

# Enhancing regenerative tourism based on authenticity: marketing identity of visitor experiences in New Zealand

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## Abstract

Authenticity is a prevalent attribute in tourism experiences. It is anticipated to lead the future of tourism systems as part of an expected effective tourism transformation. In this research, the resilience of tourism enterprises is tested based on the identity of the tourism product being sold. The paper explores the role of authenticity in the promotion of the tourism experience in New Zealand. The paper argues that the understanding of authenticity in tourism futures is going to be critical in a digital environment to attract targeted clients through digital marketing. Drawing from a website content analysis of five local experiences in New Zealand, the results discuss ‘how’ and ‘why’ a local community in New Zealand develops pure storytelling attached to its culture and nature. The paper argues that post-pandemic tourism recovery is only possible through authentic regenerative tourism where authentic experiences do not only claim to be authentic, but they are authentic in relation to the originality and symbolism of tourist activities.

**Keywords:** authenticity, regenerative tourism, post-covid tourism recovery, marketing, visitor experience.

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## Introduction

Authenticity is central to tourism in cultural heritage and indigenous settings (Jamal & Hill, 2004; Cohen & Cohen, 2012). The notion of authenticity is widely contested (Wall & Xie, 2005). The concept is multifaceted and needs a holistic understanding of the philosophies associated with it (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006). This is because every authorship has tended to define the concept based on their perspective (Conran, 2006). In the current technological-based landscape, and to enhance the visitor experience, the use of websites and social media is getting popular and often certain experiences are referred to as authentic experiences by the consumers (Mkono, 2012). Therefore, experience reviews play a vital role to make decisions and tourists often rely on the concept of authenticity when planning a trip (Ramkissoon & Uysal, 2011).

The tourist notion of authenticity is bound to and requires origin-based levels of interaction with the place and the people which gives the sense of 'authentic verification' reinforced by the guarantor who shares the story of a place with visitors (Bryce, Murdy, & Alexander, 2017; Haley, 2021). However, the claim for authenticity is rarely verified by tourists themselves (McIntosh, 2004; Swanson & Timothy, 2012) and tourists live an authentic experience that is blindly followed by other tourists (Asplet & Cooper, 2000). In the context of the relationships between authenticity and tourism (Hughes, 1995), this research aims to understand the constructs of authenticity and identity as important mechanisms in the management and marketing of tourism authenticity and contributes to theory and practice concerning the planning and development of tourism after the pandemics. Based on a website content analysis of 'authentic' experiences in New Zealand, this paper adds texture to this conversation from both supply and demand perspectives. This paper develops a novel approach to the understanding of the protection and promotion of authenticity in tourism experiences in New Zealand and it provides the most relevant features of authentic tourism experiences for regenerative tourism.

## Literature Review

This section discusses classic and recent debates on authenticity and the understanding of the notion of authentic experiences in the context of the tourism economy.

## Authenticity debate

Goffman's (1959) idea of the showcase of daily activities for visitors resulted in MacCannell's (1973) theory of staged authenticity (Tiberghien, 2019). In this sense, MacCannell's theory of 'staged authenticity' suggests that modern tourists are always in search of authentic experiences (Belhassen & Caton, 2006; Cole, 2007; Mkono, 2013; Olsen, 2002; Ryan, 2003; Ryan & Aicken, 2005; Tiberghien, Bremner, & Milne, 2020; Moore et al., 2021; Salet, 2021; Tucker, 2021). Mkono (2013) argues that the concept of authenticity needs to address the issues of power and authority (Cohen, 1979a, 1988); in particular, Cohen (2007) disagrees with MacCannell and affirms that not all tourists seek authentic experiences. Cohen (1979a) argues that putting all tourists into the same category is an oversimplification. However, as Wang (2000, p. 54) notes, "postmodernism is not a single, unified, or well-integrated school of thought. Instead, there are diverse views, although, with regards to authenticity, 'the approaches of postmodernism seem to be characterized by the deconstruction of authenticity', wherein the basis of the argument is frequently the untenability of 'copy' and 'original' separation, which possibility most object authenticity theory depends on or assumes". In many indigenous settings, the cultural expression of a community in a globalised world may be commodified as noted in the case of Kazakhstan where new forms of cultures are being adapted (Tiberghien and Lennon, 2019; Tiberghien & Xie, 2018).

