

## VOLUNTARY SIMPLICITY IN ECOTOURISM CONTEXT

### SIMPLICIDADE VOLUNTÁRIA NO CONTEXTO DO ECOTURISMO

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#### Abstract

Increasing environmental challenges caused by excessive consumption have led individuals to adopt more sustainable and simplified lifestyles, giving rise to the concept of voluntary simplicity. This transformation has also influenced the tourism sector, contributing to the emergence of ecotourism as an alternative form of travel. In this context, this study examines the voluntary simplicity lifestyles of guests staying at the Pastoral Valley Ecological Life Farm in Fethiye, Türkiye. The study adopts a qualitative research design and uses focus group interviews conducted with voluntary participants and paying guests. The findings are analyzed based on the core dimensions of voluntary simplicity—material simplicity, self-sufficiency, ecological awareness, human scale, and personal growth—along with additional emergent themes. The results indicate that voluntary participants exhibit a deeply internalized and ideologically grounded simplicity, whereas paying guests demonstrate a more conditional and pragmatic approach. The findings further suggest that voluntary simplicity should be understood as a continuum rather than a binary construct. Moreover, ecotourism environments function as transformative spaces that foster ecological awareness and encourage more sustainable consumption practices. This study contributes to the literature by integrating ecotourism and voluntary simplicity and by providing a comparative perspective on different levels of engagement with sustainable lifestyles.

**Keywords:** Ecological Awareness. Ecotourism. Focus Groups. Sustainable Consumption. Voluntary Simplicity.

#### Resumo

*Os crescentes desafios ambientais decorrentes do consumo excessivo têm levado os indivíduos a adotarem estilos de vida mais sustentáveis e simplificados, dando origem ao conceito de simplicidade voluntária. Essa transformação também tem influenciado o setor do turismo, contribuindo para o surgimento do ecoturismo como uma forma alternativa de viagem. Nesse contexto, este estudo examina os estilos de vida de simplicidade voluntária dos hóspedes que se hospedam na Pastoral Valley Ecological Life Farm, localizada em Fethiye, Turquia. O estudo adota uma abordagem qualitativa e utiliza entrevistas de grupos focais realizadas com participantes voluntários e hóspedes pagantes. Os resultados são analisados com base nas principais dimensões da simplicidade voluntária — simplicidade material, autossuficiência, consciência ecológica, escala humana e crescimento pessoal — juntamente com temas emergentes adicionais. Os achados indicam que os participantes voluntários apresentam uma forma de simplicidade profundamente internalizada e ideologicamente fundamentada, enquanto os hóspedes pagantes demonstram uma abordagem mais condicional e pragmática. Os resultados também sugerem que a simplicidade voluntária deve ser compreendida como um continuum, e não como um construto binário. Além disso, os ambientes de ecoturismo funcionam como espaços transformadores que promovem a consciência ecológica e incentivam práticas de consumo mais sustentáveis. Este estudo contribui para a literatura ao integrar ecoturismo e simplicidade voluntária e ao oferecer uma perspectiva comparativa sobre diferentes níveis de engajamento com estilos de vida sustentáveis.*



*Palavras-chave:* Consciência Ecológica. Consumo Sustentável. Ecoturismo. Grupos Focais. Simplicidade Voluntária.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Industrial Revolution marked a fundamental shift in production and consumption patterns, leading to the widespread adoption of mass production systems. This transformation not only increased production capacity but also stimulated consumption, gradually contributing to the emergence of a consumption-oriented society. Over time, technological advancements and rapid population growth further accelerated consumption behaviors, often without sufficient consideration of environmental consequences. As a result, natural resources have been used in increasingly unsustainable ways, giving rise to serious environmental challenges such as climate change, global warming, and biodiversity loss.

The growing visibility of these environmental issues, particularly through global communication channels, has increased awareness of the cumulative impact of individual consumption behaviors. This awareness has encouraged individuals to reconsider their lifestyles and adopt more responsible consumption patterns in order to preserve natural resources for future generations. Within this context, the concept of voluntary simplicity has emerged as an alternative lifestyle approach. Voluntary simplicity refers to the conscious reduction of material consumption, accompanied by an increased emphasis on ecological awareness, self-sufficiency, and personal well-being. Rather than representing deprivation, it reflects a meaningful reorientation of values toward sustainability and quality of life.

These changes in consumption patterns have also influenced the tourism sector. Tourism, defined as the temporary movement of individuals outside their usual place of residence for travel and accommodation purposes, has undergone significant transformation in response to evolving consumer values. As environmental awareness has increased, more environmentally sensitive forms of tourism have emerged, including sustainable tourism and ecotourism.

Among these, ecotourism has gained particular importance as an alternative tourism model that seeks to minimize environmental impact while supporting the socio-economic development of local communities. It is generally characterized by nature-based experiences, environmentally responsible practices, and engagement with local culture. Ecotourism destinations are often located in rural areas and offer environmentally compatible accommodation structures as well as opportunities for visitors to participate in local activities such as agriculture, handicrafts, and traditional production processes.

In this context, ecological life farms represent a distinctive form of ecotourism destination where visitors can directly experience sustainable living practices. These environments provide opportunities for individuals to engage with nature, adopt environmentally conscious behaviors, and explore alternative lifestyles. One such example is the Pastoral Valley Ecological Life Farm in Fethiye, Türkiye, which offers accommodation in natural structures and a variety of activities including agriculture, handicrafts, food production, and personal development practices such as yoga and meditation.

Despite the growing interest in ecotourism and sustainable consumption, studies that explicitly integrate voluntary simplicity with ecotourism experiences remain limited. Existing research has often examined these concepts separately, leaving a gap in understanding how voluntary simplicity is reflected in the lived experiences of individuals participating in ecotourism settings.

Accordingly, the main objective of this study is to examine the voluntary simplicity lifestyles of guests staying at the Pastoral Valley Ecological Life Farm within the context of ecotourism. The study analyzes the relationship between ecotourism experiences and the core dimensions of voluntary simplicity, namely material simplicity, self-sufficiency, ecological awareness, human scale, and personal growth. Based on these findings, the study also aims to provide practical insights for ecotourism practices.

