

Chapter 8

‘Van Tour’ and ‘Doing a Contiki’: Grand ‘Backpacker’ Tours of Europe

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Introduction

It is commonly accepted that the ‘drifters’ of 30 years ago described by Cohen (1973) have become ‘backpackers’ as they have moved from the periphery to become an important component of mainstream tourism. A corresponding change occurred in the way this group was understood in the tourism literature as the focus switched from discussions of marginal behaviours to a need for researchers to understand more about what has become an attractive market for the tourism industry (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2004). For the backpackers themselves there appears to be an increasing gap between the ideology and practice of backpacking (Cohen, 2004). The ideology of the backpacker might still be epitomised by notions of freedom and mobility and yet the reality often describes travellers collected together in the enclaves of Khao San Rd in Bangkok or King’s Cross in Sydney (Cohen, 2004; Loker, 1994; Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995; Richards & Wilson, 2004a; Scheyvens, 2002), or those travelling on organised backpacker travel networks such as the *Kiwi Experience* in New Zealand (Moran, 1999; Vance, 2004). Indeed, one could be forgiven for thinking that the only destinations attracting backpackers are either the ‘exotic’ locations in Asia, South America and occasionally Africa (Sørensen, 2003) or those countries found ‘down under’ such as Australia and New Zealand (Loker, 1994; Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995; Newlands, 2004; Riley, 1988).

The need to research a wider geographic diversity of destinations and backpacker contexts has been recognised as an area of concern in backpacker studies (Richards & Wilson, 2004b). While a range of studies and market reports have variously addressed the ‘youth’ or the ‘student’

travel market, most have considered Europe as a *source* of outbound backpacker travellers and not as a destination *per se*. The 'global' nomad survey reported some European travel by European backpackers; this travel was seen as a precursor to gaining travel experience before moving up a travel career ladder (Pearce, 1993) to visit more exotic locations (Richards & Wilson, 2003). Another large body of work looks at the experiences of Israeli backpackers but, again, few of these involve travel in Europe (see, for example, Maoz, 2004; Noy, 2004a; Uriely *et al.*, 2002). With the exception of a study of the future travel intentions of New Zealand students by Chadee and Cutler (1996), one group of travellers that has, thus far, been mostly ignored in youth, student and backpacker studies is 'outbound' Australasian backpackers. This chapter addresses backpacker tourism in Europe, an important destination for several reasons: first, Europe is where backpacker tourism originated; and second, European destinations continue to attract many thousands of backpackers.

For decades there has been a tradition of young New Zealanders and Australians going to Britain and Europe on extended travel trips. In New Zealand such an experience is called the 'OE' (sometimes the 'Big OE'), a trip of extended duration that usually involves living, working and travelling outside New Zealand for a number of years. Investigation of the OE offers a unique opportunity to trace some of the changes in backpacker travel over time as practised and experienced by a specific group (or nationality) of travellers. With its focus on Europe, an exploration of OE travel also adds to the geographic diversity of destinations studied. Also, while the numbers of New Zealand backpackers might be small on a global scale, this belies their significance to backpacker tourism research. The OE has been directly responsible for the establishment of some of today's 'global' travel companies; many others owe their continuing operation to the OE for the regular source of clientele it provides. Also, as one of the first examples of a 'working holiday', the New Zealand OE remains a forerunner of trends in backpacker travel. OE travel is an integral – and therefore difficult to isolate – part of the broader experiences of the working holiday, a phenomenon that is increasing on a worldwide scale.

This raises the question of whether the 'working holidaymaker', the 'backpacker' and the 'OE participant' are one and the same. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to engage in an extended conceptual debate, we suggest that just as there are differences between 'types' of backpackers, so too do working holidaymakers vary. OE participants can only be 'categorically' described as backpackers whilst they are engaged

in travel episodes; they are *sometimes* a working holidaymaker and *sometimes* a backpacker. This differs from the position taken by other studies. Clarke (2004; 2005), for example, appears to have considered working holidaymakers in Australia to be backpackers throughout their entire trip. The difference may be that, compared to New Zealanders on OE, working holidaymakers in Australia are on shorter trips and remain much more within the 'structured' backpacker industry.

