MINDFUL TOURIST EXPERIENCES: A Buddhist Perspective

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Highlights

- Offers a Buddhist perspective of mindfulness and tourist experiences.
- Proposes an operational definition of meditative mindful tourist experience.
- Develops a framework of meditative mindful tourist experiences
- Links, natural settings, meditative mindfulness and experiential benefits.
- Contrasts meditative mindfulness, socio-cognitive mindfulness and flow.

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ABSTRACT

This paper distinguishes between the concepts of socio-cognitive mindfulness applied in a number of tourism studies and meditative mindfulness derived from a Buddhist philosophy. An operational definition of meditative mindful tourist experiences is proposed based on forty-three semi-structured interviews involving 77 episodes of meditative mindful experiences. The paper also proposes a framework of meditative mindfulness in tourism. The framework identifies a number of antecedents to meditative mindful experience episodes and reveals several psychological and physical benefits including mental ease and response flexibility. This is the first paper to examine meditative mindful tourist experiences in tourism contexts and to explore their antecedents and consequences.

Keywords: Awareness, meditative mindfulness, memory, mental ease, tourist experience

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of mindfulness denotes a mental state that facilitates learning and where the experience tends to be positive (Langer, 2000). Moscardo (1996) used Langer’s theories (Langer, 1992) in the design of interpretative material and a number of tourism authors have built on her work (Murphy, Benckendorff, Moscardo & Pearce, 2011; Van Winkle & Backman, 2009). Langer’s theories are based on socio-cognitive mindfulness (SCM) from social psychology (Pirson, Langer, Bodner, & Zilcha, 2012). A separate literature from clinical psychology and interdisciplinary studies (Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Weick & Putnam, 2006), only recently applied in tourism research (Pearce, 2016) adopts a Buddhist philosophical perspective (Chen, Scott, & Benckendorff, 2014).

This study uses the Buddhist interpretation of ‘meditative mindfulness’ (MM) as the theoretical foundation for understanding how certain kinds of tourism experiences can result in psychological benefits such as cultivating improved mental health and wellbeing (Kabat-Zinn, 1991, 2002; Siegel, 2009; Wallace & Shapiro, 2006). In therapeutic settings, MM training assists individuals in becoming aware of their present moment experience (Bishop et al., 2004) resulting in positive psychological outcomes (Siegel, 2009; Wallace & Shapiro, 2006). MM is derived from Buddhist philosophy and practices, in particular meditation (Hanh, 1976). While clinical psychologists use formal MM training for stress reduction (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, MBSR) and cognitive therapy (Mindfulness-Based

Cognitive Therapy, MBCT) (Kabat-Zinn, 2003), MM has received limited research attention in informal settings such as tourism, despite reports of meditative-like states and therapeutic benefits as a result of visiting natural settings (Chen, Scott, & Benckendorff, 2015).

Informal MM episodes can play an important role in many everyday situations. For example, Gehart (2012) suggests that daily activities such as stopping to smell a flower, feeling the breeze, listening to sounds outside, taking a sip of water, or touching a fabric can be introduced as a form of therapy for time-stressed individuals who have no time for more formal practices. These simple activities involve being fully present and mindfully aware of daily experiences and induce an immediate sense of calm and a more focused mind (Gehart, 2012). Carruthers and Hood (2011) propose that leisure can serve as an optimal context for contemplative or informal MM practices; however, few studies have explored the antecedents of informal MM practices within a tourism context (Lea, 2008).

SCM and MM reflect different theoretical frameworks (Mikulas, 2011). SCM is based on a dual information-processing model which contrasts opposing mental states of mindfulness or mindlessness (Langer, 1992). While SCM focuses on how to learn to switch cognition modes to active thinking, MM focuses on non-judgmental awareness (Weick & Putnam, 2006). MM training avoids associative thinking, allowing an individual to be aware of their inner experiences, thoughts and emotions (Kabat-Zinn, 2002; Weick & Putnam, 2006). Both concepts are related to awareness and attention; however, they differ in the process of engagement in the present moment experience they describe. MM offers insight into the inner experiences and psychological changes of a visitor who is profoundly engaged with their surroundings.

Tourism offers the opportunity to study MM outside formal therapeutic settings. Travel is sometimes described as a liminal experience that allows individuals to escape from the structure and stress of their ordinary, everyday lives, and can result in restoration and wellbeing (Graburn, 1989). Unstructured natural settings provide meaningful and engaging experiences (Van Matre, 1990) that direct attention away from the self, and towards nature (Shiota, Keltner, & Mossman, 2007). Howell (2011) suggests that the experience of 'nature connectedness' is implicitly associated with mindfulness. Similarly, sensory stimuli (taste of local food or the smell of fresh air) can attract one's attention, thereby facilitating positive engaging experiences (Agapito, Valle, & Mendes, 2014). While it has been established that predesigned communicative cues may trigger SCM, empirical research examining the concept of MM and its therapeutic benefits in informal tourism contexts is limited.

This paper explores how and why informal tourism activities, settings, or other contributing factors facilitate MM experiences known to produce therapeutic benefits. The study identifies and explores the antecedents, episodes and consequences of MM to answer three questions: (1) Do MM episodes occur during tourist experiences? (2) What are the antecedents of MM episodes? (3) What are the experiential benefits of MM episodes? In doing so, the discussion differentiates MM from SCM and proposes a definition and conceptual framework of MM experiences.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section discusses the concepts of ‘meditative mindfulness’ and ‘socio-cognitive mindfulness’. While there are some similarities between these two concepts, they are associated with different types of positive experiences and involve subtly distinct types of awareness associated with separate mental processing modes (Teasdale, 1999).