Authenticity is a universally known concept and has got its understanding and criteria in different cultures (Mkono, 2013; Nyíri, 2006; Ryan, 2003). According to Wang (2000) and Steiner and Reisinger (2006) authenticity can simply mean a tourist having a good time and being actively involved in the tourism experience. However, often tourists themselves lack an understanding of authenticity. Mkono (2013) argues that in a field interview in Africa, it was much easier to explain the concept of authenticity to western tourists as opposed to domestic African tourists. According to Nyíri (2006) and Cole (2007), the western notion of authenticity may not be seen in the same way in other cultures. Similarly, "the subject of authenticity seemed so foreign and perplexing to them [Zimbabweans] even after several attempts to explain it in simple terms, including in vernacular. As a Zimbabwean tourist responded: I'm not sure I know what you are talking

about, I'm trying to understand what you are asking, but I'm still not quite clear" (Mkono, 2013, p. 203).

The search for authenticity has become popular in modern society (Hall, 2007; Paulauskaite et al., 2017; Rickly, 2018; Reid, 2021). It does not only matter how an expert defines it (Cohen, 1988) as every tourist has their understanding and definition of authenticity as authenticity is the projection of individual tourist experiences (Pearce & Moscardo, 1986; Pearce, 1987; Littrell, Anderson, & Brown, 1993; Silver, 1993; Brown, 2013; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2017; Rickly & Bidon, 2018).

### **Defining authenticity**

Authentic experiences are fundamental to contemporary tourism. The concept of authenticity originated in the tourism literature in the late 1950s (Goffman, 1959; MacCannell, 1973). Since the origin of the concept, it has been widely used in tourism studies (Cohen, 1979b, 1988; Wang, 1999; Wall & Xie, 2005; Steiner & Reisinger, 2006; Beer, 2008; Mkono, 2012; Bryce et al., 2017; Tiberghien, Bremner, & Milne, 2017; Wang et al., 2020; Canavan and McCamley, 2021). The postmodernists argue that authenticity is a redundant concept (Beer, 2008; Belhassen & Caton, 2006; Kim & Jamal, 2007; Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). However, this paper argues that authenticity matters (Belhassen & Caton, 2006; Mkono, 2012) and it will play a vital role in the post-Covid-19 tourism regeneration.

The concept of authenticity was first used in a museum context to explain the sense of genuineness and then it was extended to other tourism products such as festivals (Trilling, 2009) or gastronomy (Li & Su, 2021) as manifestations of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. While some tourists may think that they have had an authentic experience, this could not be true if the experience itself is staged (MacCannell, 1973). However, some authors argue that inauthentic experiences staged in a tourism consumption at a destination may become accepted as authentic (Cohen, 1988; Ryan & Gu, 2010). Some things might emerge inauthentically and become authentic such as Disneyland (Cohen, 1988) and sometimes the context of a product made an experience authentic over some time (Salamone, 1997). Despite the process of experiencing a tourism product it is vital to include local communities as they are the ones who defined the

traits of the culture and have got the power to term an experience authentic or inauthentic (Tiberghien, 2016).

Tourists' search for authentic or staged experiences drives a tourism industry that, one way or the other, relies on elements of authenticity. According to Selwyn (1996), MacCannell (1973) talks about two types of authentic experience, where one refers to the feeling and the other refers to knowledge. From an emic perspective, an experience may be termed as authentic if the essence of the tourism product is experienced as authentic by locals (Wang, 1999; Tiberghien, 2019). However, Fjellman (1992) argues that modern technological advancements can make a non-authentic product more authentic because of the use of gadgets and make an experience very much realistic, as it also happens with the use of technology (Mura, Tavakoli, & Sharif, 2017) and virtual reality (Shehade & Stylianou-Lambert, 2020). We have seen the emergence of such experiences in post-covid tourism activities where one could visit a museum online (Romano, 2020; Akhtar et al., 2021; Itani & Hollebeek, 2021; El-Said & Aziz, 2022). It is argued that a tourism product's success will solely depend on delivery and how convincing the presentation and marketing strategies are (Hughes, 1995; McCrone, Morris, & Kiely, 1995; Prentice, 2001).