To understand the travel behaviour of any group, the contexts within which it occurs – historical, temporal, global, social, cultural, institutional, spatial – are important. In spite of political, social and institutional changes in tourism over time, OE travellers still follow the same routes and travel patterns they have for decades; yet in many ways their experiences *have* changed over time. This chapter explores these travel patterns and the changes within them, focusing on two iconic travel experiences of the OE, the 'van tour' and 'doing a Contiki'. To begin, in order to 'situate' OE travel, two contexts are necessary; first an OE 'background', then a brief review of backpacker tourism.

The 'OE'

As with 'backpacker', there is no definitive understanding of what an 'OE' is. The acronym 'OE' has been in use since the mid-1970s and stands for 'overseas experience'. Interestingly, while young Australians engage in very similar travel experiences they do not 'name' theirs in the same way. Over time the OE has become a part of New Zealand culture and is seen as an iconic New Zealand experience (albeit one that occurs outside New Zealand). Bell (2002: 143), for example, described the OE as a 'young adult's rite of passage or a "coming of age" ritual'. The OE began in the 1960s and really 'took off' (in terms of the numbers going) in the 1970s as a result of social and technological changes. The 1970s was a decade characterised by a large volume of emigration from New Zealand as the birth cohort produced by the 'baby boom' were passing through the most migratory-prone phase of the life span (Heenan, 1979). Social changes, along with delayed marriage and childbearing, also brought increasing freedom for women (McGill, 1989). New Zealand at this time had a high standard of living and this, coupled with the advent of more frequent air services, made overseas travel more affordable (McCarter, 2001).

Geographical isolation is cited as a determinant of travel for most young New Zealanders going on an OE. New Zealand's remoteness has, for many years, engendered a need in its population to see the 'rest of the

world' (see, for example, Mulgan, 1984; Sinclair, 1961; Stead, 1961). This remoteness also makes travel more difficult; the distance that needs to be travelled to 'get away' from New Zealand is much further than for the majority of the world's population, making it more expensive. This, when coupled with a traditionally weak currency (by Western standards), makes long-term travel viable only if one can live and work overseas. The availability of working holiday visas facilitates this, and New Zealand's historical and ancestral links to Britain are important. Over time a tradition of travel to London became established. While in the 1960s London was the 'swinging capital of the world', for much of the world's youth it had also become 'the centre of the Pakeha¹ world' (Easthope, 1993: 20). The Earls Court area of London became the gathering place for young Australians and New Zealanders as working sojourns interspersed with continental travel became popular.

Today, with easily affordable and more convenient travel options available, many more New Zealanders travel, although it is difficult to estimate how many go on an OE, as migration figures are inconsistent and the OE itself is poorly defined. Investigation of governmental migration statistics and working holiday visa issues (along with anecdotal evidence) suggests that there has been a regularly departing OE population of around 15,000–20,000/year since the 1970s. Not all of these return permanently to New Zealand and in 2004 the number of New Zealanders 'living' in London was estimated to be between 100,000 and 200,000.² This expatriate population has spread well beyond the boundaries of Earls Court and is supported by its own infrastructure. For OE travellers there are specialised travel agencies, companies offering travel insurance and visa services, numerous travel-focused media publications, along with websites that advertise tours, 'match' travel companions and offer travel forums and advice.

From 'Drifters' in Europe to 'Backpackers' in Asia

The development of the OE coincided with the growth in travel of all types of tourists and facets of the tourism industry. Because of their age and the length of time they are away, those on OE can be likened to Cohen's (1973) 'drifters', Riley's (1988) 'long-term budget travellers' and Pearce's (1990) 'backpackers'. The characteristics of these types of tourists are well documented in the tourism literature (see, for example, Adler, 1985; Ateljevic & Doorne, 2004; Cohen, 1973; Desforges, 1998, 2000; Elsrud, 2001; Loker, 1994; Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995; Murphy, 2001; Pearce, 1990; Richards & King, 2003; Richards & Wilson, 2004b;

Riley, 1988). Most accounts suggest a temporal progression as each of these 'types' has, to some extent, replaced its predecessor. There also appears to have been a geographical succession, at least in tourism research and literature (if not in reality), as the 'drifter' centres of Europe have been replaced with 'backpacker' enclaves in many other parts of the world.

