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Zusammenfassung

Diese Masterarbeit untersucht, wie Kommunikationspraktiken an einer Kitesurfschule mit dazugehörigem Gästehaus auf den Philippinen die Erfahrungen von Touristen in Bezug auf Wohlbefinden, Zugehörigkeit und persönliche Entwicklung beeinflussen. Basierend auf ethnografischer Feldforschung durchgeführt bei Greenyard auf der Insel Boracay zeige ich, wie die Gastgeber*innen sowohl die Kommunikation vor der Ankunft als auch jene vor Ort nutzen, um nicht nur logistische Abläufe zu koordinieren, sondern um Gäste gezielt einzuladen, auszuwählen und emotional vorzubereiten. Durch Beobachtung der Teilnehmer, Interviews, WhatsApp-Nachrichten und Feldnotizen argumentiere ich, dass Kommunikation bei Greenyard als weiches Strukturprinzip wirkt, über das emotionale Erwartungen aufgebaut und soziale Zugehörigkeit gesteuert werden. Angelehnt an Salazar und Gruburns (2014) Theorie der „Tourism Imaginaries“ zeige ich, wie Gäste häufig bereits mit der Vorstellung anreisen, Teil der Gruppe zu sein – geprägt durch kuratierte visuelle Inhalte und personalisierte Nachrichten. Um diesen Prozess zu beschreiben, stelle ich das Konzept des „*imaginary cycle*“ vor: Potenzielle Gäste konsumieren Greenyards Geschichten online, werden durch direkte Kommunikation emotional vorbereitet und werden dann selbst Teil dieser Geschichten für künftige Betrachter*innen – wodurch ein ständiger Kreislauf der imaginären Integration entsteht. Ich konzentriere mich auf drei Phasen, in denen soziale Zugehörigkeit hergestellt wird: Gästerauswahl, Kommunikation vor der Ankunft und Interaktion vor Ort. Erstens zeige ich, wie der Erstkontakt mit den Gastgeber*innen als Filtermechanismus fungiert, bei dem Gäste nach emotionaler Eignung, Reaktionsbereitschaft und Lebensstil ausgewählt werden. Zweitens erzeugt die Kommunikation vor der Ankunft emotionale Bereitschaft und eine Gruppenidentität. Drittens wird durch Moderation des Gruppenchats, Tonfall, Körpersprache, gemeinsame Mahlzeiten, Ausflüge und informelle Gespräche diese imaginäre Verbindung entweder gestärkt oder gestört. Diese Prozesse unterstützen nicht nur Inklusion, sondern führen auch stillschweigend zu Exklusion, wenn die emotionale oder soziale Anpassung nicht ausreicht. Um diese vielschichtigen Prozesse zu beschreiben, führe ich zudem das Konzept „*curated belonging*“ ein welches beschreibt, wie Aufnahme und Ausschluss nicht zufällig entstehen, sondern subtil über die Kommunikation aufgebaut werden. Dazu gehören nicht nur die Erwartungen vor der Ankunft, sondern auch der alltägliche Umgangston, emotionales Filtern und informelle Hierarchien, die die Gästelerfahrung prägen. „*curated belonging*“ umfasst

sowohl digitale als auch persönliche Interaktionen und zeigt, wie emotionale Ausrichtung lange vor der Ankunft angestoßen und vor Ort kontinuierlich angepasst wird. Diese Arbeit leistet einen Beitrag zur anthropologischen Diskussion über Tourismus, Wohlbefinden und selektive Inklusion, indem sie zeigt, dass emotionale Verbundenheit nicht einfach entdeckt, sondern durch kommunikative und soziale Praktiken gezielt hergestellt wird.