This research contributes to the literature by offering empirical insights into the manifestation of voluntary simplicity within an ecotourism context and by providing a more integrated understanding of the relationship between lifestyle choices and tourism behaviors.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 From consumer society to sustainable lifestyles

The expansion of industrial production, technological development, and rising living standards have profoundly transformed modern societies into consumption-oriented systems. Although consumption has long been associated with prosperity, convenience, and social status, a growing body of research has shown that overconsumption is also a major driver of environmental degradation, resource depletion, waste generation, and carbon emissions (Jackson, 2005; IPCC, 2021). Recent studies argue that excessive consumption patterns have become one of the central barriers to sustainability transitions, especially in affluent and rapidly developing societies (Kasser, 2017). At the same time, reduced consumption is increasingly discussed not as a threat to quality of life, but as a viable pathway toward environmental sustainability and, in many cases, improved well-being.

Within this context, researchers have increasingly turned their attention to sustainable lifestyles that challenge the dominant assumption that more consumption necessarily leads to greater happiness. One of the most prominent of these alternatives is voluntary simplicity, which has been framed as a conscious effort to reduce material consumption while prioritizing intrinsic values, environmental responsibility, autonomy, and meaning (Alexander & Ussher, 2012). Earlier scholarship positioned voluntary simplicity as a response to material excess and consumer culture, while more recent work has treated it as part of wider anti-consumption, sufficiency, and lifestyle transformation debates (Osikominu & Bocken, 2021).

### 2.2 Voluntary simplicity: concept, meaning, and core dimensions

Voluntary simplicity is commonly understood as a lifestyle based on intentionally limiting consumption and reorienting everyday life toward non-material sources of satisfaction. In this tradition, Elgin's (1993) well-known formulation of a life that is "outwardly simple and inwardly rich" remains conceptually influential, while later scholarship has emphasized that voluntary simplicity should not be equated with

deprivation or forced frugality. Rather, it reflects a deliberate and value-driven decision to consume less, simplify possessions and routines, and create more room for autonomy, reflection, community, and ecological balance.

The literature also shows that voluntary simplicity is a multidimensional construct. Classic and subsequent studies have associated it with dimensions such as material simplicity, human scale, ecological awareness, personal growth, and forms of self-determination or self-sufficiency (Alexander & Ussher, 2012). These dimensions are highly relevant for the present study because they allow the concept to be examined not merely as reduced consumption, but as a broader orientation toward life. Material simplicity refers to limiting unnecessary possessions and avoiding excess; ecological awareness points to sensitivity toward the environmental consequences of consumption; self-sufficiency reflects a desire for greater independence from high-consumption systems; human scale emphasizes preference for smaller-scale, less impersonal ways of living; and personal growth highlights inner development, meaning, and self-realization.

Recent research has further refined the conceptualization of voluntary simplicity. Osikominu and Bocken (2020) highlight that voluntary simplicity encompasses not only reduced consumption but also changes in identity, values, daily practices, and social relationships. Similarly, Osikominu and Bocken (2021) emphasize the need for conceptual clarity and propose a more structured understanding of voluntary simplicity as a dynamic lifestyle process rather than a static condition.

Another important strand of the literature concerns the relationship between voluntary simplicity and well-being. A systematic review of empirical studies found a broadly positive relationship between voluntary simplicity and well-being, indicating that lower-consumption lifestyles do not necessarily reduce life satisfaction. A more recent systematic review on reduced consumption reached a similar conclusion, showing that reduced consumption is often compatible with well-being and may even enhance autonomy, environmental mastery, and social connectedness (Kasser, 2017). These findings are especially important for the present study because they suggest that guests choosing ecologically oriented tourism settings may not be motivated by sacrifice, but by the pursuit of meaningful and satisfying experiences.

### **2.3 Ecotourism as a value-based form of tourism**

The increasing environmental awareness among individuals has also influenced the tourism sector. Tourism, defined as the temporary movement of individuals outside their usual place of residence for travel and accommodation purposes (Soykan, 2000), has undergone significant transformation in response to changing consumer values. As environmental consciousness increases, alternative forms of tourism such as sustainable tourism and ecotourism have emerged (Orhan & Karahan, 2010).

Ecotourism is widely recognized as a form of tourism that aims to minimize environmental impact while supporting conservation and contributing to local communities (Fennell, 2015; Honey, 2008). Although definitions vary, there is general agreement that ecotourism involves nature-based experiences, environmental responsibility, and socio-cultural sensitivity.

Recent studies indicate that ecotourism has evolved into a value-driven form of tourism where visitor behavior is closely linked to environmental attitudes and ethical considerations (Samal & Dash, 2023). In this sense, ecotourism is not only a tourism activity but also a reflection of broader lifestyle choices and value orientations.

Ecotourism destinations are often located in rural or natural areas and include environmentally compatible accommodation structures and local production activities. In Türkiye, ecological farms represent an important component of ecotourism, offering experiences such as agriculture, handicrafts, and traditional food production (Tuncer & Bakırcı, 2021).

One such example is the Pastoral Valley Ecological Life Farm in Fethiye, which provides accommodation in nature-friendly structures and offers activities such as farming, handicrafts, and personal development practices (Akyol & Uygun, 2017).

### **2.4 Linking voluntary simplicity and ecotourism**

Although voluntary simplicity and ecotourism have usually been studied in separate bodies of literature, they share important conceptual common ground. Both are organized around reduced environmental impact, greater respect for ecological limits, and a shift away from excess-oriented, convenience-driven patterns of modern life. Voluntary

simplicity focuses on everyday consumption and lifestyle choices, whereas ecotourism concerns travel behavior and destination preferences. However, both may be understood as value-based practices through which individuals seek more meaningful, responsible, and less materially intensive ways of living and experiencing the world.

The dimensions of voluntary simplicity can be directly associated with ecotourism experiences. Material simplicity is reflected in preferences for modest and low-impact accommodation; ecological awareness aligns with environmentally responsible travel choices; self-sufficiency is linked to participation in local production activities; human scale corresponds with small-scale tourism settings; and personal growth relates to transformative and meaningful travel experiences (Alexander & Ussher, 2012; Osikominu & Bocken, 2020).

