracted to popular tourist destinations and often want to see famous places. But besides those famous western landmarks, natural features and heritage sites are often included in their itineraries for their daily activities. Chinese and Korean groups are among the easiest to manage. This might have to do with the fact that they live in collectivistic society where people prioritise the needs of a group for a greater good before taking care of their personal needs. Another reason might be the political system of their countries which encourages a new kind of tourism, 'Red Tourism', which evolves around places with historical significance to the Chinese Communism.

Most ASEAN tourists like to spend money while on vacation, especially those from the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand. One of the main activities they are interested in while travelling is shopping. Visiting big commercial cities like London, Paris, Milan, and similar is perfect for them since those urban hubs provide them with all the infrastructure and facilities they expect from the destination, safety, plenty of activities to choose from, and big shopping malls where they can 'shop till they drop'. Regarding the hotel selection, most ASEAN tourists prefer big luxury hotels with an international reputation. The standard and status are the main criteria for their selection, along with a rich assortment of facilities and services that hotels have to offer.

When talking about food, Indians first come to mind. But not because of their interest in the local food but the contrary. They seem to be very strict on their diet and rarely deviate from it. This is especially true for older generations who have strong traditional beliefs and principles that are often connected with religion. Although younger generations still follow those traditional rules when in the company of older generations or their parents, they are not so rigid when travelling alone.

When it comes to western tourists, service providers should keep in mind that they are interested in the local environment and want to experience authentic adventures. Older generations might be interested more in cultural activities and visit art galleries, theatres, opera, etc. Although younger generations are also interested in the cultural aspect of the destination, they more often lean towards outdoor activities. Both like to take some more time at the destination to get to know the local environment and connect with people. Therefore, their itineraries are not packed with lots of activities during the day but one or two per day the most. This way they get meaningful experiences that they cherish.

If we try to further dissect western tourists and look at the differences between American travellers and people from different European nationalities, we find that American tourists are much more outgoing and outspoken than some of their European counterparts. English tourists are the closest to them in this aspect, while some Scandinavian countries are the furthest away. European tourists have extremely different preferences for destination and hotel selection. Their preferences stretch from the smallest, low-rated, and unknown hotels to big international luxury hotel chains in different destinations all over the world. While

this is also true for American tourists, it seems that when it comes to hotel selection, it is more likely for them to choose big international branded hotels since they are used to them.

5.1.2 National preferences for ecotourism products-offers

Green, sustainable, responsible tourism, or ecotourism all describe the same branch of tourism that emphasizes on conserving nature and limiting the negative impact on the local environment and communities. It is a responsible way of travel that is based on the idea of simplistic travelling and causing minimal impact. It is often associated with the ongoing climate change and people realizing that we must do something to soften our impact on the environment and minimize the consequences of global warming.

Ecotourism is mostly seen as a positive movement, especially because tourism is one of the industries that cause the most pollution. This new movement is trying to change that and is putting big efforts into the development of eco-friendly facilities, limiting the visitation to fragile protected areas, funding protection of endangered species, providing services without negative impacts on the environment, and so on. All the effort for a more sustainable future is also necessary for tourism itself. Many tourist attractions depend on the local flora and fauna so to keep attracting tourists from all over the world, the natural environment must be preserved for future generations.

This is especially important for ecotourism, as it is based on nature and the environment. This is also people's perception of ecotourism, regardless of nationality. When speaking about ecotourism, all nationalities perceive it as nature-based tourism that has positive effects on the environment and local communities. Those protection efforts often come with some form of limitations and restrictions that the guests are expected to follow.

Because of the limitations, tourists from ASEAN countries perceive ecotourism as poor tourism offers and perceive them negatively. This is especially true for Indian and Chinese tourists. Limited facilities, limited usage of services, and the idea of travelling as simply as possible does not sit well with them as they like to pamper themselves during holidays. These countries do not have many genuine ecotourism offers. They don't have many rules in place for determining what tourism operators should provide nor do they have any certification system in place.