Abstract

This thesis considers how communication at a kitesurfing school and guest residence in the Philippines shapes tourists' experiences of wellness, belonging, and personal growth. Based on ethnographic fieldwork at Shoreline Kitesurfing Center on Boracay Island, I analyze how hosts use both pre-arrival and on-site communication not only to coordinate logistics, but to also emotionally align guests, and shape social compatibility before any physical meeting occurs. These communicative practices ranging from WhatsApp messages and Instagram posts to casual conversations, tone-setting, and shared daily routines create an affective structure through which belonging is imagined, rehearsed, and interpreted. Drawing on Salazar and Graburn's (2014) theory of tourism imaginaries, I introduce the concept of the imaginary cycle, a recurring process in which potential guests first consume curated visual stories online, then engage in emotionally priming one-on-one messaging, and eventually become featured in the same media content, reinforcing a cycle of imagined inclusion for future visitors. I also develop the concept of curated belonging to describe how inclusion and exclusion are quietly structured through selective communication, emotional tone, and informal hierarchies. Curated belonging includes both digital and face-to-face practices that shape who feels welcomed, who stays, and who disconnects. This thesis focuses on three key communication phases: guest selection, pre-arrival messaging, and on-site interaction. These phases not only enable connection and community-building, but also generate subtle forms of exclusion when emotional or social fit is not achieved. This research contributes to anthropological discussions on tourism, wellness, belonging, and the shaping of temporary but emotionally significant communities.

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1 Introduction

The second time I headed to Bulabog Beach and Shorelines kitesurfing school I was alone. I didn't have Isabel this time to steer the conversations or make introductions when I arrived. There was no buffer, and I could feel the difference in my chest, in my pace, and in how I carried myself. I wasn't sure if the people I had met the day before would remember me, or even if those brief hellos had meant anything at all. I felt like an outsider, trying to return somewhere I hadn't fully entered in the first place. My hands were empty, a backpack across my shoulders, and my mind busy with questions I couldn't quite shake: am I too early? do I just walk up? am I strong enough to kite? why am I sweating so much?

The path to the beach was narrow, and easy to miss if I didn't already know where to look. There were no vendors on the beach, no families with children and no signs shouting for attention. I felt like I had entered somewhere secret. The wind was strong here, enough to drown out my thoughts and tinnitus. Moments later I arrived at Shorelines kite school and made my way to the stairs leading to the second floor. I noticed that no one asked me what I was doing there, some people looked up, made eye contact, and then returned to their conversations or kite lines. I paused at the bottom of stairs before stepping, scanning the faces again and then headed up. No one stopped me, and no one called me over when I reached the top. It wasn't unwelcoming, just indifferent, calm, self-contained. That was when I began to sense that belonging here wasn't only about being introduced. It was about knowing how to move, when to speak, and what kind of energy and tone to carry. I uncomfortably looked around hoping to spot Rafi or someone I'd met the day before, but the faces were all unfamiliar. After a few seconds of hovering, I turned back toward the stairs and headed down. My head was low, my anxiety up. I was in an unfamiliar place, nervous, and looking for a helping hand to get me started, to get me kitesurfing. I made my way to the small surf shop at beach level and hesitantly approached the cashier. "Hi, I'm here for a kite lesson," I said, almost like a question. Right then, a guy in his mid-twenties came through the back door, shirt off, sun-browned and relaxed. He looked straight at me and asked, "Are you David?" When I said yes, he grinned, quickly slid around the counter, and gave me a high-five that turned into a

fist bump without hesitation. “Nice! I’m Aria, your teacher, let’s go upstairs and hang out at the bar for a bit before your lesson.”

That moment of being seen, named, welcomed, stayed with me. Not just because it put me at ease, but because it felt more than just logistics. It was tone, it was energy, it was the start of something social, not just procedural. I began to wonder, do other guests arrive feeling a sense of belonging or are they lost like I was. I briefly considered what Joy and Isabel previously told me and later came to learn through interviews and conversations, that for many, that feeling didn’t start on the beach at all, It began earlier, before arrival, in host-led continuous correspondence using text messages, photos, videos, and voice messages. It was then where something was happening, something emotional, strategic, and worth studying. The idea that wellness and belonging might be shaped through communication before anyone even sets foot on a beach challenged my assumptions about how tourism works.