Based on tourist experience literature, Wang (1999) categorises authenticity into three types: the original authentic experience (objective), the symbolic authenticity (toured) and the activity-related (existential). Cohen (1995) argues that post-modern tourists are less concerned about the authenticity of a tourism product as they are more concerned about the playful enjoyment of the surfaces. However, trans modern tourists are more concerned about the impacts of the tourist on fragile toured cultures and communities (Lew, 2018; Ateljevic, 2020; Galvani, Lew, & Perez, 2020; Hussain, 2021).

### **Quest for authenticity**

Tourists often try to improve their quality of life through leisure and tourism (Dolnicar, Lazarevski and Yanamandram, 2013; Ramkissoon, 2020). According to De Grazia (1962, p. 5), "leisure refers to a state of being, a condition of man, which few desire and few achieve". The two-dimensional tourism motivation is: the activity provides novelty to daily route (escape from personal and professional difficulties) and indivisibly seeking psychological rewards

(self-determination, personal development) (Iso-Ahol, Allen, & Buttmer, 1982; Filep & Laing, 2019; Skavronskaya et al., 2020; Hussain, 2021).

Tourist consciousness is measured in terms of its quest for the authentic experience, but it is challenging to differentiate between authentic and inauthentic experiences as almost every tourism product claims to be authentic (MacCannell, 1973). Redfoot (1984) argues that based on the level of anxiety developed by the typology of tourism experience, tourists will or not need to experience an authentic experience. However, the on-site tourist experience is explained in terms of product authenticity (Mannell & Iso-Ahola, 1987) which seemed to be the tourist's ultimate objective (Filep & Laing, 2019; Skavronskaya et al., 2020; Hussain, 2021).

Escaping and seeking the dimension of travel experiences has always been a popular phenomenon when planning a holiday (Iso-Ahola & Allen, 1982; Mannell & Iso-Ahola, 1987; Michael, Wien, & Reisinger, 2017). The escape factor implies that people often want to avoid routine personal lifestyles and activities and do something different (Mannell & Iso-Ahola, 1987) and novel (Skavronskaya et al., 2019) to potentially become digital nomads (Olga, 2020). This will be determined by the level of stimulation, where according to Mannell and Iso-Ahola (1987), people with less stimulation desire more surface activity while people with more stimulation desire interpersonal and psychological gain to further stimulate their lives.

Some aspects of travel were gaining moment due to the climate crisis (Jacobson, 2018; Fletcher, 2019; Jacobson et al., 2020; Klöwer et al., 2020). Ethical consumption, flight shame or flygskam movements are typical examples that are getting popular around the globe to contribute to society (BBC, 2019). A destination community as a whole builds a tourism product that is authentic and sustainable and should go hand in hand among different stakeholders. This can be seen in the Kawaza Village tourism project in central Zambia (Yeoman, Brass, & McMahan-Beattie, 2007). The project allows tourists to visit authentic African villages and learn about local lifestyles, environmental issues, and history through community storytelling. The project has made the livelihood of those villages sustainable by providing employment and keeping their authentic culture alive and thriving.

James (1890) used the concept of stream of consciousness to describe the mental experience of the present moment. The nature of the conscious level of experience involves the psychological stage (Mannell, 1980; Kleiber &

Dirkin, 1985; Hussain, 2021). Leisure research has been using the concepts of ‘peak’ by Maslow (1968) and ‘flow’ by Csikszentmihalyi (1975) to comprehend the psychological experiences and highest levels of fulfilment and aesthetic moments. The post-Covid-19 travel seeks even more stimulation desire and interpersonal psychological gain, which is why authenticity matters the most (see Galvani, Lew and Sotelo, 2020; Skavronskaya et al., 2020; Waters et al., 2021). In this sense, the engagement of tourists in unique activities and interpersonal integrations results in a more positive experience (Larson, Mannell, & Zuzanek, 1986) and a more positive attachment to the place (Ramkissoon, Smith, & Weiler, 2013; Ramkissoon, 2015).