According to Cohen (1973) it was the introduction of cheaper airfares, along with cheap accommodation and surface travel, that had the most impact on the expansion of drifter tourism during the 1960s and 1970s. Drifter or youth travel has become more institutionalised over time, albeit in tourism systems that paralleled mainstream tourism development. Youth travel, however, did not grow merely as a result of developing institutional facilities. Cultural, economic and political motivating factors all encouraged participation in what Cohen (1973) termed the 'drifter subculture'. These are neatly summed up in Michener's (1971) novel *The Drifters* which, through the stories of a group of young travellers, illustrated the attractions of the exotic and various modes of escape available through travel. Travel was used as a means of evading societal pressures and of avoiding routine work. The associated growth of the drug culture offered escape on a more personal level. The current generation of 'backpackers' epitomised by the characters in Garland's (1997) novel *The Beach* are similar to the characters in *The Drifters*; having found a paradise on earth and a ready supply of drugs, they live communally in a state of escapism. Only the geographical location has changed as the beach in Thailand offers today's backpackers what Torremolinos and Pamplona in Spain, Portugal's Algarve, or Marrakech did in the 1970s. For OE travellers, however, Pamplona, the Algarve and Marrakech are still sought-after destinations.

Structurally, Europe has been geared for backpacker tourism for at least 30 years and yet little attention has been paid in the research to those travelling in Europe. This may be a result of the difficulty of separating the backpacker from mainstream tourism and tourists identified by some researchers (Scheyvens, 2002; Welk, 2004). Also, identifying backpackers is a challenge when they do not 'look' different to the locals (as in the case of New Zealanders in Europe). The current trend in research to go out 'on the road', or to research backpackers in their enclaves, is perhaps a function of this; focusing attention on those places where backpackers are easier to identify. This not only results in researchers missing many backpacker locations; it also presents a risk of ignoring many varieties of backpacker travel as it predetermines which 'type' of backpackers are being researched.

According to Pearce (1990), backpacker tourism is characterised by a preference for budget accommodation, an independently and flexibly organised travel schedule and longer rather than shorter holidays. In many cases such a broad categorisation is not overly useful as it allows for most types of travel and yet fits few travellers (Sørensen, 2003). This appears to be the case with the OE. While an OE is long-term, the travel episodes within this may be relatively short because a substantial proportion of time is taken up with work. The role of work within the OE is quite different to that undertaken by the travellers for whom work on the road 'allowed them to continue their travels' (Riley, 1988: 319), or the varieties of 'travelling workers and working tourists' outlined by Uriely (2001). Riley (1988) suggested that the necessity to 'travel on a budget' is a natural result of extending travels beyond that of a cyclical holiday. Budget travellers '...are escaping from the dullness and monotony of their everyday routine, from their jobs, from making decisions about careers, and desire to delay or postpone work, marriage, and other responsibilities' (Riley, 1988: 317). The entire OE experience is encompassed by such a description, not only the travel episodes within it. An OE experience is a combination of *both* of Graburn's (1983) kinds of modern tourism as it incorporates the modal type (annual vacations or holiday breaks) into the longer-term and self-testing 'rite of passage' tourism.

Insights into OE travel can be found in a piecemeal fashion from a wide range of backpacker studies. While some recent studies have adopted more ethnographic perspectives and concepts to help describe travel behaviour, they miss the cultural contexts of the backpackers they are studying. Desforges (2000), for example, described ways in which tourism consumption was mobilised for self-identity, while Sørensen (2003) described the development of a culture of international backpackers; neither of these allowed for culturally specific travel as found in the OE experience. The OE appears similar to the 'journeys' of young Israeli backpackers, whose travel is sanctioned by the home society and has developed into distinct patterns and cultural expressions that have more to do with the travellers in question than the destinations visited. Such culturally distinct travel has implications that have only recently attracted the attention of researchers. As Urry (2002: 157) pointed out in the updated edition of *The Tourist Gaze*, 'The importance of travel to culture and how cultures themselves travel, can be seen from the nature of nationality. Central is the nation's narrative of itself'. What follows is the New Zealand OE participants' narrative of travel; it describes travel

patterns and behaviours that have been followed for over 50 years to become part of a New Zealand cultural icon.

OE Travel

While this chapter specifically addresses the travel component of the OE experience, it is part of a much broader inquiry that explored the OE from a variety of perspectives. The primary data collection was through qualitative interviews with 100 New Zealanders who had been, or were still on, their OEs. Archive and Web searches of travel advertising and literature provided supporting data to the interview findings. These combined data sources described travel experiences and patterns that have spanned five decades, from the 1960s up until the 2000s. Analysis of the data took an emic approach, drawing on the terminology used by the participants to describe their travel. The researchers of the global nomad survey also purported to use an emic approach although they 'offered' their subjects a choice of titles (tourist, traveller or backpacker) to identify with (Richards & Wilson, 2003). Similarly, Riley (1988) reported 'asking' respondents if they were travellers or tourists.