I had initially started this project during the months of January and February 2024, with an original plan to investigate how tourism hosts and tour guides “perform identity”, similar to Judith Butler’s (1990) concept of doing gender. And I had not expected to shift my project into personal wellbeing experiences taking place in a kitesurfing community that was structured around communication. What stood out to me were the small acts of tone-setting, how the hosts responded and instigated messages, and how carefully the social space was managed. Shoreline Kitesurfing Center and residence wasn’t just a place to stay or kite, it was a system of selective invitation, reinforced through language, gestures, silence, and responsiveness that shaped emotional attachments. Over time I began to understand that communication here wasn’t just a logistical norm or a tool to keep people informed, it was part of the experience, tying it all together and running through it, from the moment a guest reached out to book a holiday months ahead, until the moment they left and beyond.

Most guests at Shoreline were foreigners, young professionals from Europe, Israel, or North America with only a few from the Philippines. Many were able to work remotely, had successful careers or were between jobs. Most of the guests seemed to share more than an interest in kitesurfing. They had a desire for something more, a break, a shift, a meaningful reset. They came not only for the sport, but for something less tangible, emotional space, social connection, or the chance to feel differently. Irina, a global executive based in Dubai, came to slow down and reorient

her life. Claire arrived with a one-way ticket, unsure whether to accept a promotion back in London. BJ, recently divorced, said he came to make his “15-year-old self-proud.” Aria, recovering from a breakup and unsure where to go next, described himself as “broken, broken, broken.” These weren’t just casual getaways, they were deliberate moves toward well-being or change and Shoreline offered something that appeared to support that shift.

My focus on the emotional attachments guests described started to take shape not from theory, but from patterns I noticed early on in the field, such as many of the guests quickly extending their stays, returning for longer visits, or speaking about Shoreline as something more than a holiday. When I asked why, the guests answers rarely centered on the sport or the place alone. They talked about the atmosphere, the energy and vibe, the people, the culture, and the ease of slipping into something that felt both structured and emotionally open. It wasn’t only the place or the activities they were attracted to; it was the way they were invited, included, and continually involved. Over time, I saw that communication (especially from the hosts) ran through everything, guest selection, pre-arrival messaging, weather updates, communal dinners and more. Quietly shaping who felt like they belonged, leading me to my research question: How does pre-arrival and on-site host communication at Shoreline Kitesurfing Center shape experiences of wellness, personal growth, and belonging in a short-term tourism setting? This question places communication not as a functional backdrop, but as a structuring force, one that initiates, shapes, and at times complicates emotional connection. I propose that host communication, particularly when it is intentional, acts as both a filter and a frame. It selects for compatibility and readiness while also shaping how guests interpret the meaning of their experience.

My hypothesis is that emotional tone, timing, and the consistency of communication (pre-arrival and on-site) serve as primary instruments in curating belonging. Guests don’t just show up, they’re prepared beforehand by the host. They arrive already imagining themselves as part of something intimate, emotionally open, and self-expansive. Some are affirmed in this imagined belonging; others are not. In either case, their interpretation of what happened is shaped not just by who they are or what they do, but by how they were spoken to, invited, and read by the group. To better understand how these emotional and communicative patterns work, and how guests come to feel aligned before they even arrive on-site, and continue to feel this way throughout their holidays, I turn to existing work in tourism studies and anthropology.