2.1 Engagement in present moment experiences

The definition of experience has received attention from a number of different disciplines. In psychology, experience is a characteristic of consciousness that is ever-present in human life. Chalmers (1996) identifies experience as a process of exploring consciousness and how this consciousness interacts with the world. That is, experience is perceiving a phenomenon (e.g., object, thought, and emotion) and being consciously aware of it. This continuous and fluid process involves psychological and neurological phenomena and creates an active interaction between oneself and attention to bodily senses and perception (Morse, 2014), leading to remembering, reflecting and having memories (Curtin, 2006). In the tourism and leisure fields, experiences are ‘mental, spiritual and physiological outcomes resulting from on-site recreation engagements’ (Schänzel & McIntosh, 2000, p. 37). In leisure studies, an experience is seen as “the desired psychological result which motivates a person to participate in a recreational engagement” (Stein & Lee, 1995, p. 53). However, these definitions of tourism experiences are based on a SCM perspective rather than a MM perspective.

2.2 Buddhist perspectives of meditative mindfulness

Mindfulness has a long history in Buddhist spiritual traditions (Hanh, 1976) and healing philosophy (Kabat-Zinn, 2002). The oldest written reference to mindfulness can be traced to the Buddhist term *sati* which translates as ‘awareness’ or ‘discernment’ (Bodhi, 2011), and is described as “being aware of awareness” (Reid, 2011) or “an awareness of being aware”

(Hirst, 2003). Buddhist mindfulness is popular as a means of cultivating positive mental health through formal practices such as meditation, yoga, breathing exercises, body scanning and mindful walks (Levine, 2011). Formal mindfulness practice or meditative training helps people find happiness and fulfilment in everyday activities, as well as realise spiritual freedom and enlightenment in life (Kang & Whittingham, 2010).

Kabat-Zinn (2003, p. 145) defines MM as “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience, moment to moment”, thus highlighting three important attributes. The first is paying attention to the present-moment, where practitioners attend to somatic (sensations—sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch) to develop continuous self-regulated attention (Kuan, 2012; Mosig, 2006). The second attribute is associated with present-oriented awareness, a “state of being attentive to” and “aware of what is taking place in the present” (Brown & Ryan, 2003, p. 5). This involves monitoring one’s own moment-to-moment sensory and mental events. Present-oriented awareness keeps one’s mind focused on the object of attention (Dreyfus, 2011; Kabat-Zinn, 2002; Siegel, 2009), and not thinking about the past or future (Baer, 2003). The third attribute is an open, non-reactive (Weick & Putnam, 2006), and non-judgmental expression of awareness (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 2003)—the acceptance of one’s present moment emotions and thoughts (Bishop et al., 2004; Bodhi, 2011; Kabat-Zinn, 2003). During meditative training, non-judgmental attention to the present moment is practised through self-exploration in everyday activities (Schmidt, 2011). Thoughts are treated like any other sensations—one detaches from them and makes them simply the objects of attention (Salmon et al., 2004). This mental state is referred to as ‘openhearted presence’, ‘mindful acceptance’, and ‘affectionate awareness’, and is found to reduce emotional distress and maladaptive behaviour (Bishop et al., 2004).

Several studies have linked MM and memory. Etymologically, the word *sati* denotes ‘to remember’, or ‘one who remembers and recollects what was done and said long ago’ (Bodhi, 2011, p. 23) and can be interpreted as ‘recollective memory’ (Gyatso, 1992) or ‘recollection’ (Kang & Whittingham, 2010). Accordingly, this paper also examines tourists’ awareness of their remembered mindful experiences.

In Buddhist thought, MM is a mental process which recognises thoughts without conceptualising them (Kabat-Zinn, 2002), thereby allowing the mind to be grounded in the present moment and less reactive to external stimuli. This process therefore alters mental

1 reactions to an experience no matter whether they are positive, negative, or neutral (Weick &
2 Putnam, 2006). MM practices applied during meditation help individuals to place experiences
3 into “unexamined conceptual boxes” quickly (Kabat-Zinn, 2002, p. 69). The application of
4 MM-based clinical interventions facilitates one’s mind/body interactions (Baer, 2003; Kabat-
5 Zinn, 2003; Schwartz, 2008) in which the individual experiences a positive emotional state
6 (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). MM also leads to physical and mental changes associated with relaxation
7 and vivid attention. Cultivating MM enhances one’s ability to clarify values and life direction,
8 and to avoid “auto-pilot” behaviour (Van Dam, Earleywine, & Borders, 2010).
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11 As an important concept for understanding tourism experiences, the Buddhist notion of
12 MM has received only limited attention. Examples of studies that have discerned a Buddhist-
13 like MM include Kang and Gretzel’s (2012) study wherein tourists were found to be engaged
14 more with their surroundings at a national park while listening to a podcast. Additionally, in
15 Trinh and Ryan’s (2015) study of museum visitor behaviour, the researchers describe MM-
16 like attributes such as “clear awareness”.
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18 19 *2.3 Langer’s socio-cognitive mindfulness*

