

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the largest industries in the world and ecotourism is the fastest growing sector of international tourism (Scheyvens and Purdie 1999: 213).

'Take only photographs, leave only footprints' (International Institute for Environment and Development [IIED] 1997) is a common refrain of tourists who wish to travel to pristine environments to observe, interact and 'commune' with the earth. It is also the catch cry of environmentalists who correspondingly wish to preserve 'the environment' in its near pristine state. Situated on the periphery of tourism and environmentalism is the ecotour guide, who directs tourists into the pristine wilderness they search for and provides for them an interpretive ecotourism 'experience' of nature. These guides are the focus of my research and of this dissertation.

Ecotourism has been labelled as 'appropriate tourism' for small groups. It has also been labelled as 'socially responsible tourism' that involves adventure travel where ecotourists engage in low-impact tourism. Ecotour companies that focus on their clients prepare and direct tours that are ecologically sound. These tours are designed not to disturb or damage

the physical or social environment. Ideally, these ecoenterprises demonstrate sensitivity towards the environment, conduct their tours within an ecologically ethical framework, promote ecological sensitivity and awareness, are involved in long-term planning and support conservation awareness programs connected to the locations they visit. Leading edge ecotour operators comment that ecotourism also involves personal responsibility to the environment which continues well after the trip has been completed (Sirakaya, Sasidharan and Sonmez 1999: 172). Honey (1999b) maintains that ecotourism is frequently referred to as 'treading lightly on the earth'; where the participants 'take only photos, leave only footprints'. Much of the promotion of ecotourism contains buzzwords aimed at stirring up tourists' emotions about interacting with 'pristine' environments. Some of the words utilised include bio, eco, lush, pure, quiet, unspoiled and certainly, 'green' (Honey 1999b: 12). These assertions of 'looking after' the environment during a tour are similar to comments made by the group of interpretive ecotour guides in this study and form the basis of my investigation into the mechanisms used by the guides to interpret nature for the tourists.

Ecotourists comprise a blend of independent travellers, organised groups, private individuals or families interested in an ecotourism experience as part of a diverse holiday purchase. Some tourists attracted by

nature actually do not want to be totally immersed in a nature experience, but wish to combine the worlds of nature experience and resort accommodation. While these resort-based activities are not usually considered ecotourism, if correctly managed, they can provide an efficient and sustainable means for large groups of tourists to gain exposure to nature with lower levels of impact than would happen if they were undertaking a complete nature-based holiday, including camping and other outdoor recreational activities (Allcock, Jones, Lane and Grant 1994: 37).

Situating the Study

Tourism, as a leisure pursuit, is appealing as a research topic to any number of disciplines and has many themes and categories to investigate, particularly from a sociological perspective. Tourism can provide sociologists with understanding about social shifts of values and positions, social control of spatial movement, the social characteristics of tourists (Cohen 1974), and social applications of recreation in an increasingly bureaucratised society. On the other hand, sociology can supply much to tourism, from charting and understanding the emerging leisure consciousness and the character of the tourist role, to accentuating the expansion of the tourist industry and strengthening international relations (Schmidt 1979: 441-442). This thesis fills the existing gap in the literature about ecotourism and tour guides. The study of ecotourism also lends itself

to a new area of focus within sociology, that of mobility, in its literal sense, which includes categories of both voluntary and compulsory mobility, such as willing mobility for the wealthy and the tourists and forced mobility for vagabonds, the homeless and the poor (see Bauman 2003).

The year 2002 was deemed the 'International Year of Ecotourism'¹ globally, and within Australia, named as the 'Year of the Outback'². Although interest in ecotourism from a sociological point of view has provided little real data, the following research is timely because it presents a synthesis of a new area of investigation and is original in its composition. The research is also relevant to issues of both sociological and public concern. This study into interpretive guided tours within the scope of ecotourism is an analysis of individuals who are members of an ecotourism organisation. The research concentrates upon a group of ecotour guides called 'Savannah Guides'³ (see Plate 1.1).