First, I draw on Salazar (2012) and Salazar and Graburn's (2014) work on tourism imaginaries to think about how both guests and hosts come to share certain expectations, ideas about what kind of experience is possible, what it should feel like, and even who one might become while away (pp. 864-865; p. 1). At Shoreline, these imaginaries didn't just circulate passively via travel blogs or social media. They were actively shaped by ongoing pre-arrival communication. The hosts continuously sent messages, shared videos, and maintained contact using Instagram and WhatsApp, helping guests' picture not just the setting, but themselves within it. These interactions often created a sense of imagined connection or emotional readiness well before anyone stepped off a plane. Some guests began to describe themselves as already "part of the vibe" before arriving. In this way, the imaginary wasn't just about anticipating the place, it became a way of preparing to belong. This recurring structure includes a process I call the *imaginary cycle*. In short, this cycle begins with exposure to Shoreline's visual and emotional tone on Instagram and continues through direct messaging that builds familiarity and emotional readiness. Guests arrive not only expecting connection but often already feeling included. Once on site, many guests live out those imaginaries they once viewed and imagined themselves in. Completing the cycle, guests and kite teachers often appeared in the same Shoreline Instagram stories they used to watch, thus becoming the new imaginaries future guests are imagining themselves as. While not fundamental to every experience, this cycle captures a distinctive way emotional alignment is rehearsed before arrival and extended after it. It offers one lens on how belonging is maintained by way of visibility, tone, and selective communication, even before guests physically arrive.

Second, I expand Simoni's concept of the touristic borderzone (2008, 2019, 2020), which helps explain how inclusion and exclusion are negotiated through informal, emotionally charged encounters between hosts and guests (2008, p. 2; 2019, pp. 107–109; 2020, pp. 72–73). While Simoni focuses on interactions between travelers and local residents, the hosts at Shoreline were not Filipino, but long-term foreign residents. Yet for many guests, their emotional authority and embeddedness in the setting made them feel "local" in function, if not origin. I adapt Simoni's concept primarily to examine how these negotiations begin even before arrival, extending the borderzone into the pre-arrival phase through digital communication. At Shoreline, WhatsApp messages, personal video calls and Instagram stories and interactions became early points of contact where tone, silence, and curation shaped inclusion and previewed belonging. Rather than

relying solely on co-presence, this expanded borderzone operated through online interaction, where belonging was subconsciously shaped, filtered, or encouraged long before guests arrived.

Third, I use Hartwell's (2016) model of eudaimonic wellness, which shifts attention away from short-term pleasure and toward longer-term emotional meaning, reflection, and self-development (p. 1). Her work offers a useful approach for understanding the kinds of goals many guests brought with them to Shoreline long before arrival, with some already imagining their time there as a chance to reset, to gain clarity, or to move through personal change. These were not just casual holidays, they were purposeful breaks aimed at emotional well-being or lifestyle reconsideration. At Shoreline, these goals were often reinforced by the hosts who selected emotionally open guests and encouraged them to see their time as meaningful. Growth and ease were not just outcomes; they were part of how the experience was shaped and interpreted. What mattered wasn't just what guests did, but how they came to understand those moments in relation to themselves.

Each of these theories helped me see the field site more clearly, but none alone fully captured what I was observing at Shoreline. What I needed was a way to talk about the emotional and communicative work that goes into producing social inclusion or exclusion, especially when it feels spontaneous but is quietly shaped. This is where my concept of *Curated Belonging* emerged. I use curated belonging to describe the subtle but deliberate ways inclusion (and exclusion) at Shoreline was designed. It was never presented as exclusive, but quite the opposite, as many guests described the space as welcoming, warm, or free. However, my fieldwork suggests that this sense of ease was achieved by means of selective messaging, emotional alignment, and interpersonal management. At Shoreline the management team paid attention to tone, and they responded warmly to those they sensed were a good fit, and more cautiously towards others. Inclusion was presented as natural, but it was shaped by emotional compatibility and social readability. Those who blended easily into the house culture of being emotionally open, socially intuitive, lightly adventurous were absorbed quickly, while others had to work harder to be seen or were pushed to the side.

While curated belonging helps describe how access is managed, it also raises the question: why do some guests feel emotionally aligned so quickly? To better understand this, I draw from Neville and Reicher's (2011) work on shared identity. This helps explain why some guests at Shoreline felt instantly seen, while others felt out of sync. Belonging wasn't just about physical presence or

shared space, it was about recognizing a version of oneself in the group, and being recognized in return. Similarity at Shoreline wasn't always about background or nationality, as it often rested on emotional style, interpersonal ease, shared lifestyles, financial availability and more. Guests who had previously followed Shoreline's Instagram stories or had consistent pre-arrival communication with them often entered the space already speaking its language. In this sense, the imaginaries didn't just prepare people to expect personal growth, it also helped shape a shared identity, consciously and subconsciously having them learn to belong.