Those interviewed for this research closely resembled the backpackers described in other literature yet they did not call themselves 'backpackers', or even 'travellers'; rather they talked of going on 'trips' and 'holidays'. The language used by tourists to describe their own behaviour can impart information on that travel. Some of the past traditions of the OE, for example, are embedded in the language used by participants, even when the activity they describe no longer exists. The term 'fresh off the boat', once a literal description of the means of arrival in Europe – a transport option not available for almost 30 years – is still used by today's OE participants to describe a new (innocent) arrival from New Zealand.

The simplest differentiation made by respondents was between 'travelling' and going on 'holiday'. One 1996 OE participant described his OE travel: 'We went travelling through Europe – hired a car and just camped. After that we went back to London to work and did loads of holidays – skiing in Europe, to the States, long weekends in Paris – even did a British-type holiday when we went to the Canaries for Christmas'. Travelling usually involved multideestination trips of longer, rather than shorter duration. These, however, were not necessarily undertaken independently of the travel industry. Organised tours also counted as travelling. How travel is judged by others is an important consideration, and is a common theme in tourism literature. Doing it 'right' can endow

participants with what Munt (1994) and Desforges (1998) termed 'cultural capital', Elsrud (2001) entitled 'hierarchical positioning', and others referred to more generally as 'status' (see, for example, Riley, 1988; Sørensen, 2003). With OE, travel status could be gained through 'independent' travel, with the degree of independence determined by the mode of transport used. This is an interesting finding in light of Vance's (2004) assertion that backpackers' choices of transport modes have scarcely been considered in backpacker literature. Other studies have reported that status accrues from cheapness of travel or from visiting unique, or previously undiscovered, destinations (Riley, 1988). The 'iconic' travel experience of the OE is a Grand Tour of Europe, a 'tour' that visits some of the most expensive and popular tourist cities and sites in the world.

The attraction of Europe, for OE travellers, can be explained in several ways. It may be a result of what Graburn (1983) described as 'ritual inversion' whereby modernity (New Zealand) is replaced with history (Europe). Desforges (2000) suggested that for young Europeans increasing familiarity with their neighbours no longer makes them the 'Other'; for New Zealanders Europe is still the 'Other', the exotic or something worthy of Urry's (1990) 'gaze'. In a practical sense moving 'home' from New Zealand to Britain offered those on OE a range of new tourism experiences. As one OE participant said, 'Once you get to London the options are huge. I mean we can't [in New Zealand] hop on a plane and go across to Paris for the weekend'. Also, over time a tradition of OE travel has become established with its own set of destinations, travel styles and behaviours. Bell (2002: 143) likened the OE to secular pilgrimage, and described it as '... a quest or pilgrimage from one of the world's most remote countries, to the places familiar in national and family histories, popular media, and in tales from previous OE travellers'.

The Grand Tour of Europe

A core component of an OE is to go on at least one extended trip around Europe, much like the early 'Grand Tour' (Hibbert, 1969; Towner, 1985). According to a London newspaper article, 'spring heralds the arrival of Aussies and Kiwis in London' as, 'Every year they come to our cultured continent to do what has become known as the Grand Combi Tour. But they are not in search of culture. Armed with Vegemite and enough alcohol to float every navy in Europe, they're out to drink, drive and inject drugs' (Ferns, 1995). An OE tour is usually of three or four

months' duration and takes place in the European summer, following a circuit that begins in Pamplona, Spain in July at the *Running of the Bulls* (colloquially referred to as '*Pamps*') and finishes in Germany in October at the Munich *Oktoberfest* (the '*Beerfest*'). Between these markers the tour winds its way through Europe, to Portugal, with a side trip to Morocco, then the coastal route from Barcelona to Rome. The vans are 'parked' in Athens while their occupants visit the Greek Islands. After Greece, the 'ultimate' destination is Munich and the *Beerfest*. The speed of travel and routes taken are dependent on how much time and money the travellers have left.