¹ See <http://www.world-tourism.org/sustainable/YE-Main-Menu.htm> and <http://www.ecotourism.org.au/YE2002/index.asp>

² See <http://www.outback2002.com/>

³ I am aware that there are two separate spellings of savanna – ie. Savannah and savanna. It is correct to use either one. The Savannah Guides use their spelling to differentiate themselves in the tourism sector. The alternate spelling is used to identify a place or region, such as the tropical savannas of northern Australia, or the tropical savannas of Africa. However, Savannah, Georgia, USA, uses the same spelling as the Savannah Guides.

The Savannah Guides are a not-for-profit organisation that provide a model for the expansion and the accomplishment of world's best practice nature-based and culture-based outback tourism in the tropical savannas region of northern Australia. The principles, ethos and ongoing participation of this association in the creation of a professional 'group identity' have provided a 'remote area guiding model' that, as far as is known, is perhaps unique to ecotourism anywhere in the world (Hynes 1999: 13). Best practice, as seen from the tourist's perspective, can be defined as the search for excellence, 'keeping in touch with innovations, avoiding waste and focusing on outcomes which are in the community interest'. Best practice also encompasses the management of 'change and continual improvement'. Therefore, it includes all levels of organisational practice (Wearing and Neil 1999: 138).

Sociological investigations of guided tours are comparatively rare, even though the importance of the guide's position as an intermediary in the tourist-host connection is paramount:

Any analysis of the tourist-host relationship ... will require a consideration of some group of stranger-tourists and the agents and organisations that mediate with the hosts (Nash 1978: 41 in Holloway 1981: 378).

This research seeks to understand and clarify this under researched area by the investigation of interactions between the Savannah Guides, the tourists

and the interpretation levels and resources used in conducting guided tours of environmentally fragile areas.

PLATE 1.1

Savannah Guides



This thesis also seeks to contribute new knowledge to an undeveloped area. According to Urry (1995), 'one particular kind of service that has been particularly underexamined by sociologists is that of travel' (Urry 1995: 129) and by extension, tourism. Possibly one of the less researched features of tourism is the increase of tourism studies within academia. Even though studies have been published in books, conference papers and journals

specifically devoted to tourism, at a basic investigative level the sociological research remains eclectic, disparate and under theorised (Meethan 2001: 2).

The role of the tour guide is central in the study of tourism and this study of a group of ecotour guides is significant because they are perceived as key mediators within the tourist industry; as their vocation enhances the tourist or visitor experience. This research explores those issues.

I was able to study ecotour guides both as a group and as individuals within that group with the help of the Co-operative Research Centre for the Sustainable Development of Tropical Savannas (TS-CRC) connected to my university. Having been granted a PhD scholarship from the Co-operative Research Centre, I began a sociological study of the 'Savannah Guides' within the savanna region of northern Australia. Ecotourism, as a subject of inquiry, has long appealed to me. I have completed previous research on the social construction of 'the environment' (Hillman 1995) and also the notion of tourism being an 'authentic experience', when I undertook research into the 'backpacker' segment of the mass tourism industry (Hillman 1999). That research investigated the problematic issue of 'traveller versus tourist' and the ways in which backpackers eschew mass tourism and 'package' deals, but also how they use these same commodities to their advantage. This research seeks to build upon that pre-existing foundation. Some of the issues

that I explore throughout the thesis include membership of an overarching ecotour guide association, conformity to organisational codes of conduct, guiding ecotourists on interpretive ecotours and management of ecotourism businesses.