### **Tourism – an experiential economy**

Tourism is an ‘experiential economy’ (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) where self-fulfilment is measured in terms of experiences - beyond goods and services. There is a growing promotion of authentic experiences across the world. The stage of the experiential economy is authenticity where the consumer selectively purchases the products which are close to being authentic - not just an experience. This can be linked to Maslow’s self-actualization concept where consumers seek a deeper meaning and experiences beyond material possession (Wilmott & Nelson, 2003). The consumer now searches for an experience that offers a genuine sense of place as opposed to a destination or experience solely made for tourists (Yeoman et al., 2007; Tiberghien, 2019; Heleno, Brandão, & Breda, 2021). This means that tourists are in search of a connection with people who are rooted in a destination - for instance, heritage seekers. In addition, in modern times holidays are all about escaping from the daily routines of life and getting in touch with the true self (Yeoman et al., 2007). The sense of purpose lies in Maslow’s self-actualization.

Often tourism enterprises see each other as competitors and this notion is challenging to gain quality and positive visitor experiences (Yeoman et al., 2007; Skavronskaya et al., 2019; Tiberghien, Bremner and Milne, 2020). Without celebrating the collective distinctiveness of a destination one can frustrate visitors and make them see a destination as an unauthentic and predatory place where everyone wants to rip off the guest without offering them a real tourism experience (Yeoman et al., 2007). A destination must take pride in its heritage, food, landscape and people - which collectively exceed visitors’ experience expectations. In the framework of the experience

economy, spaces become stages where experiences are performed and valorised concerning the authenticity of place and culture (Rickly and McCabe, 2017) For example, in culinary tourism, the search for organic, fair trade and authentic real food and dishes is in high demand, as part of a slow food movement (Schlosser, 2002; Spurlock & Spurlock, 2004; Payandeh et al., 2022). Slow food is about authentic, natural, ethical and real culinary experiences (Fusté-Forné and Jamal, 2020). The movement is also indicating the health consciousness of people who want to consume something good for their bodies and minds as part of a significant conveyor of culture and place (Orea-Giner and Fusté-Forné, 2022). This is only an example of the close connection between authentic experiences and the local environment where they take place (Hussain and Haley, 2022).

## Methodology

This research used qualitative content analysis methods to analyse data and draw conclusions (Hall, 2018). This methodology uses systematic analysis of a research topic where textual data is used to describe a research phenomenon (Cavanagh, 1997; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) by creating themes and subthemes which is a prerequisite to content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). In this case, the themes and subthemes include authentic storytelling, regenerative tourism and visitor experience. This paper focuses on website content analysis methods, which are previously used in tourism research as noted by Govers and Go (2004), Stepchenkova, Kirilenko, and Morrison (2009) and Camprubí and Coromina (2016). The study particularly analyses ‘how’ and ‘why’ the concepts under discussion were manifested in the websites of the tourism experiences.

*Table 1: List of experiences analysed (own source)*

Name of the experience	Website
Pipi Journeys	<a href="https://pipijourneys.com">https://pipijourneys.com</a>
The Seventh Generation	<a href="https://theseventhgeneration.org">https://theseventhgeneration.org</a>
Tamaki Maori Village	<a href="https://www.tamakimaorivillage.co.nz">https://www.tamakimaorivillage.co.nz</a>
Tutika Tours	<a href="https://www.tutikatours.co.nz">https://www.tutikatours.co.nz</a>
Kotane	<a href="https://www.kotane.co.nz">https://www.kotane.co.nz</a>



A non-probability convenience sampling technique was used to select tourism experiences that rely on authenticity as a critical component of their storytelling. Website searches were made to find out the tours which offer regenerative and authentic tourism experiences to enhance visitors' experiences. The other selection criteria were the appearance of the tour operators on the first page of Google search. Also, the selection was based on the previous experiences of the authors and their engagement with New Zealand tourism. This knowledge has served to minimise bias in the selection criteria and the data analysis. Drawing on previous websites' qualitative analysis (see, for example, Mohamed et al., 2019), five tourism experiences were selected (Table 1) and the researchers paid attention to the development of authenticity as part of the marketing strategy of the analysed actors. Also, the authors analysed the most repeated keywords and aspects in order to provide a more robust discussion of the results. Data content recollection was conducted manually by the authors during April 2021 and analysed using qualitative analysis software MAXQDA 2020.

## **Findings**

This section analyses the authenticity promoted by the five experiences and provides examples to illustrate the marketed storytelling. Later, the discussion and conclusion section connects the results with previous literature to advance the understanding of authentic experiences from a New Zealand perspective.