All of those interviewed were familiar with this tour although few followed it exactly. Some did sections of the tour or shorter trips to the 'markers' at either end, 'did *Pamps* one year and the *Beerfest* a couple of times, but not the tour'; others recognised that they had their timing slightly wrong, 'we did a combi trip and did the circuit but left a month later than usual... but we did end up at the *Beerfest*'. *New Zealand News UK*, a London publication for expatriate New Zealanders, featured travel articles on the *Beerfest* and Pamplona (although this did not mention the *Running of the Bulls* festival) as long ago as 1965. *LAM*, another London publication for Australasians, advertised specific trips to *Pamps* and the *Beerfest* in 1978. A travel article in the same magazine the following year suggested that the popularity of *Pamps* was a direct result of Michener's (1971) book *The Drifters*.

There are many ways to 'tour' Europe and transport options fall on a continuum from independent (hitchhiking, cycling, hiring a vehicle or purchasing one's own vehicle – such as the 'combi' van mentioned in the above quotations) through public transport options (purchasing independent tickets or travel passes), the use of hop-on hop-off bus services (in more recent years) to going on organised tours (such as Contiki or Top Deck). Again, the majority of those interviewed were familiar with all the options possible and some types of travel were seen as 'better' than others, as issues of travelling 'properly' came through in many interviews. The two most talked about means of travel were the 'iconic' touring options: 'van tour' and 'doing a Contiki'.

'Van Tour'

The purchase of a van in which to 'independently' travel around Europe, and the route this tour takes, has become so established over time that it is commonly referred to as 'van tour'. Van travel became popular in the 1960s and 1970s; an early example of young people

travelling in a 'pop-top' is described in *The Drifters* (Michener, 1971). By the late 1970s a specialist guidebook was available for 'van' tourists. This guide described different models of vans,³ gave details of the van street market in London, explained which routes to take and how to budget for van travel and so on (Odin & Odin, 1979). In the early 1980s van tour was the subject of the 'hit' Men at Work song *Down Under*: 'Travelling in a fried-out combie, On a hippy trail, head full of zombie' (Hay & Strykert, 1982). More recently van tour has been immortalised in the New Zealand movie *Kombi Nation* (Lahood, 2003).

Outwardly, van tour appears to have changed little over time; the vans have not changed at all and the reference to 'fried-out' in the song lyrics above is indicative of the number of years each van had done the tour. They are often marked as 'van tour' vans, with the years they 'toured' recorded on their bodywork. Today, instead of 'parking' in an informal street market in London, vans for sale are 'posted' on the Internet and, in 2005, the vans selling were 1970, 1973, 1986 and 1986 model vehicles (Gumtree, 2005). For participants, recognition by others that they are on 'van tour' is important. A group of 2003 van travellers, for example, when asked if they had a New Zealand flag on their van said, 'Yeah we painted it on – we actually did it about half way through the trip – until then it didn't really stand out as a van tour van – it was just a blue van'. This supports Desforges' (1998: 189) notion that 'the audience is central to the transformation of travel into cultural capital' although there 'might be tensions when the audience contests the value of travel'.

The value of such travel *is* contested by some today, associated with the perceptions of many that the tour has changed. Two participants, who did van tour in the late 1980s (early in their OEs) and were still involved with OE travel in 2004 (as travel agents), talked about some of these changes: 'Van tour has become pretty feral. In its heyday in the 1970s and 1980s there were upwards of 200 vans collected in various European cities; [in 2004] there were probably less than a 100. Today's travellers are not as adventurous – I know that when we went out we were going on an adventure – just the fact that you weren't going to be able to contact people – we were going out to sample European culture – possibly not as much as a cultural student – we were going out to drink but we were going to visit as much as possible as well.' Another participant did 'van tour' in 2003, 30 years after her mother and said, 'My Mum did van tour in the early 1970s and it was different – they stayed in places for three weeks at a time and took drugs and that – back then they had no money and all they did was travel in vans and eat nothing – they

had the best time. Maybe it was easier to travel like that then because the facilities weren't there like today – it is hard to turn down what is there.'