But do not get me wrong. They have plenty of tourism providers in rural areas that have been following the principles of ecotourism for centuries. Their way of life is based on a strong connection with nature and people in secluded areas are still living this way and following the idea of being one with nature and live as simply as possible. Tourism providers in these areas are often more sustainable than any other certified providers. Not because of an economic opportunity but because this is the way they live. A perfect example of this is the Chinese concept of shengtai lüyou which is the Asian brother of ecotourism that already

existed in ancient China. The two terms have similar principles and differ from each other only in minor aspects.

Therefore, ecotourism has a neutral or even a negative connotation for Indian and Chinese people as it reminds them of possible limitations and simplicity of tourism services. But in most other countries, ecotourism has a positive, even a luxurious sound to it. It has to do with the usually higher prices since ecotourism services tend to be more exclusive and intended for a smaller number of tourists. Also, right now, ecotourism providers are in minority compared to other tourism providers, but this is expected to change. There will be more ecotourism providers in the future that will develop their services and lower their costs while remaining sustainable. With more ecotourism providers to choose from, more fierce competition and larger accessibility of ecotourism services are expected and ultimately the change in perception will follow.

5.1.3 Reasons for national differences in preferences for ecotourism

Different tourist nationalities have different ideas, preferences, and expectations regarding ecotourism providers. From their internal motivation, beliefs, and norms to external factors such as the environment they live in and people they interact with, many factors influence tourist behaviour and preferences for specific tourism offers. Even though the top choice for all nationalities in destination selection is still city tourism in big urban centres, there are some distinct differences between some nationalities that are worth mentioning.

These preferences influence the decision-making process that leads to different nationalities choosing different destinations. Usually, the case is that for their holidays they want to experience something new, something they are not used to at home. This is why tourists from big cities like Hong Kong and Singapore often choose ecotourism in rural areas where they can be surrounded by nature and get away from the hustle and bustle of their daily lives. They also like to travel to less popular places and experience something authentic that not many people have already experienced.

For the Philippines, Singapore, and Malaysia it is quite the opposite. These nationalities are more conservative and like to know what to expect from the destination they are headed to. They usually consult with their friends and family members that have already been to those destinations and ask them a lot of questions. The destinations they are most often travelling to are popular world-known locations that many tourists visit. Japanese tourists also like to do an extensive research before their departure and often plan their trip meticulously, because they do not like improvisation.

The same goes for hotel selection and facilities. Most ASEAN tourists like to have all amenities at their disposal at the hotel they are staying at. From special rooms with a view, the air conditioning, the all-inclusive service, to spa centres and countless other amenities. It is because most of them are not able to use these amenities in their daily lives, so they

want to experience them during these rare occasions when they are travelling abroad. But when discussing room type selection, some nationalities want the same kind of bed type they have at home. This is most evident with Chinese tourists, who specifically request rooms with twin beds. They are used to sleep on futons that are usually made for a single person. It is also not unusual for couples to sleep in separate rooms.

As we mentioned, Indian tourists are very passionate about their food. Reasons for this are their religion, beliefs, and customs they are used to at home. They rarely deviate from their traditions, so food is often the number one reason for preference of a particular tourism offer. Besides religion, tradition, and customs the educational level is also often the reason for preference in specific tourism offers. This is more evident in ecotourism service selection, as more educated people tend to be aware of the threats that global warming is posing and can see the benefits that ecotourism provides.

5.1.4 Responses of tourism companies to national differences

One could argue that the idea of ecotourism proves to be very efficient in theory but in reality, this is usually not the case. From all the different ecotourism providers, some started to take advantage of this idea solely for economic reasons. In recent years, we have experienced the rise of fake ecotourism providers that label themselves ‘eco’ only to attract customers, provide limited services, while charging the customer the same amount of money or even more. Because of these greedy tourism providers, many people find it hard to distinguish between genuine ecotourism and bogus ecotourism providers. This is more common in Asia than in the West, as European Union and America have more strict rules in place for certified ecotourism providers that to some extent monitor the authenticity of those service providers.