### **Pipi Journeys**

Pipi Journeys says that customers “dare to explore” in order to “connect with indigenous culture and walk in our shoes”. Specifically, the enterprise aims that visitors “come and learn about māori culture and experience our lifestyle first-hand”. Fishing is an example of an authentic lifestyle that visitors will discover in the context of Maori tiaki promise, that is, “to care for people and place” and “to care for New Zealand, for now, and for future generations” as a commitment for the future of the planet where visitors must also take their responsibilities. For example, they offer a harbour cruise to explore the wild waters of New Zealand as part of the natural landscapes of the country. Concerning a gastronomic experience, they aim to market a sustainable lifestyle based on a close connection with locals from the enjoyment of local seafood. They say “you will get a chance to harvest the

food you catch during your tour [and] our chef will facilitate you with processing and cooking your catch” to enhance the first-hand experience.

### **The Seventh Generation**

The Seventh Generation offers cultural and natural history tours. They significantly “provide a deeper understanding and local connection to New Zealand’s history and nature and leave you with inspiration and hope for the future”. They call for visitors who will “embark on a fascinating journey through New Zealand’s nature and cultural history guided by a Seventh Generation local”. Also, the business advocates for a “one-of-a-kind tour that allows you to become a participant in the places you visit and the stories that are told”. This is the most prevalent attribute of the discourse which is focused on the guidance of local people who care for and love the environment where they live. For example, a comment reveals that “as a long-time resident we loved Marie’s stories. The depth of knowledge about plants and animals filled in lots of gaps in our understanding. I completely recommend this tour. Wonderful to hear such passion about the Banks Peninsula”. In this sense, this matches with the promotion of a unique authentic experience in the context of regenerative tourism: “we don’t want our tours to be a standard tourist experience, but rather to open up to you a philosophy that is leading a world-class conservation operation. You may arrive expecting sightseeing, but you will leave with a new sense of hope and inspiration for the future. The Seventh Generation is an ethical business, grounded on the values of love of nature, love of history, and a love for the future of this earth. Profits from the ticket fees will contribute to the ongoing protection of our natural environment”.

### **Tamaki Maori Village**

Tamaki Maori Village welcomes visitors to the world of the Maori. It is a “journey back to a time of proud warriors and ancient traditions with Tamaki Māori Village”. As expressed on their website, “Tamaki has become an iconic brand in tourism – a leading force that pioneers and inspires through authentic and meaningful cultural experiences that the world continues to applaud and celebrate. Tamaki Māori Village is the most award-winning cultural attraction in New Zealand and was voted the 7th best experience in the world by TripAdvisor’s Traveller’s Choice award in 2018”. This popularity made them have plenty of comments which can be

read on their website where visitors highlight its experiential value. This experience starts with “a whakatau ceremony marks entry into our Tawa forest and evening celebrating our connection to our land, forests, waterways and each other”. The notion of authenticity is built on the concepts of sharing, eating and gathering. The experience is marketed as “interactive, educational and with small groups it offers a deeper connection with our people, history and culture”. Māori are attached to the land and this is a crucial ingredient of the experience promotion: “so as you walk through our valleys, climb our mountains and wade in our waters, remember that we hold these gifts of the earth as sacred taonga, our treasures. And remember to practice kaitiakitanga wherever you go, not just here on our shores but everywhere that you walk”. Identity manifestations as foods and tattoos used in Maori culture are also part of the storytelling that defines the integrity of Maori people and their connection to the land.

### **Tutika Tours**

Tutika (Tu Tika is a Maori word for stand true) Tours promote “your kiwi cultural connection” which is “authentic, interactive, informative and most importantly... fun!”. This is “a unique Maori culture experience and tour” to visitors who search for a genuine connection with a local Maori family. “We welcome you to step off the tourist trail and come join us for a personal and meaningful life experience. A one-of-a-kind experience. The type of experience that captivates you right from the start”. In this sense, they say that “to truly connect with this land, you need to immerse yourself with the indigenous people. Come and embrace the warmth of true Maori culture through our family. Connecting with us connects you to our people, our culture, our land, our history and our delicious food. Above all, you will be sure to create friendships and memories that will last a lifetime”. In the section ‘about us’, they inform that “when you book an experience with us, you are supporting a small family, indigenous tourism business” whose purpose is “to provide our visitors with a truly authentic connection to our whanau family and home by promoting whakawhanaungatanga – building everlasting relationships through shared experiences” which promote a positive impact for next generations.