Despite this conceptual fit, empirical research directly connecting voluntary simplicity to ecotourism remains limited. Most studies focus either on sustainable consumption or tourism behavior separately, leaving a gap in understanding how these concepts intersect in real-life tourism settings (Osikominu & Bocken, 2021). The current literature offers substantial work on sustainable lifestyles, anti-consumption, and ecotourist behavior, but there is still a lack of qualitative research examining how guests in ecological tourism settings actually express, interpret, and practice voluntary simplicity. This gap is particularly evident in site-specific studies that explore lived experience rather than only attitudes or intentions. Accordingly, examining guests staying at an ecological life farm offers an opportunity to connect two adjacent yet insufficiently integrated conversations: the literature on voluntary simplicity and the literature on ecotourism.

## **2.5 Research gap and relevance of the present study**

The literature suggests that voluntary simplicity is an important framework for understanding sustainable lifestyles, while ecotourism represents a value-based transformation within the tourism sector. However, studies that combine these two concepts within a single empirical context remain scarce.

The present study addresses this gap by examining the experiences of guests staying at the Fethiye Pastoral Valley Ecological Life Farm through the lens of voluntary

simplicity. By focusing on how guests describe their preferences, practices, meanings, and values, the study aims to show whether ecotourism participation can be interpreted not only as a travel choice, but also as an expression of a broader lifestyle orientation. In this respect, the study contributes to both the voluntary simplicity literature and the ecotourism literature by linking sustainable lifestyle theory with a concrete tourism context.

### **3 METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Research design**

Although ecotourism has been classified in various ways in the literature, this study adopts the threefold classification proposed by Polat and Önder (2006), which distinguishes between learning-based, entertainment-based, and relaxation-based ecotourism. Within this framework, the present research focuses on learning-based ecotourism, specifically in the form of farm tourism.

The study is grounded in a qualitative research design, which is particularly suitable for exploring complex phenomena such as lifestyle orientations, values, and personal experiences. Qualitative approaches allow for an in-depth understanding of how individuals interpret their experiences and construct meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this context, the relationship between ecotourism and voluntary simplicity is explored from the perspective of participants' lived experiences.

The underlying assumption of the study is that ecotourism environments, which are typically associated with environmental awareness and sustainability, may encourage individuals to adopt or reflect upon simpler and more conscious lifestyles. Therefore, examining guests' motivations and experiences in such settings provides an appropriate empirical context for understanding voluntary simplicity.

#### **3.2 Research setting**

Based on preliminary observations and existing studies, ecotourism activities in Türkiye are predominantly concentrated in the Aegean Region. For this reason, the

research was conducted in Muğla province, specifically in the Fethiye district, which is known for its ecological tourism potential.

The empirical setting of the study is the Pastoral Valley Ecological Life Farm, an ecological farm offering nature-based accommodation and experiential activities such as agriculture, handicrafts, and personal development practices. The site was selected due to its accessibility, year-round operation, and its alignment with the principles of both ecotourism and sustainable living.

Previous studies have examined this region and the Pastoral Valley from different perspectives. For instance, Kılıç and Kurnaz (2010) emphasized the ecological richness of Muğla and its suitability for integrated ecotourism and agricultural activities. Akyol and Uygun (2017) investigated visitor preferences in the context of sustainable tourism, while Üzümcü and Koç (2017) analyzed ecotourism activities in Fethiye and highlighted the need for seasonal diversification. Türk and Çakır (2019) explored the relationship between ecotourists' environmental attitudes and their behaviors.

### **3.3 Research aim and research question**

The main aim of this study is to examine the voluntary simplicity lifestyles of guests staying at the Pastoral Valley Ecological Life Farm within the context of learning-based ecotourism. In line with this aim, the central research question is formulated as follows:

“Why do visitors prefer to stay at the Pastoral Valley Ecological Life Farm, and how are these motivations related to the core dimensions of voluntary simplicity?”

### **3.4 Sampling and participants**

The population of the study consists of individuals staying in ecological villages or farms in Türkiye. However, the sample is limited to guests aged 18 and above staying at the Pastoral Valley Ecological Life Farm.

A purposive sampling strategy was employed, which is widely used in qualitative research to select information-rich cases relevant to the research objective (Patton, 2015). The choice of this sampling method allows the researcher to focus on participants who

have direct experience with ecotourism and are therefore able to provide meaningful insights. In addition, the year-round operation of the farm facilitated access to participants at different times, making data collection more flexible and feasible.

### **3.5 Data collection method: focus group interviews**

Data were collected through focus group interviews, a qualitative method that enables the exploration of participants' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences through group interaction (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Focus groups are particularly useful when the aim is to generate in-depth insights and uncover shared meanings among participants. This method was preferred because the population benefiting from ecotourism activities represents a relatively small and specific group, making large-scale survey methods less practical. In addition, focus group discussions allow for richer data collection compared to structured questionnaires, especially in exploratory research contexts (Morgan, 1997).

Prior to the interviews, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and informed consent was obtained. Permission for audio recording was also requested and granted. The interview protocol, consisting of 10 open-ended questions, was approved by the Ethics Committee of Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University (Decision No: 230160). In addition, data were collected in July 2025 at the Pastoral Valley Ecological Life Farm.

### **3.6 Group structure and procedure**

One of the main limitations of focus group research is the potential influence of participants on each other's opinions. To minimize this effect, participants were divided into two separate groups based on their status at the farm: "Volunteers" and "Paying guests". This separation was intended to reduce power dynamics and prevent potential bias arising from differences in roles or experiences (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Each focus group consisted of five participants, resulting in a total of ten participants. This group size is consistent with the recommended range of 4-10 participants for effective focus group discussions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition, participants were coded numerically from V1 to V5 (representing voluntary participants),

and from P6 to P10 (representing paying participants). Moreover, the interviews were conducted in a quiet and comfortable environment within the Pastoral Valley, ensuring that participants felt at ease and were able to express their views freely. The physical setting of focus group discussions is known to play a crucial role in data quality (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

### **3.7 Data analysis**

The data obtained from the focus group interviews were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach, which is widely used in qualitative research to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In other words, it was conducted through a four-stage qualitative data analysis process adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006):

- Coding of the data
- Identification and naming of themes
- Organization and description of data according to codes and themes
- Interpretation of findings

In this study, the first two stages— coding and theme identification—were conducted simultaneously. This approach was adopted because the analysis was guided by pre-existing theoretical dimensions of voluntary simplicity identified in the literature (Ergen, 2016), including material simplicity, ecological awareness, self-sufficiency, human scale, and personal growth.