Any research into ecotourism and ecotour guides immediately distinguishes it from mainstream tourism. Ecotourism began as a global response opposed to the mass tourist industry. The idea of environment-based tourism, which both enjoys and safeguards nature, has only been realised in the last few years (Valentine 1993). However, although ecotour guides believe they offer individual service, 'much of what is marketed as ecotourism is simply conventional mass tourism wrapped in a thin veneer of green' (Honey 1999a: 51). The notion of ecotourism as separate from mass tourism is thus one of the problematic issues dealt with in this thesis. I examine the occupation of the ecotour guide, the ways in which they interact with the mass tourism industry and how they conceive and market their ecotourism product.

This thesis defines ecotourism as another variant of the extended tourist industry where operators perceive and market ecotourism as a separate segment of the overall tourist sector.

As part of the overall tourism industry, ecotourism is regarded as a niche enterprise that caters for particular interests of certain tourists.

It has only been recognised as a separate form of tourism for the past ten years, so it is certainly not as old as, say, cultural tours of Europe. Although it is still relatively small in numbers, it shows a higher rate of growth than any other tourism niche (Beeton 1998: 4).

Somewhat close to, and often considered an off-shoot of ecotourism, are the challenging 'experience' tours which are a swiftly increasing part of the Australian tourist industry. These tours appear to have been stimulated by the achievement of the 'Crocodile Dundee' movies and the rise of a definite aesthetic sense of the Australian environment. Australian 'adventure', 'wilderness', 'outback' or 'eco' tourism is a new pattern of marketable travel which has only become accessible since the mid 1960s, but has lately attained significant popularity in the tourism marketplace (Hall 1998: 285). As Tyler and Dangerfield somewhat positively state; '[e]cotourism supplies real experiences of natural environments' (Tyler and Dangerfield 1999: 148).

Across a range of areas from marketing to sociology, it is asserted that tourism is nowadays best described as an 'experience' (see Pine and Gilmore 1999), a connection with the environment in a condition of elevated awareness. The tourist locations supply individuals with deeply significant experiences and representations of the environment and nature that are full of cultural importance and which are, in certain ways, dissimilar to their own environments (Brown 1992: 64). Within the experience economy (Pine and Gilmore 1999), individuals seek out a vast array of activities which they

desire to experience. Fodor's, a travel publications company, that offers tourist guides for many places globally, recently published Guttman's 'escapist scrapbook'. The book covers an extensive range of intense escapist experiences. It lists all manner of activities from white water rafting to dog sledding (Pine and Gilmore 1999: 15). All of these are activities that involve personal exertion and participation. So, this involvement increases and ensures the 'experiential' side of ecotourism.

In an expanding service economy, experience management is a key component of a guided tourist encounter. 'Experience management' of a guided tour is focused on the availability of qualitative factors of the travel experience, such as exotic and attainable tour objectives, excellent service provision and quality facilities and arrangements. Tour guides are responsible for high level travel experiences for the tourist and a positive result for the host (Cohen 1985; Gurung, Simmons and Devlin 1996: 110-111). The physical involvement of the tourist intensifies and enhances the emotional involvement in a guided tour.

When a client purchases a service, they obtain a set of vague activities carried out on their behalf. But when they buy an experience, they pay to interact with an enjoyable sequence of unforgettable events that a company

stages, such as in a dramatic theatrical production. This engages the client in an individual encounter (Pine and Gilmore 1999: 2).

In spite of the general perceived capacity of the unique interest travel market by potential clients and travel marketers to provide unique ecoexperiences, little empirically based data has been forthcoming on the ecotourism experience (Hall 1991: 271). Even though ecotourism and the marketing of unique travel experiences have been widely theorised within various disciplines of academia, there is little theoretical data available regarding the occupation of the ecotour guide and the ecotourism business owner-operator.

Although relatively new, ecotourism is now an integral part of the tourist industry, even though it is seen as a separate entity. This new found niche tourism gives the mass tourist industry power over the appropriated use of nature-based tourism and allows the mass tourist industry to 'corner' a piece of the currently lucrative trade in nature. This thesis will deal with two aspects of the tourist industry, the tour guide and the ecobusiness owner-operator.