### **Kotane**

Kotane, the Maori experience, is advertised as “a journey through time of an ancient people”. In this sense, “your experience at Ko Tāne will include

your official welcome to Aotearoa New Zealand, this is a traditional Māori pōwhiri (welcome) that takes in the wero (warrior challenge) and hongiri (pressing of noses between chief and visitor)". Specifically, their storytelling reports that "your experience takes you into our fully interactive village where you will be shown the tools and skills of the Māori hunter, his cooking techniques, the games he played to pass away his day, and traditional instruments used to communicate with his gods". The activity promotes food and dance. For example, whakangahau as the traditional Māori Cultural Performance emerges as "an expression of song and dance that displays traditional dance movements that can be accompanied by contemporary or traditional music". The experience also includes a visit to the Willowbank Wildlife Reserve where it is possible to explore 'Native New Zealand', "home of the Big 5 - kea (the cheeky mountain parrot, tuatara (living dinosaur), takahe (previously thought extinct), kaka (rare bush parrot) and New Zealand's iconic bird - Kiwi. Willowbank Wildlife Reserve is home to over 100 wildlife species, some of which have been brought back from near extinction. Willowbank is the only reserve in the world with 100% guaranteed kiwi viewing with no glass".

## Discussion and Conclusion

This paper has explored the role of authenticity in the promotion of tourism experiences in New Zealand. As previously discussed, visitors seek experiences that convey a sense of place (Yeoman et al., 2007) and a high level of interaction with land and people (Bryce, Murdy, & Alexander, 2017). There are different elements, such as foods or tattoos, that represent 'how' and 'why' a destination is authentic. Understanding the connection of people with culture and nature through experiences allows the suppliers to build on the notion of authenticity and communicate the values attached to communities and linked to the protection of the environment. The Seventh Generation guide tells that "I believe that you will be in awe of the spectacular history of Akaaroa and my very personal family story. With my passion for the natural environment and personal view of how we can each make a difference in this world, I would love for you to spend the day with me and learn about what makes this part of the world so special! Let me share my place, my tūrangawaewae, with you. As a kaitiaki, a guardian, of this special place in the world". This reflects the values that may guide the understanding of authenticity in tourism futures and the sustainable relationship between people and places.



*Figure 1: Main keywords reported in visitor experiences (own source)*

We are heading towards a new virtual world and this has been accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic in the form of social distancing, zoom meetings, working from home and contactless shopping, among others. In this new normal, the expression of storytelling in a digital environment is crucial to attracting targeted clients. In this environment, the use of keywords to match computing algorithms also plays a critical role in narrowing down marketing strategies. However, it is important to understand that there is going to be a direct need for protecting authenticity and promoting real experiences in the future as noted a time ago (Nozick, 1989). Research shows that the desire for human contact has always been strong in tourism experiences and the global consumer has become part of global society (Brass, 2005; Yeoman et al., 2007; Kaynak & Uysal, 2012) with a focus on travelling. Furthermore, transport infrastructure development (Khadaroo & Seetana, 2017) has made it possible for a human to explore the remotest parts of the world (Hussain, 2017; 2019). The demand for unspoiled destinations is going to be enormous in the future as tourists' desire for authentic experiences is getting stronger than ever and aim to discover untouched regions of the planet (Nepal, 2020; Schmallegger & Carson, 2010) even in the situation of pandemic tourism (Fusté-Forné and Michael, 2021).

As discussed above, the sample data in this paper suggested that a genuine experience focused on the role of authenticity includes key elements that dominate the online searchability of tourists when planning a kiwi-based experience: cultures (indigenous and non-indigenous), sense of place, natural environment, ethical tourism products, people-centred, building local connection and benefiting locals. In particular, these themes emerged when doing the website content analysis (see Figures 1 and 2). Similarly, the common words used in the narratives of the experiences also reflected the importance of certain aspects of tours such as kiwi cultural connection, creating friendships and memories, authenticity, interactive information, and learning outcomes.