Instead of targeting inexperienced tourists and deceiving them into paying extra for nongenuine and often not eco-friendly services, they should focus on different nationality preferences while being sustainable. Understanding customers is the key to a successful business and the tourism industry is no exception. Service providers should put some effort into research in the preferences of different tourists. Knowing what is important to them, what are their expectations, and their interests is a great advantage. This way, the tourism providers could tailor their services to a specific tourist nationality and get the best out of it legally and transparently.

For example, Indian tourists put great emphasis on their food and often have diets that are in accordance with their religion or personal beliefs. Some Indian tourist groups even have their chefs travelling with them because of the demanding preparation of the food. These groups often request a separate kitchen and specific kitchen tools that the religious ideology and preparation process requires.

Philippine, Malaysian, and Thai tourists like to shop, so it would be logical for tourism operators to accommodate them close to the main shopping streets and shopping malls or provide them with easy access to these locations. They should provide interesting and unique shopping experiences for them. Hotels, on the other hand, could include small souvenir shops where local products would be sold or at least provide tourists with relevant information and give them recommendations.

While tourism operators are already adjusting their offers to specific tourist nationalities with tailor-made itineraries, this kind of flexibility does not translate down to specific tourism service providers. Although some hotels and restaurants offer some level of adjustment, activity providers right now seem to have only general offers that are the same for all nationalities. Until now, these tourism providers did not have a big need for adjusting their services, since the influx of tourists was plentiful. But different times are coming. With the Covid-19, the tourist arrivals significantly dropped all over the world and many providers even went out of business. If tourism providers want to return to the pre-pandemic figures and secure their ground, they should think about the national differences and adjust their services accordingly. It is always good to know your customers and their preferences.

5.1.5 Emerging trends in ecotourism preferences

In recent years, we experienced enormous changes in the tourism industry. One of the biggest contributors to these swift changes is the global Covid-19 pandemic that broke out in the early 2020s. This virus affected all aspects of our lives and no country was shielded from it. While it has shaken many economies and disrupted industries, the tourism industry was hit the hardest. As precautionary restrictions were put in place in every country around the world, travellers were not able to cross country borders. Quarantines put a stop to tourism, forcing many providers to close their businesses. Now, thankfully, things are turning for the better and it seems like tourism is slowly starting to revive again, although with many restrictions still in place.

This pandemic also influenced people's preferences for tourism offers. As people started to worry about getting infected as it could potentially be lethal for them, tourists started to avoid crowded places and replace them with destinations away from big urban areas that can provide them with enough space and the sense of security. The same goes for hotel selection. Boutique hotels with smaller capacity offer more exclusivity and seclusion than big international resorts that can accept hundreds of tourists.

These changes might stay around for a lot longer than we imagined. Many predict that changes in tourist preferences are not temporary, but some are here to stay. Covid-19 affected us and the tourism industry in ways that we couldn't foresee. It made many people realize how small and vulnerable we are and how fast things can go wrong. The ongoing pandemic is affecting another big threat that is looming upon us – global warming. It brought positive effects for a change. It seems that the virus made us stop and think about our

behaviour and ignited the lust for change. The fight against climate change is bigger than ever. Many countries are advocating for a more sustainable future and crafting ambitious plans. It is believed that this translates down to residents through educational programs, media, and other channels.

Young generations are leading this fight. With their pro-environmental beliefs and values, they are accelerating ecotourism and the sustainable way of travel. These generations are travelling differently than their grandparents and the differences between age groups are big, which is especially true for China. In the last few decades, the itineraries changed significantly, and tourism providers had to adjust their services to stay competitive. The reason for this might be that nowadays we talk about these issues more than in the past. We hear about global warming and the problems we caused almost on daily basis. Education systems on all levels included this problem in their curriculums and are teaching young students about the importance of preserving nature and limiting our impact on the environment. Therefore, younger generations are more involved and have sufficient knowledge to address the threats.

With limitless information available on the internet and the level of connectivity that today's world is offering, travelling is easier than ever (excluding Covid-19). There are big changes on the horizon for the tourism industry and with young generations stepping in with different points of view and new attitudes towards tradition, these changes are coming fast. It will give the tourism industry a chance to restructure itself, rethink the strategy, adjust the services for new customers, and prepare for the post-Covid era of travel.