Previously, tourism research has tended to focus on tourist classifications and the various individual qualities, personalities, motivations

and requirements of travellers and less on tourism representations (Fennell 1999: 54), such as ocean reefs, sacred indigenous sites and rainforest areas. To supplement this gap, this thesis will examine the occupation of ecotour guides and their tourist clients to extend sociological knowledge.

Among many travel patterns, the guided tour is highlighted as a useful study for both the tourist and the environment and as the most symbolically ritualised for the social scientist. Ritual is easily observable in a guided tour situation where the guide follows formal procedures and ceremonial conduct while simultaneously disguising their behaviour as unplanned and 'off the cuff' routines. Of all methods of travelling, the guided tour lends itself to inquiry as a research subject because the most important parts of tourism are clearly identifiable and readily understood in this form (Schmidt 1979: 441-442). Important parts of the tourism experience include, in this case, communing with nature, suitability of the tour guide to the tour and the tourists, customers purchasing and receiving a 'customised' tour, rationalisation of tours and associated tour products and expenditure of emotional labour by the guides for the tourists. Therefore, evidence of the purchase of a tour and the delivery of a service are readily available to the researcher.

In the social science literature, there is substantial agreement that ritual serves the double function of linking individuals to the community or society, and bridging the gaps separating social differences as between social classes, families, men and women, and

so on. It is through the agency of ritual that individual behaviour and accomplishment are ratified as socially appropriate or inappropriate, exemplary, worthy of advancement, demotion, respect, disgust, or as typifying a particular social position, class or category (MacCannell 1992b: 255).

Ritual is important to this thesis because it is linked to the performance and emotional labour component of all guided tours. Ritual is also relevant to the study of the overarching organisation of the Savannah Guides because it highlights the conduct and regulations inherent in organisational behaviour. Even though the tours I engaged with ranged from cultural and historical to nature-based, all shared similar elements. In other words, the tours were ritualised and structured, although they were marketed as the opposite of highly ritualised events. For example, the tours always began with introductions and a brief 'getting to know you' session at the departure point. This was always followed by instructions and information about rules and regulations pertaining to the site and the tour itself – the 'dos and don'ts' of the tour. The rules were further comprised of ecotourism philosophy such as, 'Take only photographs, leave only footprints' (IIED 1997). Then the tour would begin. The tourists were shepherded by the guide to a bus, where they were always given a brief informative spiel of the history and geographic background of the area. Following this, the tourists were then driven to an environmentally fragile site, the focus of the tour itself, and the tour would continue. During the tour, the guide would relay information to the tour group using informed interpretive techniques. There was always

the opportunity for the tourists to make observations and to ask questions. The tours were always structured to include a food break, either lunch or morning or afternoon tea, where the tourists and the guide would interact socially with each other. Once the environmental and interpretive phase of the tour was completed, the guide shepherded the tourists back on to the bus, and they were driven back to the point of first departure. Congratulations and thanks were then bestowed upon the guide for having such an exquisite area, site or location to show the tourists and for the informative aspects of the tour itself.

Therefore, as with other ritualistic behaviour, such as initiation or ceremonial formality, nature-based guided tours act to connect individuals with nature. It is the role of the guide to interpret 'the environment' for the tourist. In turn, the tourist hopefully gains an insight and awareness about environmental concerns.

This thesis maintains that ecotourism is an extensively marketed and interconnected component of the tourism industry. Ecotourism activities can function as an example of the ecologically sustainable growth of all forms of tourism (Allcock, Jones, Lane and Grant 1994: 18). To this end, ecotour guides occupy an important role.