In addition to these predefined categories, the analysis also allowed for the emergence of new themes beyond the existing framework. This combination of deductive and inductive analysis strengthens the validity of qualitative findings by allowing both theory-driven and data-driven insights (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

### **3.8 Data coding and thematic structuring**

The data obtained from the two focus group interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed through a hybrid thematic coding approach, combining both deductive and

inductive strategies. In the first stage, a theory-driven (deductive) coding framework was developed based on the core dimensions of voluntary simplicity identified in the literature. In the second stage, data-driven (inductive) coding was applied to capture emergent themes beyond the predefined structure (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

### 3.8.1 Deductive coding: voluntary simplicity dimensions

The initial coding framework was structured around five core dimensions of voluntary simplicity:

- Material Simplicity (MS)
- Self-Sufficiency (SS)
- Ecological Awareness (EA)
- Human Scale (HS)
- Personal Growth (PG)

Each dimension was operationalized through a set of keywords and expressions identified in prior studies.

**Material Simplicity (MS)** refers to reduced consumption and minimalistic lifestyles, including expressions such as “owning fewer possessions,” “avoiding excess consumption,” “budget-conscious living,” and “non-materialistic values” (Firat & Işık, 2020).

**Self-Sufficiency (SS)** reflects efforts to reduce dependence on complex systems and includes practices such as producing at home, repairing goods, reusing items, borrowing, renting, and using second-hand products (Topçu, 2013).

**Ecological Awareness (EA)** encompasses sensitivity toward environmental issues, including references to nature, sustainability, recycling, waste separation, organic products, and environmentally friendly behaviors.

**Human Scale (HS)** represents preferences for small-scale, community-oriented, and socially meaningful environments, including concepts such as localism, collective living, and warm, intimate social settings (Kara & İrge, 2021).

**Personal Growth (PG)** includes themes related to inner development, learning, mindfulness, and self-awareness, such as engagement in activities like yoga, meditation, and personal reflection.

During the coding process, segments of text corresponding to these dimensions were systematically identified and categorized. Although an initial color-coding scheme was used during the early stages of analysis to facilitate visual organization, the final analytical framework was structured conceptually rather than visually.

### 3.8.2 Inductive coding: emergent themes

In addition to the predefined dimensions, the analysis revealed the presence of four emergent themes that extend beyond the traditional voluntary simplicity framework. These themes were identified through iterative reading and comparison of the transcripts.

**Child- and Family-Oriented Living (CFOL)** This theme captures participants' emphasis on creating a healthier, safer, and more meaningful environment for children and family life. It reflects motivations related to upbringing, values transmission, and family bonding.

**System Critique (SC)** Participants expressed critical perspectives toward modern consumption systems, industrial production, and mainstream lifestyles. This theme reflects a broader ideological stance that questions the sustainability and ethics of dominant socio-economic structures.

**Time Perception (TP)** This theme relates to participants' reflections on time, including a slower pace of life, escaping time pressure, and valuing present-moment experiences. It indicates a shift from efficiency-oriented time use toward experiential and mindful living.

**Search for Experience (SE)** Participants frequently emphasized the desire for authentic, meaningful, and experience-based activities rather than consumption-oriented tourism. This theme highlights the importance of experiential value over material consumption.

### 3.8.3 Analytical integration

The combination of deductive and inductive coding enabled a more comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences. While the predefined dimensions provided a structured theoretical lens, the emergent themes revealed additional layers of meaning that enrich the interpretation of voluntary simplicity within an ecotourism context.

This dual approach enhances the analytical rigor of the study by ensuring both theoretical consistency and contextual sensitivity (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). It also demonstrates that voluntary simplicity, when examined in real-life tourism settings, may extend beyond its traditional conceptual boundaries.

To ensure analytical transparency and clarity, the coding framework used in this study—comprising both theoretically derived dimensions of voluntary simplicity and emergent themes—is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Coding framework used in the analysis of voluntary simplicity and emergent themes*

Theme	Code	Definition	Example Keywords	Illustrative Quote*
Material Simplicity	MS	Reduction of material consumption and preference for a minimal and non-materialistic lifestyle	minimalism, fewer possessions, low consumption, simple living, non-materialism	"I realized I don't actually need many things to feel comfortable here."
Self-Sufficiency	SS	Efforts to reduce dependence on external systems through self-production, reuse, and repair practices	self-production, DIY, repairing, second-hand, reuse, borrowing, renting	"We try to produce what we can ourselves instead of buying everything."
Ecological Awareness	EA	Sensitivity toward environmental issues and engagement in environmentally responsible behaviors	nature, sustainability, recycling, organic products, waste separation, environmental concern	"Being here makes you more aware of how your actions affect nature."
Human Scale	HS	Preference for small-scale, community-based, and socially meaningful environments	local community, small groups, collective living, intimacy, social closeness	"I prefer places where you can actually connect with people, not crowded hotels."

\* Illustrative quotes are representative examples constructed to reflect typical participant expressions.

Personal Growth	PG	Emphasis on inner development, self-awareness, and meaningful life experiences	mindfulness, meditation, yoga, self-awareness, learning, reflection	“This place helps me reflect on myself and what really matters in life.”
Child- and Family-Oriented Living	CFOL	Motivation to create a healthier and more meaningful lifestyle for children and family	family life, children, upbringing, healthy environment, values transmission	“I want my children to grow up understanding nature and simplicity.”
System Critique	SC	Critical attitudes toward modern consumption systems and mainstream lifestyles	consumerism, capitalism critique, industrial system, dissatisfaction with modern life	“The system pushes us to consume constantly, and I don’t agree with that.”
Time Perception	TP	Reinterpretation of time as slower, more meaningful, and less efficiency-driven	slow life, time freedom, present moment, less stress, escape from routine	“Here, time feels slower, and you can actually enjoy the moment.”
Search for Experience	SE	Preference for authentic, meaningful, and experience-based activities over material consumption	authenticity, experience, learning, meaningful activities, engagement	“I come here for the experience, not for luxury.”

As shown in Table 1, the coding process integrates both deductive and inductive categories, enabling a comprehensive interpretation of participants’ experiences. Moreover, direct quotations from participants are included to enhance the credibility and transparency of the findings.

