

Abstract of a dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the Degree of M.Appl.Sc.

**Volunteer Tourism: An Exploration of the Perceptions and Experiences of
Volunteer Tourists and the Role of Authenticity in Those Experiences**

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This dissertation explores the volunteer tourism phenomenon and the role of authenticity in volunteer tourists' experiences. Although previous research has explored volunteer tourism, this study examines the phenomenon using in-depth interviews of volunteer tourists who have done different types of volunteer tourism trips. This study investigates the types of opportunities in which these volunteer tourists have participated, why they have participated in volunteer tourism, and what they have gained from their volunteer tourism experiences.

The study's results illustrate numerous opportunities to travel almost anywhere in the world, including developed countries, and that teaching and construction were common volunteer activities. A typical volunteer tourism trip for these participants lasted two weeks with the volunteering portion lasting a month or less, and all participants took part in touring the local area in some way. The study explores the motives of these volunteer tourists and found that most participants went on their trip to have a new experience of a different part of the world or to help others. Previous researchers stress that the overlying motive of volunteer tourists is altruism; however, this study finds that the 'desire for a new experience' outweighs 'altruistic' motives. The difference in these findings illustrates how volunteer tourists' motives can vary and that some volunteer tourists may be more vacation-minded than volunteer-minded. These

volunteer tourists' attained experiences reveal three main themes: experiences relating to self; getting behind-the-scenes; and sincere communication and relationships.

Based on these attained experiences, the study explores the role of authenticity in them and found that existential authenticity (inter-personal and intra-personal), constructive authenticity, staged authenticity, sincerity, and intimacy all play a role. Some participants learnt more about their self and had life-changing experiences, which made them gain a better or different sense of their self or discover their identity. These experiences relate to existential authenticity. The sense of satisfaction attained by many of these participants shows signs of intra-personal authenticity. The study also demonstrates the role of staged authenticity with behind-the-scenes experiences important to these volunteer tourists. Ideas of constructive authenticity relate to when some of the participants experienced the host destination differently from their beliefs and expectations. Lastly, notions of sincerity and intimacy, linked to notions of interpersonal authenticity, are significant in the context of volunteer tourists' genuine communication and relationship forming with members of the local community and fellow volunteers. Based on these results, this study concludes that authenticity plays an important role in volunteer tourists' experiences and that this helps differentiate volunteer tourism from other tourism experiences.

Keywords: volunteer tourism, volunteer tourists, perceptions, experiences, sincerity, authenticity.