A significant feature to emerge from this research is that ecotour guides provide a valuable quality encounter as compared to mainstream tour guides and mass tourism operators. The focus of the ecotours and this thesis is on interpretive guided tour experiences arranged by a tour operator and led by a guide (Weiler and Davis 1992: 92). An exploration of the processes and relationships associated with becoming and 'being' a tour guide provided many questions; some of which are listed here:

1. What do the Savannah Guides accomplish?
2. What is significant about the discourse of the Savannah Guides? How do they acquire their knowledge, and from what source?
3. What is the philosophy of the organisation? What are the inclusive and exclusive practices of the organisation?
4. How do they present themselves to the public? To what extent do their values fit within the wider discourse on environmentalism and ecotourism?
5. Why are these individuals drawn to ecotour guiding as an occupation?

The aim of this study is to investigate the occupation of the ecotour guides as 'workers', the relationship between ecotour guides, interpretation of guided

tours and ecotourism practices and how they relate to, and are utilised by tourists, as part of an expanding service economy.

Although research in various aspects of tourism has received some attention, the verbal performances of tour guides have undergone little study (see Fine and Haskell Speer 1985: 75; Sheldon 1986: 350). While some sociological studies of tours recognise that the dramaturgical expertise and presentation ability of tour guides are significant (Holloway 1981; Mulhauser and Peace 2001; Schmidt 1979), only a small number of studies have examined the spoken performance of a guided tour. Except for generalisations about the significance of verbal skills or rigid ideas about how to speak, not even well known reference books used to train tour guides (Grinder and McCoy 1985) contribute any practical examples of the structure and purpose of the interpreter's speech (Fine and Haskell Speer 1985: 75).

It is clear that the quality of the information provided by tourist guides and the performance of the guides, can vary enormously. This in turn impacts on the visitor's perception of the host nationals and the environment (Gurung, Simmons and Devlin 1996: 113).

A qualitatively based sociological approach to the study of tourism offers a different type of analysis from quantitative approaches to investigations into the conduct of tour guides (Cohen 1985; Fine and Haskell Speer 1985; Holloway 1981; Katz 1985; Weiler and Davis 1993). Direct engagement with participants allows the collection of important data highlighted by the

subjects themselves. Meanings given to the interpretive guide experience by the guides themselves is realised through their thoughts and concerns on tourists, ecotourism and the environment. Although quantitative data can illustrate trends and provide general statistics, qualitative methods engage with reasons and interpretations of subjective constructions.

The guided tour reduces an extensive geographical area into a memorable experience of many tourist sites. Organised tours help to overcome the problem of what to see in a short time frame. The tourist's personal well being is assured because they know in advance, where they are going and where they will be staying. Tour co-ordinators and operator-owners excel at planning and arranging tour components. Similar to other service industry providers, tour co-ordinators operate their businesses in an ever-changing and cost competitive market. They sell a non-essential experience (see Pine and Gilmore 1999). The co-ordinators and operator-owners attempt to provide for the needs of the tourists and not for the shortfalls of the destinations (Carey and Gountas 1997: 426). Tours also provide some pleasures that are not disclosed or even acknowledged (Schmidt 1979: 442). Some of these experiences may include such things as tactile sessions with native flora and fauna, or the sighting of a rare or endangered animal while on tour. Tour guides behave as shields between tourists and the social circumstances, planning transport, interpreting and

managing problems which may occur (Schmidt 1979: 442). A tour guide is an individual who is accountable for the delivery of an ecotourism experience in the field (Weiler and Davis 1993: 92).

In this dissertation, I have used grounded theory to generate theoretical insights. As the theories and concepts emerge from the data, new theories are conceived throughout both the data collection process and the analysis process. Grounded theory involves new theory development. My new theories concerning ecotour guides will be developed throughout the thesis and will be discussed in Chapter Eight.

The very purpose of grounded theory research is to produce theory. The source of theory here is the researcher who constructs it from the interview, observation, visual or documentary data collected concerning a target phenomenon; theory is developed in situ, or is *grounded* in the data collected (Sandelowski 1993: 214 italics in original).