## 4 FINDINGS

The findings from the two focus groups- voluntary participants and paying participants- are presented in three stages. First, the results obtained from voluntary participants (Focus Group 1) are presented. This is followed by the findings from paying participants (Focus Group 2). Finally, a comparative analysis is conducted to highlight the similarities and differences between the two groups.

### 4.1 Voluntary participants (focus group 1)

The analysis of the responses obtained from participants who stayed at the Pastoral Valley Ecological Life Farm on a voluntary basis reveals a strong alignment with the core

dimensions of voluntary simplicity, alongside several emergent themes that extend beyond the existing theoretical framework.

#### 4.1.1 Material simplicity (MS)

Material simplicity emerged as one of the most dominant themes among voluntary participants. The findings indicate that participants largely avoided detailed financial planning and instead adopted a flexible and low-consumption lifestyle. Rather than engaging in structured budgeting, participants emphasized minimal needs and reduced financial concern.

Participants emphasized a lack of structured budgeting:

*“I didn’t plan anything. I just let things flow.”* (V2)

Similarly, another participant stated:

*“I only kept a small amount of money for emergencies.”* (V1)

Participants also demonstrated a clear tendency toward minimal material possessions, often traveling with very limited belongings and reusing items:

*“We came here with very few belongings, just a backpack. Clothes are washed and reused.”* (V1)

These findings suggest that voluntary participants internalize material simplicity not only as a practical necessity but also as a conscious lifestyle choice.

#### 4.1.2 Self-sufficiency (SS)

Self-sufficiency was another strongly observed dimension. Participants emphasized practices such as repairing, reusing, and avoiding unnecessary purchases.

One participant noted:

*“I prefer buying from local markets instead of brands. I don’t feel comfortable paying high prices for branded items.”* (V3)

Another highlighted long-term use and repair culture:

*“I use my belongings until they are completely worn out. I don’t replace them unless absolutely necessary.”* (V4)

Additionally, participants described practices of circulation and sharing, including giving unused items to others and participating in informal exchange systems. This reflects a clear departure from conventional consumption patterns.

#### 4.1.3 Ecological awareness (EA)

Ecological awareness was highly prominent across all participants. The findings show that participants demonstrate both cognitive awareness and behavioral engagement with environmental issues.

For example:

*“Being here makes you think about your ecological footprint.” (V1)*

Participants mentioned practices such as avoiding plastic use, separating waste, using reusable bags, preferring organic or natural products. However, an important nuance emerged: the gap between awareness and full implementation.

*“I know how to do better environmentally, but I don’t always apply it.” (V2)*

This indicates that ecological awareness exists alongside structural and practical constraints.

#### 4.1.4 Human scale (HS)

The preference for human-scale environments was evident in participants’ emphasis on small communities, close social relations, and informal interactions.

One participant expressed:

*“Here, no one judges you based on your appearance. It’s a more genuine environment.” (V1)*

Another highlighted the contrast with urban life:

*“Life here feels more comfortable than city life because everything is simple and natural.” (V2)*

In addition, voluntary participants valued intimacy, social closeness, and non-hierarchical interactions. This reinforces the idea that ecotourism environments foster alternative social structures aligned with voluntary simplicity.

#### 4.1.5 Personal growth (PG)

Personal growth emerged as a key motivational factor for voluntary participation. Many participants emphasized that being in the ecological farm allowed them to reconnect with themselves and engage in self-development activities. For example:

*“Here, I finally have time for things I couldn’t do before, like yoga and reading.”*

(V1)

Another participant noted:

*“I feel better because I can dedicate more time to myself here.”* (V5)

Moreover, activities such as yoga, meditation, reading, and learning new skills were frequently mentioned, indicating that voluntary simplicity is closely linked to inner transformation and self-awareness among voluntary participants focus group.

#### 4.1.6 Emergent themes

Beyond the predefined dimensions, four significant emergent themes were identified.

##### 4.1.6.1 Time perception (TP)

Time perception was one of the most prominent emergent themes. Participants frequently emphasized a shift toward a slower and more meaningful experience of time:

*“Life should not reduce your quality of life by making you lose time.”* (V3)

Voluntary participants also valued being present, reduced time pressure, and elimination of unnecessary routines within time perception.

##### 4.1.6.2 System critique (SC)

Participants expressed critical attitudes toward modern consumption systems and societal structures:

*“The system pushes people to consume constantly.”* (V5)

They also highlighted structural barriers to sustainable living, including economic constraints, lack of systemic support, and societal norms.

#### ***4.1.6.3 Search for experience (SE)***

Participants emphasized experiential value over material consumption:

*“I chose this place for the experience.”* (V4)

Experiential motivations such as learning, participation in activities, meaningful engagement have emerged among voluntary participants.

#### ***4.1.6.4 Child- and family-oriented living (CFOL)***

Although less pronounced, some participants referred to future-oriented concerns such as raising children in nature and providing healthier environments.

#### ***4.1.7 Overall interpretation of voluntary participants (focus group 1)***

Overall, the findings demonstrate that voluntary participants strongly embody the principles of voluntary simplicity across multiple dimensions. Their motivations are not solely economic but are deeply rooted in:

- ecological consciousness
- desire for personal growth
- rejection of consumerist norms
- search for meaningful experiences

Additionally, the emergence of themes such as time perception and system critique suggests that voluntary simplicity in the context of ecotourism extends beyond lifestyle practices and reflects a broader philosophical and socio-cultural transformation.

## 4.2 Findings: paying guests (focus group 2)

The analysis of the paying guests' responses reveals a more hybrid relationship with voluntary simplicity, where participants partially adopt simplicity-oriented behaviors while still maintaining certain conventional consumption patterns. Compared to voluntary participants, paying guests demonstrate a more selective and conditional engagement with voluntary simplicity dimensions.

### 4.2.1 Material simplicity (MS)

Material simplicity is present among paying guests; however, it is more rational and strategic rather than deeply internalized. In this direction, participants frequently referred to budget allocation, price–performance evaluation, and planned consumption.

*“I usually determine my preferences first, then compare prices and evaluate based on price-performance.”* (P6)

*“I have a certain budget and I evaluate options accordingly.”* (P9)

Unlike voluntary participants, who minimized consumption naturally, paying guests tend to optimize consumption rather than reduce it entirely. However, minimalism in packing behavior is clearly observed:

*“I try to carry as few items as possible. Everything should be functional and lightweight.”* (P7)

*“This time I brought much fewer things. I realized many items were unnecessary.”* (P8)

In short, material simplicity exists, but it is functional minimalism rather than ideological simplicity.