I have organized this thesis around two empirical chapters, with additional support from a literature review, a field site overview, and a methodology chapter. Empirical chapter one examines how pre-arrival communication shapes guests' emotional investment and imagined inclusion. Empirical chapter two focuses on on-site communication and its role in generating both connection and pressure. Drawing from scenes and testimonies of the daily life at Shoreline, post-holiday reflection's from guests, and more critical dimensions of the experience, the empirical chapters show how communication at Shoreline creates emotionally constructed tourism experiences. The methods and literature chapters provide the foundation for this analysis, while the conclusion reflects on curated belonging and its broader implications.

What began as a project about performativity in tourism developed into a study of how personal growth, emotional readiness, and the boundaries of inclusion and social ease are shaped through communication. At Shoreline, most people did experience personal growth, but rarely in isolation. Their experiences were influenced by the way they were invited, spoken to, welcomed, and remembered. Belonging did not just happen. It was made carefully, socially, and often invisibly. To better understand how these processes operate, and how communication might act as a subtle scaffold for inclusion, I now turn to existing work in anthropology and tourism studies. The following literature review traces important contributions to the anthropology of tourism and ongoing debates around tourism imaginaries, host-guest relations, emotional tone, and wellness. Rather than treating the literature as background, I use it as a tool for thinking through what I observed at Shoreline and for refining the concept of curated belonging.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Anthropology of Tourism

In this literature review I outline how tourism anthropology, wellness theory, and anthropological work on communication and belonging contribute to understanding emotional connection, belonging, and personal development within selective tourism spaces. I use three primary concepts to organize this analysis. 1. *tourism imaginaries*, a term Salazar and Graburn (2014) use to describe collectively shared representational structures that influence how people interpret and anticipate travel experiences (p. 1); 2. *touristic borderzones*, defined by Simoni (2020) as socially and emotionally charged zones of interaction shaped by informal scripts, expectations, and embodied performances (pp. 2-3); and 3. *eudaimonic well-being*, as conceptualized by Hartwell (2016), which refers to a form of wellness rooted in meaning, self-realization, and personal growth rather than short-term pleasure (p. 2). Using these models, I highlight that host-guest communication is not merely logistical, but a means through which emotional compatibility, inclusion, and personal meaning are actively shaped.

To clarify how these three ideas shape the analysis, it is helpful to define several key terms that appear throughout the thesis. Well-being (wellness), as used here, builds on Hartwell's (2016) focus on eudaimonic tourism, an angle that prioritizes lasting psychological benefit, meaning making, and self-development, rather than short-term enjoyment or hedonic pleasure (p. 1). Personal growth (or personal change) refers to the internal shifts guests often associate with their stay in tourism settings, including increased self-confidence, new emotional perspectives, or a renewed sense of purpose (Garcês et al., 2018, p. 42; Valente-Mosqueda et al., 2025, p. 9). Similarity, a term drawn from Neville and Reicher (2011), refers to the perception of shared identity or values, which can produce a sense of social ease and emotional recognition. They observe that when participants believe they share an outlook or values with others, it breaks down barriers and encourages more open, warm interaction (p. 383). While difference is often idealized in tourism discourse, the data presented here suggests that at Shoreline, belonging was more often shaped through subtle forms of similarities, especially in emotional tone, social behavior, and

shared expectations, rather than overt demographic diversity. With this conceptual groundwork in place, I now turn to the anthropological foundations that inform my approach to tourism.