Although theory is pervasive in qualitative research, and is primary to the way in which a research project is undertaken, it can either be central or marginal to the research subject being investigated. Because qualitative methods are utilised to examine a plethora of meanings, there is a certain amount of hesitancy about 'how central theory should be at the substantive level in a qualitative product' (Sandelowski 1993: 215).

The most significant and lasting contributions ... have been made by researchers who employed an often loose qualitative methodology. Their often acute insights and theoretical framework in which these have been embodied provided the point of departure

for several “traditions” in the sociological study of tourism, which endowed the field with its distinctive intellectual tension, even as the much more rigorous quantitative touristological studies often yielded results of rather limited interest (Cohen 1988a: 30).

Some proponents suggest that qualitative methods produce ‘richer’ and ‘thicker’ descriptive data than quantitative methodologies, in many cases, they should replace them (Dann and Phillips 2000: 253). Importantly, qualitative research can be perceived as an attempt to give meaning and comprehension to various phenomena, as understood by the individuals who experience them. Furthermore, in some studies, the data does not lend itself to being collected quantitatively because the researcher seeks to relate elements of an intricate world through the situations and perspectives of participants. Qualitative investigators understand that the ‘truth’ cannot be discovered absolutely, but are representing the knowledge they have found as accurately as possible (Riley 1996: 38).

A Short History of the Tourism Industry Responses to Ecotourism

Following *Our Common Future* (World Commission on Environment and Development [WCED] 1987) and the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, escalating numbers of groups and businesses at the global, federal and provincial level and in both the civic and personal domains have embraced the beliefs of ‘sustainable development’. Likewise, within tourism, ‘sustainability’ has been accepted by developers and scholars as an objective

for development, and there has been an ever intensifying flood of policy information, preparation guidelines and exemplars of best practice from a diversity of origins (Sharpley and Sharpley 1997: 123).

Governmental agencies have begun to understand that tourism and the environment are inseparably connected and that tourism projects must be cautiously designed to avoid environmental problems. Some of these problems include atmosphere pollution, water, sound and ocular contamination, congestion and ecological injury, and disturbances which have been encountered by particular tourism zones (Boo 1991: 189; Butler 1992: 32; Coppock 1982: 272; Eder 1996: 192; Hall 1994: 139; Inskeep 1987: 121; Orams 1995: 3; Tyler and Dangerfield 1999: 146; WCED 1987: 33). Tourism planning is essential, not only for scientific aims, but to preserve the environment for the future. The planning also safeguards the long-term assets in tourism infrastructure, destinations, departments, services and marketing agendas. More and more, ecotourists are demanding that their environments be high class and, as far as possible, pollution free as well as intrinsically stimulating. Inskeep (1987) reports that environmentally conscious tourists will alter travel arrangements if environmental quality prospects are not appropriate (Inskeep 1987: 119).

Ecotourism customs and measures are being mediated through business operators, systems of administration at every level, not-for-profit associations, environmental idealists and aboriginal groups, along with ecotourist organisations themselves. All these groups bring their own agendas that can, and frequently do, clash. Notwithstanding these apparent differences, there is justification for hope: all of these groups express a shared concern in the sustainability of the natural assets that comprise the basis of ecotourism. Ecologically conscious business operators acknowledge the necessity to safeguard the long-term durability of their trade. Governments and not-for-profit associations may challenge the impact of ecotourism activities, yet they also identify their significance in the preservation of natural sites from more unfortunate abuse (Honey 1999b: 9; Shephard and Royston-Airey 2000: 331). Equally, Aboriginal groups are faced with options concerning marketable use that entails the conservation or devastation of ecologically crucial regions (Lawrence, Wickins and Phillips 1997: 315). The development of relevant and appropriate organisations to oversee the dissemination of information and co-operative efforts regarding sustainable practices within ecotourism is on the increase world-wide.

The industry needs to develop standard codes of conduct and disseminate accurate and reliable information to all parties involved in tourism. Possibly, each country should develop an ecotourism association to serve as an information clearing house and as an organiser for co-operative efforts (Hawkins 1994: 268).