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21 Dual mindfulness-mindlessness theory is based on the prevalence of both of these states in
22 daily life (Langer, 1992) and reflects an interest in thinking and problem solving (Pirson et al.,
23 2012). Langer (1992, p. 289) defines mindfulness as “a state of conscious awareness in which
24 the individual is implicitly aware of the context and content of information”. Socio-cognitive
25 mindfulness is a state of consciousness where “cognitive distinctions about objects of
26 awareness are continually made, with the environment (and self) thus continually treated as
27 emerging and novel” (Langer, Pirson, & Delizonna, 2010, p. 70). This active and questioning
28 cognitive state combines novelty seeking, ongoing alertness to existing expectations and
29 continuous refinement and differentiation of newer experiences (Pirson et al., 2012).
30 Decreasing mindlessness and increasing mindfulness can diminish certain social concerns and
31 bring about change in an individual’s awareness (Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000). Other
32 characteristics of SCMs include an awareness of multiple perspectives, being actively
33 engaged in the present, and a mindset of openness to novelty (Langer, 1992, 2000).
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36 In Western thought, SCM requires that individuals are implicitly aware of the content of
37 information embodied in stimuli. In this mode of information processing, one consciously
38 interprets information by actively constructing categories and distinctions (Langer, 1992). In
39 tourism contexts, SCM has been applied to explain how improved information design can
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1 help visitors find their way around, make connections to other tourists, and enhance learning,
2 enjoyment, and satisfaction (Murphy et al., 2011). In these situations, the visitor is alert, and
3 engaged in thinking about causes and consequences. SCM information processing
4 corresponds to ‘conceptualising’ in which awareness is associated with cognitive thinking or
5 rational judgment through continuous refinement or evaluation of present-ideal discrepancies
6 in relation to goal-oriented tasks (Teasdale, 1999).
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11 In the tourism literature, SCM has been used to examine how and why visitors respond to
12 external stimuli and social situations (Moscardo, 2008). SCM is associated with the active
13 processing of information where individuals are responsive to the creation of new categories
14 in their surroundings (mindfulness) (Langer, 1992), rather than being trapped by previous
15 routines (mindlessness) (Van Winkle & Backman, 2009). Moscardo (1996) characterises
16 mindfulness as “open to learning, attention to the setting and development of new routines”,
17 and mindlessness as “use of existing routines, little attention to the setting, and no learning”
18 (p. 25).
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27 In summary, previous tourism research has focused on SCM, mainly in the context of
28 interpretation and visitor learning, but has neglected MM. No prior studies have explored
29 whether MM episodes occur during travel experiences. MM can provide a feasible theoretical
30 foundation to help understand experiences that lead to therapeutic outcomes and a peaceful
31 mind. Table 1 compares MM and SCM by illustrating how they describe different mental
32 processes that predict common as well as different outcomes. This study examines the
33 relationship between MM and tourist experience, and explores the role of mindful mental
34 states in producing experiential outcomes.
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Table 1. Comparing meditative and socio-cognitive mindfulness

Features	Meditative mindfulness (MM)	Socio-cognitive mindfulness (SCM)
Theoretical origins	Buddhist philosophy	Western social psychology
Definitions (awareness)	Awareness of being aware <i>Being aware of awareness</i>	Conscious awareness <i>Being aware of contexts and information</i>
Psychological constructs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purposeful monitoring <i>Bare attention through senses</i> • Present-oriented awareness <i>Being in the present</i> • Non-judgemental awareness <i>Detachment from one's thoughts</i> <i>Acceptance of present emotions</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeking multiple perspectives <i>Attention to the setting</i> • Active engagement in the present <i>Focus on the present</i> • Awareness of cognitive distinctions <i>Refinement and questioning</i> <i>Differentiation of newer experiences</i>
Processing mode	Meditative processing of experiencing	Cognitive processing of conceptualising
Mental state	Openhearted presence with acceptance	Novelty seeking and alertness
Outcomes (benefits)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health • Relaxation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal-oriented learning • Competence
Applications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clinical psychology • Therapeutic interventions • Meditative training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social psychology and tourism • Interpretative interventions • Education

3. METHODOLOGY

Several quantitative measures of meditative mindfulness have been developed for therapeutic and non-therapeutic contexts. This study adopts a qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews which facilitates the collection of rich and detailed narratives about MM episodes, and their antecedents and consequences. Each interview consisted of two stages (screening and extended questions). In the first stage, three screening questions, as shown in Table 2 (Questions 1a, 1b and 1c) were used to identify the presence of three conditions defined by Kabat-Zinn (2003): *attention*, *present moment*, and *non-judgment*. The purpose of the screening questions was to identify participants who had recalled at least one meditative mindful episode that met all three conditions. The three screening questions were adapted from validated quantitative scales in the Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory (FMI) (Walach, Buchheld, Büttenmüller, Kleinknecht, & Schmidt, 2006), the Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills (KIMS) (Baer, Smith, & Allen, 2004) and the modified Four Dimensions of Mindfulness Questionnaire (FDMQ) (Kang & Gretzel, 2012). The FMI and KIMS scales

have been validated for identifying populations with limited or no meditation experience; this is important because few respondents had previously participated in formal MM practices or understood the concept of MM used in the study, while the FDMQ scale has been used in a study of visitors to a national park. Subsequent questions (Table 2, Questions 2 and 3) prompted respondents to provide further detail about their MM episodes, including the antecedents and consequences of these episodes. Additional prompts were also used to probe respondents for more detail. Questions about antecedents explored the activities, settings or other contributing factors that facilitated MM episodes, while questions about consequences included probes for experiential benefits.

A pilot test of the interview questions (including the screening questions) was conducted to ensure that they were appropriately framed. Five Taiwanese backpackers were recruited for the pilot study. Throughout the pilot process, the draft questions were revised by adding, omitting, or rewriting the questions. The interview only proceeded if participants provided an affirmative response to the first two questions and a negative response to the third question.