5.2 Discussion of findings

We can see that most of our findings are in line with the theory reviewed at the beginning. Some differences we identified in the theory were brought up also during our expert interviews and discussed about. The respondents with their first-hand knowledge provided us with relevant data to draw following connections with the theory on cultural differences in regards to ecotourism and environmentally friendly behaviour.

Our theory divides nations by comparing Eastern and Western tourists and their involvement in ecotourism. Eastern world that was influenced by religions such as Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism consist of more collectivistic societies, that put the needs of others before their own needs. That is why Eastern groups are among the easiest to manage. They are usually very connected with their families and like to travel in big groups. Nations such as Philippines, Singapore, and Malaysia put a lot of emphasis on opinions and recommendations from friends and family members. If we return to Hofstede's six dimensions framework, we can understand the reasons behind their behaviour. Because they are from countries with high uncertainty rates, it's people don't tolerate ambiguity and like to know what to expect from the destination they are headed to. They usually feel

uncomfortable in unstructured situations, so they like to gather as much information from their loved ones as possible.

Western societies on the other hand are more individualistic and its people like to explore the unknown. Countries of Europe and America are considered as nations with low uncertainty avoidance, where formal rules are looser and people tolerate divergent ideas. Group travel is not as popular as is in Asia and people seek for adventures and real experiences at the destinations outside the city centres. While older generations are interested in cultural activities, younger generations more often lean towards outdoor activities. But both like to stay longer at the destination to get to know the local environment and connect with people. Maybe that is also why accommodation trend with Western tourists is hard to define. Europeans like to stay in different accommodation facilities, which include everything from small boutique hotels to apartments. Only accommodation type they are not so keen on are big international hotels.

As we can see, the environment that we live in can have major impact on our values, norms, beliefs and behaviour. The understanding of ecotourism and the extent to which people feel obliged to act in pro-environmental way differs from nation to nation. While the human behaviour in the West is restricted to ensure the sustainable use of natural resources, Eastern world combines human artifacts with natural resources. This has to do with different views of ecotourism and core values of the historical concepts that were carried on by generations and became the essence of the main thought of specific cultures. Those traditional values are hard to overcome, especially when religion is involved. Western world gradually distanced themselves from religion, but some countries in the East still have strong religious following like India for example. As research showed, they take their religion and traditional values very seriously, which strongly influences their values, norms, beliefs and behaviour.

Our research also confirmed the problems of greenwashing that was discussed in the theory. Some tour operators label themselves as sustainable or eco-friendly without satisfying the basic requirements to be classified as such, only to gain benefits from this label. Our respondents even stated this issue as the negative impact that ecotourism has on development of new genuine tourism service providers. The motivation behind providing new ecotourism services is corrupt and therefore is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish real ecotourism providers from bogus ecotourism providers. This phenomenon is more common in the Eastern world, where most countries do not have strict legislation on sustainability or a functioning certification system for ecotourism in place, nor do they monitor the authenticity of those service providers. European union on the other hand has very strict rules, guidelines and regulations.

5.3 Limitations

The first limitation that I encountered during the writing process of this thesis was connected to data collection and data analysis methods. As many qualitative studies, this thesis also

involved a small sample of respondents. Although they provided me with quality data and useful information, the sample size was just too small to draw firm conclusions on a global level. A larger number of respondents would provide me with more information which would make the obtained data more reliable and relevant. Because of the small sample size, it is possible that data saturation was not reached, and interviewing additional experts might have produced new insights.

The second limitation could be the bias answers from my respondents, especially when the subject of the research is regarding someone's behaviour, thinking, and motivation and the respondents are drawing conclusions based on their personal experience. Even though my respondents have worked with these nationalities for a very long time, they could have personal opinions on specific nationalities that are based on emotional connection.

This thesis was emerging in a very specific and unique time. In the beginning, the industry was in a very different state than it is today. I began to write this thesis before the coronavirus outbreak when tourism and all its branches were experiencing the golden age of tourism. Today, the industry is very different, and it has changed virtually through the night. The effects the pandemic had on tourism are mind-blowing and nobody could have foreseen that. Therefore, I am listing this drastic change as my third limitation.