*Figure 2: Most highlighted aspects in visitor experiences (own source)*

For a tourism experience to flourish, destinations must see the real benefit of tourist visitation and willingly get engaged with the whole process of product development and consumption. Therefore, any destination engaged with a development based on authentic experiences requires residents' involvement as the key to the successful delivery of the product focused on local resources and competencies (Traskevich and Fontanari, 2021). The holistic post-pandemic tourism recovery is only possible by enhancing emerging tourism concepts such as regenerative tourism (Cave and Dredge, 2020) where people contribute back to the community welfare (Hussain, 2021) and where authentic experiences do not only claim to be authentic, but they are authentic. This research shows the promotion of authenticity in

tourism experiences based on five products. The analysis of the most highlighted keywords and aspects demonstrates that authenticity can be examined based on certain characteristics which are classified focused on three types of design (see Table 2), as it is also revealed by previous research (Ateljevic, 2020; Boyle, 2003; Cohen 1988; Galvani, Lew and Sotelo, 2020; Hussain, 2019; James, 1890; Kleiber and Dirkin, 1985; Larson et al., 1986; Mannell, 1980; Wang, 1999; Yeoman et al., 2007). These features will play a crucial role in the post-pandemic tourism recovery stages of tour operators. Every tourism product must fulfil product originality, symbolism and authentic activity base. This is the main theoretical and practical implication of this research and how this study brings important insights that contribute to the understanding of authentic experiences from both supply and demand perspectives in tourism futures.

**Table 2: Features of authentic tourism experiences (own source)**

Type	Characteristic	Description
Originality	Beautiful	Tourism product needs to be beautiful and look appealing to the visitor
	Natural	The tourism product should be purely natural and must not be tainted or manufactured
	Genuine	Tourism products and the experience need to be genuine and give the tourist a sense of place
	Location	An authentic experience is unique and belongs to a particular area that cannot be experienced elsewhere which is why a tourism experience is a tourism experience
Symbolism	Ethical	Experience should be found in ethical consumption, sustainability and the principles of community
	Rooted	A sense of place is rooted in a particular destination and the tourism product being offered relies on it
	Honest	Deliver an honest product and must not promise what cannot be delivered
	Consciousness	An experience that improves conscious level where traveller seeks interpersonal gains in the form of psychological rewards and enjoys a positive experience
Activity	Human	The experience is people-centred and tourists want to connect with local people
	Simple	The experience must be simple, and the visitor should be able to see the benefit without any complications
	Involvement	Where tourists interact and engage actively in the tourism experience delivery processes, build long-lasting relationships and pay multiple visits

From a theoretical perspective, the unique contribution of this paper relies on the analysis of the most relevant features of tourism experiences which may drive future regenerative tourism based on the protection and promotion of authenticity. Based on the analysis of five products, results of this research also inform academics and practitioners of the crucial aspects that may serve to construct an authentic storytelling which is strongly manifested in its originality and symbolism. In relation to the practical contributions, this research argues that authentic activities rely on human-to-human interaction, which are the basis of host-guest relationships, and drive visitors to a long-lasting involvement with people, places, and practices. However, this research is limited in nature since it offers an approach to the topic from the content analysis of the websites of a reduced number of tourism experiences in a single country. Also, its qualitative methodology does not allow to generalize the results of the paper. This provides opportunities for further research which may explore the relationships between authenticity and tourism experiences in other countries, using other methodologies, and with a focus on the specific features described in Table 2 in order to demonstrate the relevance of each characteristic in the marketing strategies of tourism products.

In this sense, the future of travel also revolves around authentic self-actualisation and one's self-fulfilment and goes further in search of authentic experiences. According to McGraw (2001, p. 30), "the authentic self is the you that can be found at your absolute core. It is the part of you that is not defined by your job, your function, or your role. It is the composite of all your unique gifts, skills, abilities, interests, talents, insights and wisdom. It's all your strengths and values that are uniquely yours and need expression, versus what you have been programmed to believe that you are 'supposed' to be and do. It is you that flourished, un-self-consciously, in those times in your life when you felt happiest and most fulfilled". As observed in this research, educational programmes, resources and tours are a prevalent strategy to protect and promote the values embedded in authentic experiences which are rewarding activities, original and symbolic, and rely on locals - culture, nature and people. The understanding of authentic experiences is crucial to determining the real benefits of tourism through the regeneration of tourism production and consumption. Particular attention should be paid to special features of tourism experiences which rely on original, symbolic and activity-based dimensions, and communities must see the real benefits of tourism visitation.



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