Table 2. Interview questions

Dimension	Questions
1. Presence of MM	
1a. <i>Attention</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> During your travels, have you experienced times when you were unusually aware of sensory experiences involving sight, sound, odour, flavours, touch and mental objects? If yes, could you explain further? (Affirmative)
1b. <i>Present moment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Were you able to focus at that moment on the situations you mentioned? Why/why not? (Affirmative)
1c. <i>Non-judgment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did you find yourself making judgments or evaluating whether your perceptions or thoughts were right? Why/why not? (Negative)
2. Antecedents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Could you describe in more detail how you felt and thought at the moment of the particular situation? Could you show me any photos that embody more detail or stories? What led to this experience?
3. Consequences (experiential benefits)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What outcomes (benefits) do/did you feel you gained from the experience? How do you sense the experiences (or positive transformation) have changed you? And why is this change important to you?

Finally, interviews were conducted with Taiwanese backpackers in Australia. Snowball sampling was used to recruit respondents at backpacker hostels and national parks. Cohen (2003) argues that the backpacker experience leads to greater self-awareness and cultural

sensitivity because backpackers totally immerse themselves in their journeys. Furthermore, backpackers often search for meaningful experiences, self-discovery and self-change (Cohen, 2003). These characteristics reflect key elements of the MM experience. Selecting Taiwanese respondents allowed the primary researcher, who is also Taiwanese, to more clearly understand the rich meanings and cultural context of the responses. Many young Taiwanese travellers are motivated to engage in self-exploration, and learning how to face difficulties, thereby cultivating an open mind (Pan, 2012).

Interviewing ceased when data saturation was achieved; that is, when there were no new emergent themes or concepts, and collecting further data appeared to be redundant (Koerber & McMichael, 2008). Key concepts and themes were monitored and analysed throughout the data collection process to the data saturation stage. Analysis involved constant reflection on the preliminary findings from the collected data and the related theories from the literature review. Saturation was reached after 43 semi-structured interviews and data from 77 episodes of meditative mindful experiences were collected. The participants reported between one and three MM episodes during their travels in Australia. The sample included 21 female and 22 male Taiwanese backpackers aged from 23 to 45. Although two participants identified themselves as Buddhists, a majority of participants did not report a specific religious affiliation. Most participants did not practise formal mindfulness techniques.

Data were collected in Brisbane, Alice Springs and Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, Australia, as these destinations provided opportunities to meet Taiwanese backpackers staying in hostels, youth hostels and camping grounds. Each interview was recorded with the permission of interviewees, and took between 45 and 60 minutes. The interviews were conducted in Chinese to facilitate a greater understanding of the meanings associated with the responses. The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim in Chinese and the transcripts were reviewed and discussed with each respondent where possible. Key quotes, themes and concepts were translated into English by the researcher, who is bilingual in English and Chinese. These translations were checked by three Taiwanese tourism experts who are bilingual in English and Chinese. The coding of key themes using a descriptive and interpretive pattern (Miles & Huberman, 1994), was subject to scrutiny by two other academics who are experienced in qualitative research methods, and then discussed with an English professional editor. NVivo 10 was used to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the data analysis process. Ongoing analysis and refining of themes and concepts were undertaken during the process with coded extracts serving as initial nodes leading to a

thematic ‘map’. Lastly, a report capturing illustrative quotes for each theme and concept was completed.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Meditative Mindful Experiences

The screening process ensured all of the respondents subsequently interviewed had experienced MM, characterised by **paying attention to the experience, living in the present, and non-elaborative awareness**. In total, seven concepts associated with the three characteristics of MM were identified (see Table 3).

Table 3. Themes and concepts of meditative mindful experiences

Themes	Concepts
1. Paying attention to the experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensory awareness • Relaxed attention
2. Living in the present	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being in the moment • Not worrying about the past or future • A sense of timelessness
3. Non-elaborative awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bare perception • Non-conceptual insight

Participants reported an enhanced level of **sensory awareness** and **relaxed attention** identified as engagement, rather than goal-directed awareness. ‘**Paying attention to the experience**’ was evidenced by participants’ ability to recall specific sensations (mostly auditory, tactile or visual in nature) in rich detail as illustrated by the quote below:

...the world seemed still—no wind and rain, and extremely quiet. I started to notice the special geology of the area composed of fine, soft grey sands that displayed the colours of winter, even though my trip was in summer. The beautiful images consisted of harmonious colour keynotes I was completely involved in appreciating the dense forest. All around me were trees, but each tree was different from the next. [S16]

Participants also demonstrated relaxed attention; they were immersed in and intuitively focused on sensory awareness, and felt at ease physically and mentally. For example:

I felt my whole body move with ease during the rolling moment; the grass was soft. I rolled again and again to keep the feeling even though at the same time