Some of the information I gathered in the theory was no longer relevant and some figures just did not make sense anymore. I had to discard a portion of my theory findings and alter the data gathered to fit in this place and time. Besides this, I had to include another unplanned part in my thesis. Since the pandemic affected the industry that this thesis is talking about so profoundly, I just could not leave this unmentioned.

Another limitation regarding the ongoing pandemic was the change in my respondents. Because of the big drop in tourist arrivals, many workers in the tourism industry and other industries connected to tourism lost their jobs. Some of the respondents I had arranged the interviews with were not working in the tourism industry anymore by the time of conducting the interview. I had to look for new candidates and change my original list of respondents.

To make this thesis more relevant, I planned to include a comparative analysis of two eco-labeled and certified hotels. I wanted to explore the most common guest nationalities in those two hotels and draw conclusions from comparative findings. This way I would see if there are any differences in most common guest nationalities at the destination's hotel selection. Because of the coronavirus pandemic, one of these hotels did not have any data to provide me with, since it opened just a few months before the virus outbreak and very soon faced the lockdown. The hotel re-opened only recently and the number of tourists that stayed in the hotel before I finished my thesis was simply too small to draw any conclusions. Therefore, I was unable to gather this data and proceed with comparative analysis.

5.4 Future research

Ecotourism is now a very interesting topic to explore, mainly for two reasons. It has started to gain value and it has established itself as an important branch in the industry. It is not only a transient trend, but it is here to stay. Also, it will be very interesting to see how ecotourism will adjust to a new norm we live in and how it will emerge after the Covid-19 era. It has a major potential that is waiting to be unleashed if people will take interest in it which we can already see they are.

For other scholars who will explore ecotourism and cultural differences, I would suggest a bigger sample size, that would provide more information that could be then generalized. It would be wise to include more respondents from different countries all over the world. This thesis provided a brief comparison between a handful of countries in Asia and a handful of countries in Europe. Although we have gathered useful data regarding American tourists, it would be more relevant if a respondent was from America as well. The same goes for other countries. The bigger the sample size, the more data from different nationalities, the more relevant the information extracted.

Many ecotourism providers are advertising how green, carbon-neutral, and sustainable their offers are, but no one seems to know for sure. Extensive research into certified eco-hotels and other ecotourism providers would expose how sustainable ecotourism providers are. We have seen that some of them are using marketing as a powerful tool to attract customers that are not very knowledgeable about this topic. One of the reasons is that research into all aspects of specific ecotourism providers is scarce. More information on this topic would also help people to be more informed and aware of the situation on the market.

It would also be interesting to know how big the market is. We explored the pre-pandemic state of the industry, but it would be useful to know the exact size today and how it will emerge after Covid-19. As we said, the industry is going through tough times and it is experiencing big changes. Arguably, it seems worth paying attention and follow the development of ecotourism through these times, especially because we live in a very specific period. What is happening today, is something humanity hasn't experienced in a very long time. And hopefully, when all this is over, we will not experience it again for a very long time.

CONCLUSION

In these turbulent times, ecotourism proves to be of great importance for future development not only in the tourism sector but also in other aspects of our everyday life. With the drastic changes, we are experiencing because of the ongoing global climate change and the coronavirus outbreak, it is necessary to provide relevant information for the tourism providers and encourage them to develop their services in a way that will benefit the public and not only themselves.

This thesis brought together two very important dimensions of tourism: the culture and the environment, by providing insight into different nationalities' preferences for specific tourism offers and exploring the determinants for ecotourism preferences. I explored the factors in preferred destination selection among different tourist nationalities to better understand cross-cultural differences in tourist preferences towards ecotourism. This research will hopefully help tourist agencies and hotels in the ecotourism sector to better understand the needs of their customers and eventually adopt their services to achieve better customer satisfaction and stay compatible.