One objective in Australia has been to develop a national framework for the

expansion of ecotourism. One of the main points emerging from the debate is the need for compromise between all concerned parties. Other vital issues include the need for low impact and ecologically acceptable advances to tourism growth and development. Within management groups, the necessity to simplify the procedures used in rule creation between state borders and organisation management needs to be made uniform. Other elements that influence supervision of natural assets, as well as restraints, are the need for regulation of impacts and accreditation to be addressed (Allcock, Jones, Lane and Grant 1994; Department of the Environment, Sport and Territories 1996). The national framework in Australia is being developed to create a uniform code of conduct across all states and territories and has simple guidelines that are applicable to, and suit all, groups involved.

Compliance with these guidelines can encourage the ecotourism trade towards a sustainable use of tourism assets. It can also protect ecotour operators from the misappropriation of the term 'eco'. Thus, guideline compliance will protect clients from 'eco abuse' and, more consequentially, create a clear path to an accreditation strategy (Allcock, Jones, Lane and Grant 1994; Orams 1995; Sirakaya 1997).

The Australian National Ecotourism Strategy (1994), established some important guidelines to advance ecotourism in Australia.

Australia will have an ecologically sustainable ecotourism industry that will be internationally competitive and domestically viable. Ecotourism in Australia will set an international example for environmental quality and cultural authenticity while realising an appropriate return to the Australian community and conservation of the resource (Department of the Environment, Sport and Territories 1996).

Ecotourism is focused on the use of the environment and is also concerned with the biology and physiology of natural features. The preservation of pristine areas and natural resource management are therefore fundamental to the planning, development and management of ecotourism (Allcock, Jones, Lane and Grant 1994: 16). Currently, ethical environmental guidelines are left up to each individual operator to implement and enforce as they see fit.

Codes of ethics are designed to set the ethical standard, guide, communicate and educate organisational members. Presumably then, those operators that have codes of ethics and, perhaps more importantly, implement them in their day-to-day functioning are more likely to have a heightened awareness of acceptable conduct and a consistent ethical approach throughout their business operation (Fennell and Malloy 1999: 938).

Therefore, the co-operation of all governments, preservationists, rural communities, tourism operators and project organisations will ensure that ecotourism is on the way to long-term sustainability (Whelan 1991: 14).

In answer to warnings for greater environmental accountability, the Australian Tourism Industry Association (ATIA) drafted a set of environmental ethics, which urges owner-operators of the sector to acknowledge their accountability to both the human population and the broader environment. The tourist industry is accountable for keeping sustainable those parts of the earth and its assets they use. Moreover, sustainable development can be used for continuing the long-term expansion of the ecotourism trade but it can only be remain sustainable if consideration is applied to the tourism sectors response to consumer and tourist trade demand (Hall 1992: 152-153).

The Australian National Tourism Committee has placed considerable emphasis on special interest tourism as a growth area of travel with potential for much further development and noted a world wide trend towards 'travel with a purpose' (Hall and Weiler 1992: 6).

In 1996, following years of tourism trade deliberation, the Ecotourism Association of Australia (EAA) and the Australian Tourism Operators Association (ATOA) initiated a comprehensive accreditation agenda for ecotourism business people, entitled the National Ecotourism Accreditation Program (NEAP) (Beeton 1998: 137).

The initial approach to the founding of NEAP was assigned to the tourism portfolio in the Australian Commonwealth government. Consultants were employed to formulate a national ecotourism accreditation

plan. A plan was created that covered designated programs, but little that involved essential accreditation measures. At that time, the newly founded EAA began to compile an up-dated and more comprehensive draft. The initial form of NEAP was issued in 1996 by the Australian government. It was developed by a contingent from the EAA, the Office for National Tourism (ONT), and Victoria Tour Operators Association (VTOA), with help from more than thirty tourism administrators (Buckley 2001: 165-167; Epler Wood and Halfpenny 2001: 124; Wearing and Neil 1999: 26-27).