### 4.2.2 Self-sufficiency (SS)

Self-sufficiency is strongly present but appears in practical and situational forms. Paying participants frequently has expressed issues like preparing their own food, carrying reusable items, and engaging in sharing or second-hand use.

*“I usually bring my own food. It is both economical and practical.”* (P6)

*“I carry water and coffee with me to avoid unnecessary purchases.” (P9)*

Second-hand consumption is particularly notable but varies:

*“For baby products, I prefer second-hand because they are used for a very short time.” (P6)*

*“I don’t fully prefer second-hand clothing, but I see it as logical and sustainable.” (P9)*

Self-sufficiency is seen as instrumental (cost-saving & convenience) rather than value-driven in all cases.

#### 4.2.3 Ecological awareness (EA)

Ecological awareness is widespread among paying guests and is often reflected in daily practices. Participants reported expressions such as reducing plastic use, separating waste, reusing materials, and using reusable bags.

*“I prefer reusable bags and try to avoid plastic.” (P8)*

*“I started separating waste and using glass jars instead of plastic.” (P6)*

However, similar to voluntary participants, a gap between awareness and full behavioral consistency exists among paying participants.

*“I haven’t reached that level yet.” (P6)*

To sum up, ecological awareness is developing and experiential, not fully stabilized among paying paying participants.

#### 4.2.4 Human scale (HS)

Human-scale preferences appear indirectly and are less dominant compared to the voluntary group. Paying participants have highlighted the preference for quieter environments, the avoidance of crowded mass tourism, and the interest in more “authentic” settings. However, this preference is often balanced with comfort expectations, which differentiates them from voluntary participants.

#### 4.2.5 Personal growth (PG)

Personal growth is an important but secondary motivation for Focus Group 2 participants. They mostly emphasized the learning new perspectives, gaining inspiration, and the self-reflection.

*“I came here to experience something different and maybe gain inspiration.”* (P6)

However, unlike voluntary participants, personal growth is not the primary driver, but an additional benefit.

#### 4.2.6 Emergent themes

Several strong emergent themes distinguish paying guests from voluntary participants.

##### 4.2.6.1 Comfort orientation (CO)- new

This is the most distinguishing feature of paying guests due to the fact that participants of Focus Group 2 clearly stated the basic comfort is necessary, the hygiene matters, and the safety is important.

*“Comfort is important for me, especially hygiene and a certain level of quietness.”*  
(P7)

*“I prefer places where I feel safe and comfortable.”* (P9)

In order to compare the two focus groups, volunteers reject comfort norms, whereas paying guests redefine comfort instead of rejecting it.

##### 4.2.6.2 Child- and family-oriented living (CFOL)

Much more prominent than in voluntary group, paying participants emphasized the child safety and practical decisions based on family needs.

*“If I travel with my child, safety becomes the most important factor.”* (P10)

This theme strongly influences the accommodation choice, the consumption patterns, and the comfort expectations among paying participants in the study.

#### **4.2.6.3 Search for experience (SE)**

Experience is a major motivation in the Focus Group 2:

*“I came here to experience something different and learn something new.” (P6)*

Similar to volunteers, but more touristic motivation and less lifestyle transformation have emerged in paying participants focus group.

#### **4.2.6.4 Time perception (TP)**

Participants show a shift in time perception, but less radical:

*“I don’t feel the need to see everything anymore.” (P9)*

The findings regarding time perception indicates the slowing down and selective engagement in those participants.

#### **4.2.6.5 System critique (SC)**

Some paying participants criticize overconsumption, mass tourism, and waste in focus group interviews, however, this remains less ideological compared to voluntary participants.

#### **4.2.7 Overall interpretation of paying participants (focus group 2)**

The findings indicate that paying guests adopt a moderate and selective form of voluntary simplicity. In addition, their behaviors are characterized by:

- conscious consumption rather than minimal consumption
- practical sustainability rather than ideological commitment
- balance between simplicity and comfort
- experience-oriented motivations

### 4.3 Volunteers vs. paying guests: a comparative discussion

A comparative analysis of voluntary participants and paying guests reveals significant differences in how voluntary simplicity is interpreted, internalized, and practiced within the context of ecotourism.

#### 4.3.1 *Depth of simplicity: ideological vs. conditional*

The most fundamental distinction between the two groups lies in the depth of commitment to voluntary simplicity: Voluntary participants demonstrate a deeply internalized and value-driven simplicity, where reduced consumption emerges naturally as part of their lifestyle. In contrast, paying guests exhibit a conditional and situational simplicity, often shaped by practical considerations such as budget, comfort, and convenience.

While volunteers tend to minimize consumption without explicit calculation, paying guests engage in rational decision-making processes, such as price–performance evaluation and planned budgeting. This suggests that simplicity among paying guests is not a rejection of consumption but rather an optimization strategy.

#### 4.3.2 *Consumption patterns: reduction vs. optimization*

A clear divergence is observed in consumption behaviors. Voluntary participants try to reduce consumption to the minimum levels, whereas paying guests want to optimize consumption within acceptable limits. Moreover, paying guests frequently emphasized financial planning and efficiency:

*“I compare options and choose based on price-performance.” (P6)*

In contrast, voluntary participants often abandoned structured financial thinking altogether:

*“I just go with the flow.” (V2)*

This indicates that voluntary simplicity, in the case of paying guests, is economically mediated, whereas for volunteers it is philosophically grounded.

#### 4.3.3 *Self-sufficiency: practice vs. philosophy*

Both of focus groups demonstrate self-sufficiency practices, however, their motivations differ significantly. Volunteers see self-sufficiency as a way of life, where paying guests embrace self-sufficiency as a practical tool.

Paying guests engage in behaviors such as bringing their own food, using reusable items, or purchasing second-hand goods. However, these practices are often justified in terms of cost efficiency, convenience, or functionality, rather than ethical or ideological commitments.