After reviewing the existing literature on the national differences in tourist preferences, I conducted my research with top industry specialists. By relying on a sample of five in-depth, semi-structured expert interviews with leading professionals in the tourism industry, I found several important findings. First, tourists' behaviour and preferences are based on their previous experiences, preferences, motivation, and personal beliefs that are highly influenced by individual determinants and outside factors such as national culture, society, friends, family, etc. Tourists, regardless of their nationality, often choose a destination that is very different to their home country. I found out that even though there are some fundamental similarities present in almost all of the countries explored, some interesting differences in preferences for specific ecotourism offers arose from the gathered data.

City tourism with major famous attractions is still popular with all nations, except for Hong Kong and Singapore, whose tourists prefer natural tourism. Nature-based tourism is the tourists' second most popular choice of spending their vacation. Asian guests often choose big, well-known international hotel chains because of the status and abundance of facilities, and because they know what to expect. When talking about the activities at the destination, Philippine, Indonesian and Thai tourists prefer shopping, while Indians are strict on food and some Chinese tourists practice an interesting branch of political tourism, where they travel to countries with historical significance to Chinese Communism, referred to as 'Red tourism'.

When it comes to ecotourism, not all nationalities perceive it the same way. Some of the crucial factors that tourists take into consideration while choosing among various types of ecotourism currently available on the market: safety, connectivity, affordability, attractiveness, versatility, and diversity, with sustainability becoming a new important factor for the new generation of tourists. The term itself is associated with an upscale, trendy connotation in most countries with rare exceptions. How a nation perceives ecotourism also depends on the government's interest in a sustainable future. The external factors are often influenced by a top-down approach, meaning that a person is influenced by bigger groups of people (family and friends), these are influenced by communities and different organizations, and these are influenced by the governments.

In general, ecotourism is very high on the agenda of most Western countries. Countries of the Eastern block, on the other hand, have much room for improvement in this area. While

some Asian countries qualify as genuine ecotourism destinations, most Asian countries still lag behind. But with the new generation of travellers, this is changing fast and the coronavirus outbreak is only accelerating this change. Nothing is the way it was, and the ecotourism industry is no exception. We see more people choosing ecotourism services due to its characteristics: smaller capacity, seclusion from big urban areas, connection to nature, etc.

Because of our irrational exploitation of natural goods and the negative impact that we have on the natural environment, we have started to see the consequences. Global climate change is ever more present in our everyday lives, as is the propaganda for more sustainable ways of life. The realization that this might present a big problem for future generations or even jeopardize our very existence on this planet, sparked some serious concerns among the people, especially younger generations. That is why youth and pro-environmental movements are for now our best answer to secure our wellbeing on this planet and preserve the living environment for all the generations to come.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Povzetek (Summary in Slovene language)

V magistrski nalogi sem raziskoval medkulturne dejavnike preferenc do ekoturizma. Moja poglobljena vprašanja so bila: kakšne so razlike med kulturami, kako dojemajo ekoturizem, kateri dejavniki vplivajo na njihove odločitve, kakšni so trendi in ali turistični ponudniki prilagajajo svoje storitve glede na kulturne razlike. Ta magistrska naloga združuje dve zelo pomembni dimenziji turizma: kulturo in naravo. Po pregledu obstoječih sekundarnih virov sem s pomočjo poglobljenih intervjujev z vodilnimi strokovnjaki iz industrije pridobil pomembne informacije glede na njihove dolgoletne izkušnje pri delu s turisti različnih narodnosti.

Ekoturizem je gibanje, ki se je začelo v sedemdesetih letih minulega stoletja, vendar njegov izvor ni povsem znan. Nekateri drugi izrazi, kot je trajnostni razvoj, pa so se začeli uporabljati že v 17. stoletju. Od takrat do danes je ekoturizem prerasel v eno od pomembnejših industrij, ki po nekaterih ocenah predstavlja 11,4 % vse porabe potrošnikov in raste, ki presega rast industrije turizma kot celote. Gibanje, ki ima potencial, da postane ne le gibanje, ampak nova norma v industriji. Zato je postavljanje takšnih vprašanj vse bolj nujno.