2.2 Early Approaches and Shifting Concerns

The anthropology of tourism is an evolving field contending with its past perception as a frivolous, non-worthy, academic pursuit avoided by serious scholars (Burns, 2004, p. 2). Today, the anthropology of tourism allows for the social, cultural, economic, and political dimensions of tourism to be understood through the dimensions of tourism as a global phenomenon (Burns, 1999, p. 1). Nelson Graburn (Burns, 1999) has provided a foundational understanding for this once skepticized discipline by arguing that “tourism is more than a collection of business transactions, a process, or set of impacts. It is a multifaceted assortment of systems that includes economic, built and natural environments, ownership patterns, relationships between generating and receiving countries, and the relationship between the locale in which tourism takes place and the wider society” (p. 1). In addition, Graburn (as cited in Burns, 1999) points out that anthropology’s holistic approach is useful in studying tourism, since anthropology is ultimately about people, and so is tourism (p. 13). While anthropologists may try to identify themselves as a researcher within the field, it is Graburn’s proposal in which the researcher inherently plays two parts, both the tourist and then observer, whether they like it or not (Burns, 2004, p. 13). I believe this “dual role” enhances the anthropological understanding of tourism by integrating both theoretical and practical perspectives by participating in, and by observing tourism, leading to a better understanding of the lived experiences of both tourists and host communities. Pedregal (2020) adds to Graburn’s work and builds on the intricacy of tourism settings, noting, “Anthropological studies have shown, beyond any theoretical saturation point, that the diverse nature of the tourism phenomenon cannot be understood, not even in its most entrepreneurial aspects without understanding the social and cultural processes that occur in the tourism setting” (p. 6). Furthermore, Graburn (2009) articulates the relationships between hosts and guests and how these relationships evolve over time, highlighting the importance of the anthropological study of tourism. This field of research which should continue to be a focus, considering it includes, but is not limited to “ethnicity, identity, local and global politics, development, social in equality, gender, material culture, globalization, diaspora, lived experience, discourse, representation, and the objectification and commodification of culture” (Leite & Graburn, 2009, p. 35. Burns, 2004, p. 11).

Graburn (Burns, 2004,) in similar discourse to Turner, also discusses the ritualistic aspects of tourism, drawing parallels within the traditional rites of passage. Graburn suggests that tourism can be seen as a process of temporary suspension from everyday norms, where individuals engage in unusual or heightened experiences (p. 11). This conceptualization aligns with Turner's (1969) model of transition rites, which involve stages of separation, liminality, and reintegration (p. 98). The concept of liminality, as introduced by Turner (1969), is also relevant in understanding rapid place attachment through tourism as it refers to the phase where individuals are removed from their usual social roles and norms during travel (p. 104). This results in tourists potentially entering a liminal state where they are free from the constraints of their everyday lives. As a result, this state of liminality can improve their openness to new experiences and facilitate deeper emotional connections with the places they visit. Similarly, Nash (1991) discusses the changing effect of tourism, suggesting that tourism is a way society responds for the alternation or recreation in people's lives. Nash elaborates on this concept, explaining that in transition rites, individuals leave their structured social routines and enter a liminal phase where normal patterns dissolve, eventually reintegrating into their regular lives with new perspectives (p. 17). In other words, these perspectives accentuate the ritualistic aspects of tourism which contribute to its potential to shift meaning.

Simoni (2020) advocates for the value of a contextually grounded method to tourism research. He points out that recent anthropological work has moved away from broad typologies and generalizations, turning instead toward ethnographically rich, situated studies of how tourism is practiced and experienced. This shift has opened new pathways for research, treating tourism as a reflexive and embodied activity (p. 1). Simoni also discusses the increasing overlap between tourism and heritage-making, suggesting that tourism contributes to wider anthropological debates about cultural property, material culture, and how societies remember and represent the past (p. 7). Likewise, Pedregal (2021) pushes for a nuanced understanding of host-guest relationships, stating that social scientists maintain that tourists do not always behave the same way everywhere and that host-guest relations are not always identical (p. 8). This recognition has led to a preference for studying the social and cultural processes in tourism environments, rather than viewing hosts and visitors as homogeneous groups. Such a stance acknowledges the diverse motivations and behaviors of tourists and the varied responses of host communities.