Some of this change was seen as beyond the control of participants (the world and the contexts in which they were travelling had changed) and some was attributed to participants themselves (and the way they travelled or behaved while travelling). Increasing facilities and better communications have made 'van tour' less of a challenge and the van tour of the past was seen as 'better' for a variety of reasons – the participants had less money, travel was slower, time was spent sightseeing as well as having 'fun' and there was greater interaction with local cultures. While van tour always involved a degree of hedonism, over time the hedonistic aspect of the tour appears to have become much more significant. This, coupled with the development of the informally 'prescribed' tour route, has reduced the 'value' of this type of travel (Desforges, 1998). The modern van tour resembles the 'trip' described in a review of *Kombi Nation*, 'A lack of interaction with the locals makes *Kombi Nation* more a transplanting of Kiwi culture than a compelling overseas experience' (Croot, 2003: E4).

'Doing a Contiki'

In the past 'van tour' was usually lauded (for its independence), while 'doing a Contiki',⁴ the other 'iconic' OE travel experience, was denigrated (for being 'organised' travel and for the hedonistic behaviour associated with it). Yet ironically, these two perceived 'extremes' of travel not only display many similar characteristics but had the same beginnings. The early tours began as rough camping tours, using vans much like those travelling on the independent combi tours. The Contiki company, for example, was started in the 1960s by John Anderson, a New Zealander who, after presenting himself as a travel guide, took bookings and deposits for a tour of Europe; with the money he collected he then bought the van to be used for the tour (White, 2005). The other major tour company to have survived since the early days of the OE – Top Deck – was launched in a similar fashion by a young Australian. In Earls Court, in the late 1960s and 1970s, 'you only had to leave the back doors of a transit van open for five minutes and you'd return to find half a dozen people in the back waiting to leave for Europe' (Top Deck, 2004b).

Doing a tour was generally looked down on although it was an (almost) acceptable option if one had just 'arrived'; it could serve as an introduction to both the destinations and the mechanics of travelling. For most there was a degree of self-awareness of their naivety and

inexperience as travellers; a tour was a sensible option for someone who was 'fresh off the boat'. As one 1984 participant explained, 'We did a Contiki trip around Europe – I remember at the time thinking it was a kind of tacky thing to do – but it was our first proper big adventure and we thought it would give us an idea of which countries we wanted to go back and visit'. Also, some destinations were acceptable by tour: Scandinavia–Russia tours were very popular before the Berlin Wall came down, as were overland tours across Europe to Asia (on the hippie trail) until political trouble closed this route. For some, however, an organised tour was never an option, as one 1988 participant commented, 'I don't like package tours personally – having never done one in my life. It is probably an identity thing – because I don't want the social stigma of being a bus tripper'. Again, the opinion of one's audience was important (Desforges, 1998).

A major issue was the 'party' reputation some tours had; as one participant said about her tour, 'it was just one big long party – we spent most of it drunk – I missed things entirely – like the Sistine Chapel – I was so hung-over – I have felt ashamed of that for years'. Despite this party aspect of the tours, most found them good introductions to travel and enjoyed them immensely. Many of today's OE participants do the same trips their parents did a generation ago although it is questionable how 'similar' these tours would have been. Tours have changed considerably over time as, 'Gradually more luxury was added – 54-seat Mercedes coaches with TV, reclining seats and toilets replaced Ford Transit vans . . . and castles and comfort replaced camping' (White, 2005: 55). Contiki still offers camping tours but also runs hotel and 'concept' tours that stay in luxury, or unusual accommodations; in a shift further into mainstream tourism the company opened a resort on the Greek Island of Mykonos in 2004 (Contiki, 2005). Camping tours are advertised 'nostalgically' as, 'the original Contiki classic. Traditional touring combined with a can-do team spirit' (Contiki.com, 2003: 80).

There have also been changes to this type of travel. Some tour options have become less structured and are more like independent travel. In 2002, for example, the Contiki company began offering European Getaways, which, according to their brochure, are 'different city combinations designed to give you flexibility and freedom but still all the advantages of group travel' (Contiki.com, 2003: 43). These trips are also shorter than the 'traditional' Contiki tours, a trend across most types of OE travel. For many of more recent OE participants work commitments restricted their travel episodes to these quick trips or weekend breaks to European capitals, rather than month-long odysseys 'doing a

Contiki' or 'van tour'. Top Deck also offers a range of 'festival tours' that are only of a few days' duration. The focus, however, is still on the markers of the Grand Tour: *Pamps* or the *Beerfest*.