V zdajšnjih turbulentnih časih se je ekoturizem izkazal za zelo pomembnega za nadaljnji razvoj. Ne le v turističnem sektorju, ampak tudi v vseh drugih vidikih našega vsakdana. Z drastičnimi spremembami, ki jih doživljamo zaradi globalnih podnebnih sprememb in izbruha koronavirusa, je treba ponudnikom turizma zagotoviti relevantne informacije in jih spodbuditi, da storitve razvijejo tako, da bodo koristile širši javnosti in ne le njim samim. S pomočjo vodilnih strokovnjakov v turistični industriji sem odkril več pomembnih okoliščin.

Vedenje turistov in njihove preference temeljijo na dozdajšnjih izkušnjah, preferencah, motivaciji in osebnih prepričanjih, na katera močno vplivajo zunanji dejavniki, kot so nacionalna kultura, družba, prijatelji, družina itn. Ne glede na narodnost se ljudje pogosto odločijo za potovanje na destinacijo, ki se zelo razlikuje od njihovega domačega okolja. Čeprav obstajajo nekatere osnovne podobnosti med vsemi narodnostmi, zajetimi v raziskavi, so podatki pokazali nekatere zanimive razlike v preferencah za posamezne ponudbe ekoturizma.

Mestni turizem je še vedno najbolj priljubljena oblika turizma pri ljudeh vseh zajetih narodnosti, razen Hongkonga in Singapurja, katerih prebivalci imajo raje turizem v naravi. Naravni turizem je za turiste druga najbolj priljubljena izbira počitnic. Azijski gostje pogosto izberejo velike, znane mednarodne hotelske verige zaradi statusnega simbola, bogate dodatne ponudbe in ker vedo, kaj lahko pričakujejo. Če pa govorimo o različnih dejavnosti, ki turiste zanimajo na destinaciji, so pa filipinski, indonezijski in tajski turisti tisti, ki radi nakupujejo. Indijci so zahtevni glede hrane. Nekateri kitajski turisti pa izvajajo t. i. rdeči turizem, ki je zanimiva veja političnega turizma, kjer turisti potujejo v države zgodovinskega pomena za kitajski komunizem.

Vendar ekoturizma ne dojemajo vse države enako. Ključni dejavniki, ki jih turisti upoštevajo pri izbiri med različnimi vrstami ekoturizma, ki so trenutno na voljo na trgu, so: varnost, lokacijska in cenovna dostopnost, privlačnost in raznolikost, pri čemer je trajnostni razvoj postal nov pomemben dejavnik za mlajšo generacijo turistov. Sam izraz ekoturizem ima pozitivno konotacijo. Kako bodo prebivalci dojemali ekoturizem, pa je odvisno tudi od vladnega interesa za trajnostni razvoj. Zunanji dejavniki na človeka vplivajo s pristopom od zgoraj navzdol, kar pomeni, da na posamezno osebo vplivajo večje skupine ljudi (družina in prijatelji), medtem ko na te vplivajo skupnosti, različne organizacije, nanje pa vladni organi.

Na splošno je ekoturizem zelo prioriteta politična tema večine zahodnih držav. Države vzhodnega bloka pa imajo na tem področju še veliko prostora za izboljšave. Medtem ko nekatere azijske države veljajo za pristne ekoturistične destinacije, večina azijskih držav še vedno zaostaja. Vendar se z novo generacijo turistov situacija hitro spreminja. Pandemija koronavirusa bo to spremembo le še pospešila. Vedno več ljudi se odloča za trajnostni turizem – ekoturizem zaradi njegovih pozitivnih vplivov: manjše namestitvene zmogljivosti, oddaljenost od velikih mestnih območij, povezanost z naravo itn.

Že občutimo posledice našega neracionalnega izkoriščanja naravnih dobrin in negativnega vpliva na naravno okolje. Globalne podnebne spremembe so vedno bolj občutne v našem vsakdanjem življenju, prav tako pa tudi ozaveščanje o trajnostnejših načinih življenja. Zavedanje, da bi bilo to lahko velika težava za prihodnje generacije ali bi lahko celo ogrozilo naš obstoj na tem planetu, je sprožilo nekaj korenitih sprememb, zlasti med mlajšimi. Zato so tovrstna gibanja za zdaj naš najboljši odgovor na spremembe okoli nas.