The anthropology of tourism also examines the economic impacts of tourism on host societies. Smith (Nash, 1991) observed that while tourism is not the primary driver of cultural change in most societies, it notably impacts the economic landscape, acknowledging “tourism is not the major element of culture change in most (host) societies. Whatever impact does occur appears to operate most significantly on the economic front” (p. 16). This perspective is important for understanding the benefits and challenges that tourism brings to local economies. Building on this, the rise of neo and digital nomadism illustrates the increasingly blurred lines between work, leisure, and travel. Researchers have begun to analyze how these modern nomads integrate their professional lives with their travel experiences. These studies suggest that the evolving nature of work, characterized by flexibility and instability, both shapes and is shaped by these new forms of tourism (D’Andrea 2007; Mancinelli 2018; Thompson 2019 as cited in Simoni, 2020, p. 8)

Extending the discussion, Simoni (2020) describes the early anthropological study of tourism as a theoretical extension of classic themes such as ritual, pilgrimage, and modernity, noting that these foundations helped shape the field’s initial analytical frameworks (p. 4). He also stresses the importance of a multidisciplinary lens, arguing that tourism research now encompasses a wide range of anthropological concerns, including ethnicity, identity, politics, and globalization (p. 59). In a complementary vein, Burns (2004) has advocated for a systems approach that highlights the interconnectedness of tourism within broader political, ecological, and social structures. As he explains, “The advantage of a systems viewpoint is that tourism is not automatically seen in isolation from its political, natural, economic or social environments” (p. 1).

Overall the study of tourism within anthropology has gradually shifted in recent years, moving from early skepticism to a more detailed, situated and empirically grounded understanding. The concept of “place attachment” is also relevant here, as it explores how both tourists and locals form emotional and psychological connections with specific places (Dwyer et al. 2019). These attachments shape how locations are experienced, valued, and remembered, adding greater significance to anthropological engagement of tourism. As tourism expands and changes, anthropologists will continue to play an important role in examining its social, cultural, and economic effects, while recognizing “tourism as a means of global communication” that can “promote peace and understanding among nations” (Pedregal, 2019, p. 8).

2.3 Place Attachment in Tourism

Reflecting on the fundamental human-place relationship, place attachment contributes substantially to the understanding of tourism originating from an environmental psychology perspective (Dwyer et al. 2019, p. 645). Acheampong et al. (2023) observe and articulate how emotions play an important role in place attachment, influencing both tourists and their connections to destinations (p. 2). On top of that, literature from environmental psychology recognizes the overlap between emotions felt toward a place and place attachment (Halpenny, 2010; Low & Altman, 1992; Manzo, 2003, as cited in Hosany et al., 2017, p. 3). Dwyer et al. (2019) explain how place attachment and tourism has shifted from merely experiencing places to understanding the formation of strong attachments, which has become necessary for destination competitiveness. They argue that emotional attachment within a tourism destination is deeply connected to how both residents and tourists relate to the place (p. 645).

The collaborative work of Kyle and his colleagues in 2003 (Brown & Gross, 2008) notably advanced the understanding of place attachment in tourism. In their research, they examined the relationships between leisure activity involvement and place attachment among hikers on the Appalachian Trail. “The findings in this place attachment to tourism indicated that the place identity dimension was best predicted by the self-expression and attraction dimensions, whereas the only predictor of place dependence was self-expression.” (pp. 1142-1143). As a result, their structural modeling analysis has laid the groundwork for numerous subsequent studies, offering insights into the motivations for recreationists’ engagement and visitation to specific settings (Brown & Gross, 2008, p. 1143). Morgan (Hosany et al., 2017) suggests that place attachment develops as experiences during a trip are “internalized at the unconscious level and subjectively manifested into an attachment to place” (p. 7). Hosany (2017) adds to this by expressing that emotions such as “love, pleasure, joy, amazement, caring, and inspiration are important to meaningful tourism experiences”, contributing to the consolidation of place identity and place dependence (p. 9).