Conclusions

While those on OE went on many different trips and holidays in the years they were away, engaging in a myriad of types or styles of travel, this chapter has focused on the Grand Tour of Europe as experienced on 'van tour' or through 'doing a Contiki'. In these travel experiences there is evidence to support tourism changes found in other research and literature. Most evident are the institutionalisation and commodification of the tourism product as travel experiences have become increasingly organised and packaged for quick consumption. Technological changes have also affected the way travel is organised and planned. Yet despite such changes the core experience has remained the same – the destinations, the routes followed and the way travel is practised are so well established in the OE as to constitute the experience, rather than merely describing its characteristics. A core component of this is the hedonistic nature of these travel experiences. These OE participants appear to more closely resemble Cohen's (1973) drifters than they do the backpackers travelling in Australia or New Zealand in search of outdoor adventure experiences, or in a quest for self-identity (Desforges, 2000; Loker, 1994; Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995).

This chapter highlights the need to consider the contexts in which travel is practised. The focus of travel in Europe by OE participants, for example, can be attributed to colonial history, to the availability of working holiday visas, to geographic remoteness and to longstanding OE 'traditions'. The OE is a cultural expression of New Zealand, not of Britain, where these OE travellers live and from where they travel. This has implications for research on both practical and theoretical levels. OE participants' relatively long-term residence in Britain means that tourism statistics record them as domestic British tourists and yet they travel to different destinations and in different ways than do most British tourists (including British backpackers). One participant, for example, was called 'backpacker girl' by her British workmates, because she took her backpack into work every Friday to go away for weekends. Some of those interviewed had enjoyed 'British-type' holidays; the unusual or different 'type' of holiday experience recognised as much as an attraction as the destination of the holiday itself. The working holiday experience, with its blurred boundaries between work and travel, adds to the

challenge of understanding these travel experiences. While Top Deck is primarily a travel company, for example, it also recognises the extended nature of the OE experience of its clientele; the company hosts 'reunion' parties in London bars post-tour for its clients and runs a London 'Deckers Club' that offers members advice on living in London, holds mail for them, and runs day tours and other social events (Top Deck, 2004a).

There is a degree of self-awareness found in these OE tourists, something that has been overlooked in backpacker and other tourism studies. These OE participants had not only considered what type of tourists they were but also understood where, and how, their own travel traditions fitted with other types of tourism experiences. By interviewing a group who had engaged in the same travel experiences over many decades, very rich data could be collected. Those who had travelled in the earlier years, for example, were familiar with current travel options; recent OE participants were familiar with the way 'it used to be'. The data collected combined narratives of personal experience and opinions on OE travel. Some of those interviewed also offered 'professional' information and opinions on OE travel as a result of their involvement in the travel industry. Supporting data from various media sources and guides, along with advertising and popular literature, added the context in which this travel occurred. The final point this chapter makes is that the 'voices' and language of those being researched needs to be listened to more carefully. Those on OE have been following the same travel patterns around Europe for over 50 years despite numerous changes in tourism infrastructure, in technology and in travel fashion. Over time the terminology used by OE participants to describe their travel experiences had not changed and yet the experiences themselves were very different. The 'backpackers' described in this chapter travel around what the literature regards as non-backpacker destinations and, over time, OE travel has become institutionalised to the point where 'organised backpacking' has emerged. However, most OE travellers do not fully 'do' this organised form.

This chapter clearly illustrates that Europe is a major backpacker destination for non-Europeans. This is an area of research that deserves much more attention and should include travel from other non-European generating regions such as North America, South Africa and perhaps even South America. Backpacker tourism is *not* just travel to third world countries and Australasia. Given the long history of OE travel, the numbers involved and the impact these OE travellers have had on the development of tourism in Europe, it could also be argued that the

facilities for backpacker tourism in Australasia are a direct consequence of OE experiences. Again, this needs further investigation.

Notes

1. 'Pakeha' is a Maori word commonly used to describe a New Zealander of European ancestry.
2. These figures are based on market research done by Sky TV to determine the potential audience for a 'domestic' Australian and New Zealand news programme to be broadcast in Europe (personal communication, Nick Samitz, August 5, 2004).
3. The Volkswagen Combi was one of the more popular makes of van used. While there were many other makes of van, the term 'combi' was used by many participants to describe *any* van. There was a range of internal conversions that could be made to these vans and the relative merit of each type was a frequent topic of conversation.
4. While Contiki was only one tour company among many, it is one of the 'survivors' from the early days of the OE. Perhaps because of this, the term 'doing a Contiki' was used generically by most to describe *any* organised tour.