1 *I could feel it pricking my skin. I did not care that there might be some tourists*
2 *watching me. [S06]*
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4 The second significant theme was labelled ‘**living in the present**’. Participants reported a
5 sense of ‘**being in the moment**’—simple attention accompanied by a tendency to connect
6 with what they were doing—whether engaged in a dynamic or a static leisure activity:
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10 *I opened myself to the experience of the present moment when I looked at the*
11 *stars. I did not think too much or think anything else. I felt that I was close to*
12 *the stars and could easily catch them with my hands. I felt connected to my*
13 *experience in the here-and-now. [S38]*
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18 In these experiences, participants’ thoughts were fully engaged. A focus on being present-
19 centred directs attention to the present moment **rather than worrying about the past or**
20 **future**. This creates a space for thinking about the current situation in a more positive light, as
21 illustrated in the following:
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27 *I almost completely forgot about losing my wallet after my tranquil walk in the*
28 *national park. Therefore, I chose to continue this trip and the negative events*
29 *did not affect me. That beautiful state of being in the present moment made my*
30 *trip worthwhile and negative thoughts were taken away... I began to not care*
31 *about anything, even my lost cards. It did not matter I told myself. [S16]*
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37 A third concept in this theme is a ‘**sense of timelessness**’. This is one step beyond simply
38 paying attention to the experience, and involves losing the sense of time passing. In this state,
39 study participants shifted from ‘doing’ to ‘being’:
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43 *I wanted to see the sunrise. We went too early, so we stayed there and waited*
44 *about two hours. Initially, I thought the two hours wait might be very boring;*
45 *however, I felt [that] the time and space stood still and I was almost oblivious*
46 *to myself as well, when I looked at the night sky full of stars. [S03]*
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51 When living in the present participants felt nothing needed to be done; actions, duties or
52 obligations evaporated and there was no need to worry about problems.
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56 The third theme was related to the cognitive processes experienced during the MM episode.
57 Respondents were unaware of their thinking and totally immersed in their present moment
58 sensations. This was labelled ‘**non-elaborative awareness**’. A key concept associated with
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1 this theme was labelled '**bare perception**'. Phrases such as: "*I was oblivious to what was*
2 *going on and spaced out*" [S44] were used. These comments indicate a lack of consciousness
3 of the self as distinct from the world, of forgetting the self, and of being in harmony with the
4 world. This mental process involved 'an absence of cognition', 'a state of emptiness', 'blank
5 brain' or 'spaced out' when in a state of high involvement and complete immersion: *I just felt*
6 *I was part of the moment. My brain was in a state of emptiness and went blank... Eventually, I*
7 *immersed myself into the view and then I felt feelings of peace and relaxation.* [S44]
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13 Some respondents indicated a deeper insight by recognising their reality with acceptance.
14 This was labelled '**non-conceptual insight**': *My mind was in a state of enjoyment of where I*
15 *was. However, it was based on recognising that I was aware of my body and its limitations,*
16 *and understood the nature of the mountain as well.* [S01]
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22 Positive mental states were associated with a feeling of immediate peace and of being at
23 ease, as well as 'response flexibility' such as 'pausing before acting'. These results suggest
24 that non-elaborative awareness experienced by respondents involves an interaction between
25 awareness and cognition. During MM experiences, participants turn their attention inwards
26 and engage in an internal dialogue that recognises the reality of current situations, events or
27 objects, but allows negative thoughts to dissipate. The three themes explained above identify
28 episodes of tourist experiences associated with MM in backpacking contexts based on the
29 definition and key characteristics provided by Kabat-Zinn (2003). The characteristics are
30 distinct but occur simultaneously, interacting to produce a MM state. The three different types
31 of awareness observed suggest a definition of meditative mindful tourist experience as
32 "*paying attention to a present moment experience, without elaborating on it*".
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43 An analysis of responses based on demographic characteristics did not highlight any
44 obvious differences in MM experiences. Interestingly, the two Buddhist respondents claimed
45 that the informal MM episodes experienced during travel were similar to the state they
46 experience when practising meditation. It appears that MM episodes go beyond religion,
47 ideology (Kabat-Zinn, 2003) and demography.
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52 4.2 Antecedents of Meditative Mindfulness 53 54

55 Four main types of antecedents of MM were identified and labelled as: **travel-induced**
56 **relaxation, aesthetic appreciation, atmosphere of tranquillity, and curiosity**. Nine
57 concepts were identified within these four themes (see Table 4).
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Table 4. Antecedents facilitating meditative mindful tourist experiences

Themes	Concepts of triggers
1. Travel-induced relaxation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Relaxed state
2. Aesthetic appreciation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Beauty in wonder• Beauty in impermanence• Beauty in authenticity
3. Atmosphere of tranquillity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Absence of noise• Absence of normal light
4. Curiosity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Novel stimuli• Absence of cognitive stimuli

Travel often leads to relaxed attachment, a ‘change of pace’ that enables attention as well as an ability to feel relaxed about travel obstacles or disturbances. Respondents were not distracted by their MM travel experiences, and instead paid attention to their internal thoughts. This antecedent of a mindful experience was labelled ‘**relaxed state**’:

I was in a casual and relaxed mood when I was travelling because my mind was prepared for travel and fun. I would just naturally focus on being curious about what I was seeing or doing, and [being] in a receptive mood. [S20]

Aesthetic appreciation of beauty was associated with vastness, uniqueness and transcendence. Settings or events that created a sense of awe and wonder led to mindful attention. This was noted especially in natural and cultural settings in Australia. Aesthetic appreciation of mountains, the ocean, wildlife, classic architecture and the colours of sunrise, pure blue skies, and genuine outback scenery was labelled as ‘**beauty in wonder**’. “*I was intoxicated with appreciation of the wonderful beauty of nature*” [S06].

A second antecedent was another form of aesthetic visual stimuli, embodied in ever-changing natural phenomena such as sunrises and sunsets, shooting stars, moonrises, the night sky, the Milky Way or a double rainbow. Such transient natural phenomena allowed participants to experience a deep and stable awareness, labelled as ‘**beauty in impermanence**’:

I fully concentrated to notice those changes during the sunrise. It seemed I had seen a spiritual art performance on a stage that was different from looking at

1 *a picture or books.... I felt peaceful, beautiful, and nothing interrupted me at*
2 *that moment. [S10]*