#### 4.3.4 *Ecological awareness: internalized vs. developing*

Ecological awareness is present in both groups but differs in intensity and maturity. In deed, voluntary participants demonstrate a more holistic and integrated ecological consciousness, while paying guests exhibit a developing awareness, often shaped by recent experiences and learning processes. Many paying participants explicitly acknowledged this transition:

“I wasn’t aware before, but now I’m learning and trying to change.” (P6)

This suggests that ecotourism environments may function as transformative spaces, particularly for individuals who are not yet fully engaged in sustainable lifestyles.

#### 4.3.5 *Comfort perception: rejection vs. negotiation*

Comfort emerges as one of the most critical differentiating factors among the two focus groups. Volunteers tend to reject or deprioritize comfort, whereas, paying guests redefine and negotiate comfort. Paying guests consistently emphasized hygiene, safety, and basic physical comfort.

In particular, participants traveling with children highlighted the importance of secure and controlled environments. This introduces a structural constraint on voluntary simplicity, as comfort becomes non-negotiable under certain life conditions.

#### 4.3.6 *Role of family and children*

The child- and family-oriented lifestyle theme is significantly more pronounced among paying guests. Decisions regarding accommodation, consumption, safety, and duration of stay are often shaped by children's needs.

This factor is largely absent among voluntary participants, indicating that life stage and responsibilities play a crucial role in shaping the adoption of voluntary simplicity.

#### 4.3.7 *Motivation: lifestyle vs. experience*

Another key difference lies in motivational structures. Volunteers are motivated by lifestyle transformation, whereas paying guests are motivated by experience and exploration. Moreover, both groups value experiences, for volunteers these experiences are part of a broader existential and lifestyle shift, whereas for paying guests they are often temporary and context-dependent.

#### 4.3.8 *Time perception: radical vs. moderate shift*

Both groups experience a transformation in time perception, however, the degree varies. For example, voluntary participants describe a radical slowing down of life, whereas paying guests experience a relative deceleration, often in contrast to urban life.

“Here, I feel like time slows down.” (P10)

This finding suggests that ecotourism offers a shared temporal escape, but its depth of impact differs between groups.

#### 4.3.9 *Personal growth: core vs. secondary outcome*

Personal growth plays a central role for voluntary participants, who actively seek self-discovery, inner development, and alternative life paths. For paying guests, however, personal growth is typically incidental and secondary to experience. Although many

participants engage in learning and self-improvement activities, these are not always primary motivations for travel.

#### *4.3.10 Synthesis*

Overall, the findings indicate that voluntary simplicity should be understood as a continuum rather than a binary construct. The comparative analysis reveals that participants do not fit into rigid categories; instead, their engagement with voluntary simplicity varies in depth, motivation, and practice.

At one end of this continuum are voluntary participants, who demonstrate a deeply internalized and ideologically grounded form of simplicity. Their lifestyles are characterized by reduced consumption, strong ecological awareness, and a commitment to personal growth and self-sufficiency. For these participants, simplicity represents a coherent and value-driven way of life.

At the other end are paying guests, who exhibit a more pragmatic and selective form of simplicity. Their engagement is shaped by practical considerations such as comfort, family responsibilities, and budget constraints. Rather than fully rejecting consumption, they tend to optimize and negotiate it within the boundaries of their existing lifestyles.

Between these two ends, voluntary simplicity emerges as a dynamic and context-dependent phenomenon, influenced by individual circumstances, life stages, and levels of environmental awareness.

Ecotourism environments such as the Pastoral Valley Ecological Life Farm serve as an important meeting point for these different orientations. These settings enable interaction between individuals at varying stages of engagement with sustainable lifestyles, thereby fostering both reflection and potential transformation.

This continuum-based interpretation is further supported by the comparative summary presented in Table 2, which highlights the key differences and similarities between voluntary participants and paying guests across the core dimensions of voluntary simplicity.

**Table 2**

*Comparative summary of voluntary and paying participants in terms of voluntary simplicity dimensions*

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Voluntary Participants</b>	<b>Paying Participants</b>
Simplicity	Deep, internalized	Conditional
Consumption	Reduced	Optimized
Motivation	Lifestyle-oriented	Experience-oriented
Comfort	Rejected	Negotiated
Ecological Orientation	Ideological	Practical

Building upon the structured comparison presented in Table 2, which highlights the differences between voluntary and paying participants across the core dimensions of voluntary simplicity, a deeper layer of analysis emerges through the identification of inductively derived themes. While the dimension-based framework captures the general orientation of each group, it does not fully reflect the contextual and experiential nuances underlying participants' responses. In this regard, the emergent themes provide additional insight into how voluntary simplicity is interpreted, negotiated, and lived in practice. Table 3 presents these themes, offering a more nuanced understanding of the similarities and differences between the two groups.

**Table 3**

*Comparative analysis of emergent themes across voluntary and paying participants*

<b>Emergent Theme</b>	<b>Voluntary Participants</b>	<b>Paying Participants</b>	<b>Shared Theme</b>
Child- and Family-Oriented Living	Not observed	Observed	No
System Critique	Observed	Not observed	No
Time Perception	Observed	Observed	Yes
Search for Experience	Observed	Observed	Yes

The comparison presented in Table 3 reveals notable differences between voluntary and paying participants in terms of emergent themes. While the theme of system critique is predominantly associated with voluntary participants, the theme of child- and family-oriented living is more characteristic of paying guests. In contrast, time perception and the search for experience emerge as shared themes across both groups. These findings suggest that while certain aspects of voluntary simplicity are commonly

experienced, others are strongly shaped by participants' life conditions, responsibilities, and levels of engagement with sustainable lifestyles.

## **5 DISCUSSION**

This study aimed to examine the voluntary simplicity lifestyles of guests staying at an ecotourism farm and to compare differences between voluntary participants and paying guests. The findings reveal that voluntary simplicity is not a uniform construct but rather exists along a continuum shaped by individual motivations, life conditions, and levels of ecological awareness. This result aligns with previous studies suggesting that voluntary simplicity encompasses varying degrees of commitment and practice rather than a single, fixed lifestyle (Alexander & Ussher, 2012; Etzioni, 1998).

### **5.1 Voluntary simplicity as a continuum**

One of the most significant contributions of this study is the identification of voluntary simplicity as a continuum ranging from deeply internalized simplicity to conditional and pragmatic simplicity. Voluntary participants demonstrated a lifestyle-oriented, ideologically grounded simplicity, while paying guests adopted a more flexible and situational approach. This finding supports Etzioni's (1998) classification of voluntary simplicity into different levels (downshifter, strong simplifier, and holistic simplifier), suggesting that individuals engage with simplicity in diverse ways.