The Australian tourism industry has pushed the need for self-regulation as a strategy to enhance its credibility. But probably more importantly, it is seen through this activity, to be active within the sector, and thus stave off government regulation. For instance, the Australian Travel Industry Association (ATIA) has advanced a voluntary set of environmental practice rules for tourism operators. This ambition mirrors the development of a more responsible viewpoint within the industry. In the future, environmental management will extend policies and take into account social impacts, monitor changes within the industry and recognise political tensions as a prerequisite for the institution of satisfactory levels of tourism growth (Craik 1991: 132).

Ecotourism is an industry that is highly dependent upon a continued pristine environment. In recent times 'the environment' has evolved from being purely a backdrop to tourism in the regulation of landscapes and 'sun, sand and surf' (Crick 1989) for certain groups of tourists, to becoming a core of the tourist experience. This major change, in relation to eager tourists scrutinising the environment, is commonly understood as 'ecotourism' (Hall 1992: 152).

Even though the potential for ecotourism is high in Australia, little data exists relating to the interpretive guided ecotour experience and, the occupation of tour guide. In spite of the fact that specific ecotourism operators can provide some evidence of experience related data, it is hard to acquire (Blamey 1995: 15). Further, many of the operators have not seen the need to provide such data, or even to make it available.

This thesis will detail the occupation of the ecotour guide, their place as purveyors of the environmental message to the tourists and, their position as protectors and interpreters of the outback within the framework of an expanding experience economy.

Summary of the Thesis

Chapter Two is the literature review and examines the theory, ethical issues and research that surrounds sociology and tourism. It is organised according to themes of tourism, the environment, tour guides and emotional labour. It discusses theoretical perspectives on these issues using literature from within the disciplines of sociology, tourism and management.

Chapter Three sets out the methodological approach taken in this study. The chapter begins with a contextualisation of the study and follows on with the procedures and methods used to record and collect the data. I then conclude the chapter with a discussion of grounded theory and its positioning as my methodological base within my research.

Chapter Four is the first of the substantive chapters. It presents a profile of the ecotour guide and introduces the research participants. I discuss the different types of individuals who have joined the main guiding association, the Savannah Guides, and their reasons for joining. This is followed by a discussion of individuals' personal skills and backgrounds and, how these 'fit' into their notions of tour guiding. The chapter concludes with an overview of the effects of the guides' working arrangements on their family lives.

Chapter Five examines the values and norms of the Savannah Guides Association. Becoming a Savannah Guide involves a process of a number of measurements of competence and conformity. This chapter examines these processes and the tensions and contradictions encountered by the organisational members as they strive to attain and to maintain membership of the overarching group.

Chapter Six is given over to an exploration about leading guided ecotours. It examines the framework of the ecotours themselves, discusses the elements that make up each individual ecotour party, the cultural background of the tourists and how the tour guides perceive that the tourists themselves 'come to' the understanding that they are ecotourists. The chapter concludes with a discussion about ecotourist behaviour while engaged in a guided tour.

Chapter Seven focuses on the hardships and responsibilities of the guides as business managers. One the problems of running an ecotour business is how it should be marketed and the sort of support needed to position these businesses in the competitive ecotourism sector. This is followed by a discussion of the maintenance of sustainable ecotours for the clients and the restrictions imposed by governmental and environmental bodies on the execution of tours.

Chapter Eight, the Conclusion, summarises the research aim and questions. The study shows that through the application of a selective theoretical approach, an informed contribution to the sociology of tourism can be achieved. My study contributes to sociological accounts of tour guides, tourism and the environment. The insights generated from the data are also theoretical, as the research engages with the tensions from within sociological theory as a means to uncover a meaningful framework for analysis. Finally, I make recommendations for future research.