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4 Here, visual appreciation of the beauty of a transient natural phenomenon focused attention.
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6 Although such phenomena happen in everyday life, travellers often have more time to look
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8 for them.
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11 The final concept identified in the theme of aesthetic appreciation was labelled ‘**beauty in**
12 **authenticity**’. Here, experience involving authentic beauty was a sense of, or a response to,
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14 what the respondents felt were genuine features of a setting:
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17 *I felt refreshed: “Does a real Shangri-La exist in the world?” The scene*
18 *encountered over there was beautiful with light blue water, pure and peaceful*
19 *beach and schools of tiny fish. I praised the image for a precious moment with*
20 *some surprise. What a real Australia! [S21]*
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25 Overall, these aesthetic experiences created visual fascination, an intensified sense of
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27 interrelatedness and a weakened sense of self (being oblivious to oneself) that contributed to
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29 the MM episode.
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31 The third theme, ‘**atmosphere of tranquillity**’ represents the absence of distractions,
32 particularly artificial sounds and lighting. The responses indicate that a person’s attention to
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34 sensations can be sharpened in a quiet environment. In such places, sounds from nature were
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36 clearly and vividly perceived:
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40 *I had a strong sense of focusing on listening to the different bird songs, the*
41 *sound of the waterfall and creek, the tick-toc of raindrops, even the slight*
42 *rustle of leaves in the wind or slight commotion among the bush grass. That*
43 *area was very quiet. [S28]*
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48 Tranquillity or quietness also allowed participants to focus on internal sounds: *I heard*
49 *nothing except my clear breathing and the sound from the ocean ... [S30]* An **absence of**
50 **noise** led to heightened attention to sounds from nature and to alternative sensations.
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55 A low intensity of visual stimuli, labelled as ‘**absence of normal light**’, was also an
56 antecedent of MM. Lesser amounts of light during outdoor activities such as camping or star
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58 gazing appeared to be related to feelings of calmness and peace. For example: *I felt I was*
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connected with nature, the stars, the ocean, even the dark. There was no longer a distance between my mind and the universe; very peaceful. [S03]

The triggers discussed above indicate that an atmosphere of tranquillity is an antecedent that facilitates attentiveness to sensations and allows individuals to gain access to a deeper self, leading to calmness of the mind. It should be noted that these triggers were mostly associated with natural settings.

The fourth theme was labelled ‘**curiosity**’. The results reveal that curiosity motivated respondents to be aware of their current experiences. Specifically, the first visit to a site or participation in a novel activity led to more intense engagement. ‘Being curious’ appeared to open mental ‘doors’ triggering a sense of being fully connected with the perceived sensations— allowing a new awareness of ‘**novel stimuli**’: *I was surprised seeing many pelicans gathering on the bays when I was reaching Moreton Island on a ferry. I had never seen such a beautiful scene in Taiwan. Wow... the experience was wonderful!* [S40]

Such curiosity about novel stimuli aroused positive emotional responses. Alternatively, the ‘**absence of cognitive stimuli**’ led to intense and continuously alert attention: *I had a strong sense of focusing on listening.... My friends had the same sense as well, because we were in an alert but happy mood in wild bushland along the river looking for platypuses.* [S28]

In contrast to predictions of SCM, low intensity on-site interpretation, and even an absence of interpretation facilitated MM experiences (Howard, 1998; Hughes & Morrison-Saunders, 2005). The development of curiosity leads participants to be mindfully aware of what is around them and encourages them to explore possibilities that exist on their journey and which differ from their daily routines.

4.3 Consequences of Meditative Mindfulness

MM was accompanied by immediate positive mental states, leading to affective (feelings or emotions) and cognitive psychological benefits (thoughts and thinking). Many participants also mentioned physiological benefits (see Table 5).

Table 5. Benefits of meditative mindful tourist experiences

Themes	Concepts
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1. Psychological (Mind)

Affective

- Mental ease (*tranquillity, joy, relaxation, stress release*)
- Psychological well-being

Cognitive

- Response flexibility (*detached awareness of thoughts, less cognitive reactivity, reflection*)
- Openness (*a simple heuristic of knowing*)
- Retrospective memory

2. Physical (Body)

- Physical relaxation
 - Physical resilience
-

Participants mentioned affective benefits associated with spontaneous feelings of mental ease. These spontaneous affective feelings were akin to a sense of serenity—an emotional equilibrium—rather than a more intense emotion. They were associated with tranquillity, joy, relaxation, and stress release and labelled as ‘**mental ease**’: *At that moment, my mind was in a state of calm. The calm was derived from my inner experience and felt pretty deep. The experience helped me to refresh myself and to be released from stress. [S15]*

Several interviewees commented on longer term transformational effects when explaining how the meditative mindful experience had positively influenced their daily lives. Such beneficial feelings occurred onsite immediately after the meditative mindful experience but could also continue long after the experience. Transformational benefits appeared to provide a re-establishment of affective balance and labelled ‘**psychological wellbeing**’: *This experience acted as a recharge that gave me the power and energy to face future challenges. [S02]*

Many respondents experienced some form of deep insight, understanding and acceptance of themselves as a result of a mindful experience. A MM episode seemed to allow changes of habitual thinking patterns that produced positive reflective responses to the situation, labelled ‘**response flexibility**’: *I tried to go along with the wave rather than challenge or combat it, even though I preferred adventurous activities like playing in the water. [S02]*

During such mindful experiences, backpackers were more open to novelty, and more receptive to the unknown, whether pleasant or unpleasant. This kind of thinking constituted a cognitive shift of ‘**openness**’, a simple heuristic of knowing rather than an objective distinction: *I found my mind adopted an innocent state, like a child’s...no evaluation, value, or reward was aroused. That is the true happiness of a child. [S38]*

Cognitive experiential benefits were also related to vivid memories. When asked about their mindful experiences, all respondents were able to spontaneously recall stories, vividly and in detail. Such memories were recalled for a long time afterwards the event, and were labelled as ‘**retrospective memory**’:

The travel experience of multi-sense perceptions is a clear and bright memory to me, although that travel was three years ago. I enjoyed every one of them. It seems I can feel different senses aroused again when I am talking to you.....
[S02]

It is noteworthy that these recollections were more related to inner feelings, rather than instrumental knowledge. There was little response when participants were asked about memories of cognitive or interpretative information.