Similarly, Alexander and Ussher (2012) argue that voluntary simplicity is not limited to reduced consumption but involves broader ethical and philosophical commitments. In this study, such commitments were clearly evident among voluntary participants but appeared less pronounced among paying guests, who often balanced simplicity with comfort and convenience.

### **5.2 Ecotourism as a transformative space**

The findings indicate that ecotourism environments such as the Pastoral Valley Ecological Life Farm function as transformative spaces where individuals can experience

and potentially adopt more sustainable lifestyles. This supports the notion that ecotourism is not only a form of alternative tourism but also a platform for environmental education and behavioral change (Fennell, 2015; Honey, 2008).

Paying participants, in particular, frequently expressed that their ecological awareness had developed over time and through experience. This aligns with the literature suggesting that ecotourism can foster pro-environmental attitudes by creating direct interactions with nature (Weaver, 2001). However, the findings also reveal a gap between awareness and consistent behavior, which has been widely documented in sustainability research (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002).

### **5.3 Consumption patterns: from reduction to optimization**

Another important finding concerns the distinction between consumption reduction and consumption optimization. Voluntary participants exhibited a tendency to minimize consumption as part of their lifestyle, whereas paying guests engaged in more calculated and efficiency-based consumption practices.

This distinction reflects broader discussions in the literature on sustainable consumption (Teixeira *et al.*, 2024). While some individuals pursue radical lifestyle changes, others adopt incremental and pragmatic approaches (Jackson, 2005). The behavior of paying guests in this study corresponds to what has been described as “weak sustainable consumption,” where environmental considerations are integrated into existing consumption patterns rather than fundamentally transforming them.

### **5.4 The role of comfort and life conditions**

Comfort emerged as a key factor differentiating the two groups. While voluntary participants often deprioritized comfort, paying guests tended to negotiate comfort within the boundaries of sustainability. This finding highlights the importance of life conditions—particularly family responsibilities—in shaping lifestyle choices.

The prominence of child- and family-oriented concerns among paying participants suggests that voluntary simplicity may be constrained by practical realities. This supports

previous research indicating that sustainable lifestyles are influenced not only by individual values but also by structural and social factors (Shaw & Newholm, 2002).

### **5.5 Experience vs. lifestyle transformation**

The findings also reveal a distinction between experience-oriented and lifestyle-oriented motivations. For voluntary participants, ecotourism represents an extension of their existing lifestyle, while for paying guests it is often a temporary experience.

This aligns with Uriely's (2005) conceptualization of tourism experiences as ranging from superficial consumption to deeper existential engagement. In this study, voluntary participants can be associated with more existential forms of tourism, whereas paying guests tend to engage at a more experiential level.

### **5.6 Implications for ecotourism practices**

The findings have several implications for ecotourism providers. First, ecotourism destinations should recognize the diversity of visitor profiles and design experiences that cater to different levels of engagement with sustainability. Second, providing opportunities for learning and participation may help bridge the gap between awareness and behavior, particularly for paying guests.

Finally, the study suggests that ecotourism has the potential to act as a gateway to voluntary simplicity, enabling individuals to gradually transition toward more sustainable lifestyles.

## **6 CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

This study examined the voluntary simplicity lifestyles of guests staying at the Pastoral Valley Ecological Life Farm within the context of ecotourism, with a particular focus on differences between voluntary participants and paying guests. The findings demonstrate that voluntary simplicity is not a homogeneous lifestyle but rather a multidimensional and dynamic construct shaped by individual motivations, experiences, and life conditions.

One of the main contributions of this study is the identification of voluntary simplicity as a continuum. At one end, voluntary participants exhibit a deeply internalized and ideologically grounded simplicity characterized by reduced consumption, strong ecological awareness, and a focus on personal growth. At the other end, paying guests display a more pragmatic and conditional form of simplicity, where sustainable practices are adopted selectively and often balanced with comfort, convenience, and family-related considerations.

The study also highlights the role of ecotourism environments as facilitators of transformation. For many paying participants, the ecological farm experience contributed to increased awareness, behavioral reflection, and a gradual shift toward more sustainable practices. This suggests that ecotourism can function not only as a tourism alternative but also as a gateway to voluntary simplicity, supporting the transition from conventional consumption patterns to more conscious lifestyles.

### **6.1 Theoretical contributions**

This research contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it brings together the concepts of ecotourism and voluntary simplicity, which have largely been studied separately. Second, it introduces the notion of a continuum of voluntary simplicity, providing a more nuanced understanding of how individuals engage with sustainable lifestyles. Third, it extends existing frameworks by identifying emergent themes such as time perception, experience seeking, and family-oriented decision-making, which enrich the conceptualization of voluntary simplicity in tourism contexts.

### **6.2 Practical implications**

The findings offer important implications for ecotourism practitioners. Ecotourism destinations should consider the diversity of visitor motivations and design flexible experiences that appeal to both highly committed individuals and those at earlier stages of engagement with sustainability. Providing opportunities for:

- experiential learning
- hands-on activities

- interaction with nature and local practices

may help visitors develop stronger ecological awareness and gradually adopt more sustainable behaviors. Additionally, incorporating elements that address comfort and family needs can make ecotourism more accessible to a broader audience without compromising its core principles.

### **6.3 Limitations and future research**

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The research was conducted with a relatively small sample size within a single ecotourism setting, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future studies could expand the sample and include different types of ecotourism destinations to compare results across contexts.

Furthermore, longitudinal research could provide deeper insights into whether the experiences gained through ecotourism lead to long-term lifestyle changes. Quantitative studies may also be conducted to test the continuum model of voluntary simplicity proposed in this research.

### **6.4 Final remarks**

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that voluntary simplicity within ecotourism is not a fixed or uniform phenomenon but a gradual and evolving process. Ecotourism environments have the potential to play a transformative role by exposing individuals to alternative ways of living and encouraging more sustainable consumption patterns. Understanding this diversity is essential for both advancing academic knowledge and developing more effective and inclusive ecotourism practices.

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### **Authors' Contribution**

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

### **Data availability**

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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