Appendix 2: Interview guide

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE CROSS-CULTURAL DETERMINANTS OF PREFERENCES FOR ECOTOURISM

Semi-structured interview questionnaire

The proposed interviewees include:

- United Kingdom: CEO of ‘X’ tourist agency and managing director of London subsidiary, covering western Europe and Scandinavian market,
- China: managing director of Shanghai subsidiary, supports sales operations for Mainland China,
- South-east Asia office: managing director of Kota Kinabalu office – sales office for Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei,
- Greece office: managing director of Athens office,
- India: managing director of Pune office.

Basic information about the interviewees:

- Name:
- Age:
- Gender:
- Place of birth:
- Nationality:
- City of residence:
- Previous work experience:
- Current job position:
- Years of service in the industry:
- What tourist nationality you work with the most:

GENERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT ECOTOURISM – EXPERT’S OPINION ABOUT THE INDUSTRY

- How familiar are you with the term ecotourism?
- What are your first three associations with the word ecotourism?
- Which negative impact of ecotourism do you think is the most destructive and beneficial?
- How do you believe Covid-19 will affect the ecotourism industry?

QUESTIONS REGARDING PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE (WITH TOURIST GROUPS THEY WORK WITH) - ECOTOURISM EXTENSION

ABOUT TOURISTS PLANNING BEHAVIOUR

- Do most tourists you interact with come prepared and with a firm idea of where they want to go?
 - Do people usually plan their trips meticulously and long before their trip starts?
 - Do people come prepared with extensive information about the chosen destination?
 - What kinds of things usually excites them about visiting someplace new?
 - Are tourists interested in learning new information about the destination?

ABOUT ECO-FRIENDLY TOURISM TRENDS

- What do you think is the main reason for tourists to choose regular tourism services over ecotourism services?
 - Are there any factors about ecotourism that hold people back?
- Were the groups prepared to pay extra for staying at an eco-friendly hotel if primary hotel selection was not available for chosen dates?
- Did you have any groups/agencies that specifically requested an eco-friendly hotel as their first selection (or choose an eco-friendly destination)?
 - How many agencies did you work with that had an eco-friendly hotel as their first selection?
 - What was the main reason tourists choose an eco-friendly hotel?
- (What was the main reason the groups did not want to stay at an eco-friendly hotel?)
- Are there any popular ecotourism destinations that the groups like to visit?

CULTURE AND TOURISM

- If you think of the different destinations tourists most often choose to go to (beach, natural areas, towns/cities, etc.), which do you think tourists **from your country** prefer? Why?
- Have you noticed any **national/cultural trends** in preference for these destinations (e.g. people from specific countries tend to choose similar types of destinations?)
- Have you noticed any **national/cultural trends** in preference for specific types of hotels (e.g. hostels, shared lodging, luxury hotels, eco hotels, etc.)?
- Have you noticed any **national/cultural trends** in the kind of information are tourists most interested in before travelling?
 - about the local food, culture, and customs
 - about the natural environment of the destination
 - about the lifestyle of the residents
 - about different tours and places to stay

- Have you noticed any national/cultural trends in the activities tourists are most interested in while travelling?
 - try the local food and learn about culture and customs
 - learn about and understand the environment
 - meet residents and learn about their way of life
 - participate in environmental education tours

CULTURE AND ECO TOURISM

- Who do you think is more prone to **choose sustainable tourism** offers (in your country) – locals or foreigners? Foreigners from which country? Why?
- Among the different kinds of **eco-friendly activities** tourists are interested in (volunteering, wilderness, etc.), do you see any national trends in preferences for these activities?
- Connotations of the word ‘ecotourism’ - What do people **from your country** usually think of when they hear the word? (please explain)
- Is the term ecotourism **in your country** associated with a more upscale, trendy (even luxury) connotation or the opposite?
- Do tourists from other countries have different views?