Physical benefits were related to physical sensations, symptoms and improved performance. Some physical responses manifested quickly while respondents were on-site, leading to immediate muscular relaxation and comfortable breathing, labelled ‘**physical relaxation**’: *I could feel my shoulders loosening rather than being raised or hunched. I also felt my head cool down and stones were falling away from my jammed brain. At that moment, I feel my entire head was loosened. [S15]*

Physical responses would often last for some time and participants perceived enhanced ‘**physical resilience**’ and reduced fatigue: *While I did not sleep very long, my sleep was deep and comfortable. I knew my body rested well after the slow walk in the National Park that day. [S16]*

These findings suggest a reduction in physiological arousal also reduces psychological arousal and leads to positive outcomes, indicating a reflexive relationship between mind and body.

5. DISCUSSION

By applying Buddhist conceptualisations of MM to tourism contexts, this paper has identified informal mindful experiences and has explored their antecedents and consequences. Based on the findings, a framework for meditative mindful tourist experience is proposed (Figure 1).

Figure 1. A framework for meditative mindful tourist experiences

The findings regarding MM episodes firstly allow Kabat-Zinn's (2003) definition of mindfulness—paying attention, being in the present moment and being non-judgmental with acceptance—in the tourist context to be defined as “*paying attention to a present moment experience, without elaborating on it*”. The first part of this definition (paying attention to the experience) was found to be closely related to the sensations perceived during relaxation. Sensory awareness is a fundamental element of MM because a stream of awareness beginning with sensation leads to the commencement of mental processing in a mindful way (Siegel, 2009). Siegel (2009, p. 154) explained this phenomenon as a kind of “flow” in response to a “bottom-up” experience which enables an individual to “hold onto the present moment, not getting lost in prior learning or worries about the future”. This means that one is not thinking about the future (prospection) or the past (retrospection) but rather, one is experiencing present sensations (Gilbert & Wilson, 2007).

The second part of this definition (living in the present) refers to respondents paying attention but not entertaining an intention to act. They were relaxed in response to negative

emotions and thoughts aroused during the experience. Other researchers described this as “quieting the mind with concentration” (Mikulas, 2011, p. 3). Quietening helps people to distance themselves from their thoughts and relax in the here and now. Awareness of living in the present stops automatic responses to thoughts about the past or the future. Participants reported that they were not distracted when engaged in their MM experience and instead had a ‘blank brain’. In this state, their attention was not entangled with thinking about the past or the future; neither were they elaborating on, or judging the present.

When meditating, practitioners are in the present moment and not thinking about the past or future (Baer, 2003). Instead, they notice distracting thoughts then return their attention to the present moment. This contrasts with mental states in which the mind is preoccupied with thoughts about the past or the future, such as planning or fantasies. Retrospection (thinking about the past) is associated with increased severity of depressive symptoms and anxiety (Kang, Gruber, & Gray, 2013). Meditative practices emphasise present-centred awareness of one’s senses (Wallace & Shapiro, 2006), allowing the mind to pay attention to a focal object rather than being distracted (Dreyfus, 2011). Interestingly, this may activate the third construct of MM—non-elaborative awareness.

Non-elaborative awareness involves only the recognition of an object rather than conceptualising or judging it. It is a welcoming acceptance of any object (thought, feeling or sensation) where the objects are not deeply elaborated on or conceptualised. The common interpretations of ‘being oblivious to oneself’ and ‘blank brain (a sense of emptiness)’ described by Taiwanese backpackers are similar to descriptions of the phenomena of awareness in ancient Chinese philosophy. The classical Zhuangzi text on Daoist philosophy discusses the interaction of nature, the life of a human being and the philosophy of the mind (Defoort, 2012). Central features of Daoist philosophy emphasise the “harmonious union between humans and nature” which reflects a state of mental “wandering at ease” beyond the boundaries of the mind—this depicts people as being oblivious of themselves and others at that present moment and being immersed in the infinite (Blakeley, 2008). Introspection or reflection was often noted when the backpackers were immersed in nature or in outdoor activities. Interestingly, reflection allows tourists to self-generate insightful knowledge, rather than absorbing knowledge from external cognitive stimuli. Similar reflections have also been noted in studies of adventure travel, rural tourism and backpacker tourism (Cohen, 1979). Tourism settings may be endowed with specific characteristics, such as beauty, that draws attention and facilitates deeper non-conceptual insight.

The way in which an experience is imprinted in a participant's memory highlights a key difference between MM and SCM experiences. The findings imply that retrospective memories incorporate representations of affective sensations (Barrett & Bar, 2009). Respondents did not recall cognitive processes such as information processing being an important part of the MM episode. This may imply that during MM episodes, knowledge derived from brochures, signs, or interpretative contents such as biological characteristics of plants or animals are relatively less well retained. Sensory awareness that is non-conceptual may facilitate cognitive processes connected to working memory (Dreyfus, 2011). Indeed, remembering is another term for mindfulness in Buddhism and a vivid sensory awareness may enable the MM episodes to be remembered.

The results reveal interesting parallels and differences between MM and SCM (Table 6), most notably related to awareness and attention. Firstly, MM episodes involved experiencing sensory stimuli with relaxed attention, whereas SCM experiences tended to be sensitive to content or communicative cues that heightened attention (Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000). Secondly, MM episodes were identified with 'being' in the present, rather than entangling the mind in thinking about the past or the future. In contrast, SCM experiences involve a heightened state of involvement by actively drawing distinctions to understand the present (Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000). Thirdly, MM episodes are characterised by non-elaborative awareness that leads participants to turn their attentions inwards and to engage in an internal dialogue. In contrast, SCM requires deliberate cognitive awareness underpinned by a questioning or conceptualising mode of thinking.

Table 6. Contrasting MM and SCM in tourism contexts

Mindfulness	MM tourist experience	SCM tourist experience
Definition	Paying attention to a present moment experience, without elaborating on it	Conscious awareness: Being aware of the context and content of information
Psychological constructs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paying attention to the experience <i>Stimulating by sensory awareness</i> • Living in the present <i>Attention not entangled with thinking</i> <i>Being immersed, like 'blank brain'</i> • Non-elaborative awareness <i>Internal dialogue merges awareness and cognition</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeking multiple perspectives <i>Stimulating by interpretative content</i> • Active engagement in the present <i>To situate in the present</i> <i>To absorb knowledge</i> • Deliberate cognitive awareness <i>Conceptualising or questioning mode</i>
Experiential benefits	Being at ease; reflective response	Open to learning

The findings can also be linked to a number of other psychological concepts used to understand tourist experiences, including immersion, absorption, engagement and flow. Flow is a state of arousal where a person is totally engaged in an activity in which the level of challenge matches the skills of the individual (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Flow is activated by goal-orientated awareness followed by intense concentration or ‘hyperfocus’. In contrast, MM episodes begin with sensory perceptions associated with relaxed attention and attachment. During a flow experience, goal-seeking behaviour produces a kind of ‘top-down’ rather than the ‘bottom-up’ experience of MM (Siegel, 2009). Flow occurs, “when a person is aware of his or her actions but is not aware of his or her awareness of those actions” (Reid, 2011, p. 50). In contrast to flow, MM does not involve “the achievement of any particular state, but intentional awareness of what is, being aware of awareness” (Reid, 2011, p. 50). The feeling of being ‘in the zone’ during a flow experience produces a blissful state, whereas an informal MM episode leads to a state of being at ease. These subtle differences are worth investigating in future research.

The findings also support a connection between aesthetic appreciation connected to nature-based experiences, attentional function, and heightened sensory awareness (Xu, Cui, Ballantyne, & Packer, 2012). The liminal nature of travel has been proposed to transform an individual’s views and mind toward a more harmonic state (Graburn, 1989). In addition, attention restoration theory has been used to examine why visits to museums create satisfying experiences, enabling visitors to recover from the stresses of everyday life (Packer, 2008). The similarities and differences between attention restoration theory and MM could be examined further.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

These findings make three contributions to the understanding of tourist experiences. This study is the first to empirically identify the phenomenon of MM in tourism. An operational definition of MM has been proposed. Secondly, links between MM and its antecedents are proposed, particularly in relation to nature-based tourism settings and specific activities. Thirdly, the study indicates links between MM and its positive psychological and physical benefits. Mental ease and wellbeing are similar to the outcomes of formal mindfulness practices, such as a state of tranquillity and relaxation (Siegel, 2009). The findings further indicate that meditative mindful tourist experiences are often imprinted as vivid memories (Jha, Stanley, Kiyonaga, Wong, & Gelfand, 2010).

1 These findings have important implications for tourists and tourism operators. MM
2 provides a framework for understanding deeper engagement and positive psychological and
3 physical outcomes in nature-based tourism contexts. For tourists, travel creates a way of
4 experiencing MM to calm the mind and to provide intrinsic satisfaction. For tourism operators,
5 MM experiences may provide opportunities for mental and spiritual experiences sought by
6 customers in the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). There are also opportunities to
7 apply the findings to environmental interpretation as well as marketing and experience design.
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13 Future research could explore whether MM episodes occur in other types of tourism
14 contexts and whether the antecedents and consequences are similar to those reported in this
15 study. The findings of this research must be interpreted within the Taiwanese cultural context
16 of the sample. Given the growing interest in formal meditative mindful practices such as
17 meditation and yoga, it would be interesting to explore how the Buddhist perspective on
18 mindfulness is applied in other cultural contexts. The study could be replicated with other
19 Asian and non-Asian respondents to further develop the conceptual framework of meditative
20 mindful tourist experiences. Quantitative research to test and refine the conceptual framework
21 presented is also needed to provide a deeper understanding of how the mental processes
22 involved in meditative mindful tourist experiences are transformed.
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MINDFUL TOURIST EXPERIENCES: A Buddhist Perspective

Statement of Contribution

1. What is the contribution to knowledge, theory, policy or practice offered by the paper?

This research contributes to the body of knowledge in the area of meditative mindfulness studies applied to tourism. Meditative mindfulness is distinguished from socio-cognitive mindfulness. The findings of this paper make three theoretical contributions to the understanding of tourist experiences. Firstly, this study breaks new ground by empirically identifying the phenomenon of meditative mindfulness in tourism. An operational definition of meditative mindfulness associated with the tourist experience has been proposed, and the constructs of meditative mindfulness have been detailed. Secondly, this paper is the first attempt in tourism to identify the links between meditative mindfulness and its antecedents. Thirdly, the study has extended knowledge about the links between meditative mindfulness and its consequences. In addition, the results of this study also carry implications for policy and practice.

2. How does the paper offer a social science perspective / approach?

Meditative mindfulness is an emerging and complex concept that has received growing attention in the clinical psychology literature. This work adopts a social science approach by identifying and exploring the psychological processes behind meditative mindfulness. The study draws on the insights provided by Buddhist philosophy to propose an alternative psychological framework for mindful tourist experiences. The study then contrasts the proposed framework of meditative mindful experiences with psychological concepts such as socio-cognitive mindfulness and flow commonly used in the social science literature. Mindful travel is suggested to contribute to therapeutic-like benefits, which provides support for prior research on wellness and tourism.