Altman and Low (Dwyer et al., 2019) have discovered that tourists and visitors often develop place attachment through meaningful social interactions and involvement within the destination. The intensity of the emotional ties’ tourists form with a place varies, ranging from immediate sensory

experiences to long-lasting, deeply rooted affections (p. 646). An example of this can be witnessed in Campbell, Nicholson, and Kitchen 2006 study (Dwyer et al., 2019), which found that “social bonding was prominent in creating true loyalty among private health club members” (p. 647). Adding that place attachment in leisure and tourist destinations has been linked to repeat visits as well. Multiple studies have discovered that individuals’ “involvement in leisure activities plays a key role in developing emotional attachment to natural environments” (Kyle et al. 2004a, 2004b, Hwang et al. 2005, Lee et al. 2007, and Gross and Brown 2006, 2008 as cited in Dwyer et al., 2019, p. 647). Therefore, according to Hosany (2017), incorporating such activities is needed in the pursuit of place attachment, as it can heighten the overall tourist experience and promote sustainable tourism practices (p. 7).

Tsai’s (2011) Strategic Management of Place Attachment model outlines the comprehensive foundation necessary for nurturing place attachment, encompassing emotional pleasure, cognitive stimulation, psychological growth, self-expressiveness, and communal awareness created by a holistic tourist experience (p. 139). Place attachment, supported on such a foundation, becomes a powerful driver of tourists’ revisit behavior, illustrating the role of place attachment in “eliciting attitudinal loyalty and revisit behavior via the creation of desirable and memorable experience” (Tsai, 2011, p. 141). To add to that, tourist behavior is also influenced by the physical environment, interaction quality, and outcome quality of the destination (Alexandris et al., 2006 as cited in Tsai, 2011, p. 141).

Not to be outdone, Hsiao et al. (2019), explain how tourism experiences contribute to well-being by creating memories, which enhance “happiness and life satisfaction” (p. 323). These experiences by both first-time and repeat visitors can contribute to the development of strong attachments to a place. This highlights the subjective nature of tourist experiences, and suggests that place attachment depends more on the meanings associated with the experiences rather than the frequency of visits (Hsiao et al., 2019, p. 329). Also, Dwyer et al. (2019), argue that tourism is a major contributor to place change, influencing place identity and attachment as it intersects with global processes like globalization, urbanization, virtualization, and environmental pressures (pp. 645-647). Thus, understanding place attachment and sense of place is fundamental for effectively managing and marketing tourism destinations in our rapidly changing world.

2.4 Wellness in Tourism and Emotional Structuring

Wellness tourism has often been presented as an industry that responds to growing interest in mental clarity, physical health, emotional healing, and spiritual meaning (Garcês et al., 2018, p. 36; Valente-Mosqueda et al., 2025, p. 4). However, recent literature adds to this idea, stating that wellness is not only a fixed or universal goal. Instead, it is described as a multidimensional and subjective pursuit, shaped by personal values and lifestyle perceptions (Valente-Mosqueda et al., 2025, p. 1). Within this literature, two major strands have emerged: the hedonic model, focused on short-term pleasure and relaxation, and the eudaimonic model, centered on self-realization, emotional depth, and meaning making (Hartwell, 2016, p. 1; Piuchan, 2022, p. 7).

Eudaimonic well-being, as Hartwell (2016) explains, is generally regarded as “more meaningful and enduring than hedonic experiences which are related to transient pleasures and the temporary satisfaction of basic needs” (p. 1). She suggests that aligning tourism offerings with eudaimonic ideals, such as self-actualization, growth, and connection can lead to more meaningful and enduring experiences (p. 4). This perspective aligns with broader psychological perspectives such as Seligman’s (2002) authentic happiness, which identifies emotional richness, engagement, and purpose as primary components of a fulfilling life. As Hartwell (2016) puts it, “A fulfilling tourist experience is arguably one which is characterized by these components and is thus not simply equated with pleasure” (p. 8). Still, most scholars make clear that hedonic and eudaimonic well-being are not opposites, but intertwined. As Henderson and Knight (2012) argue, “a life rich in both hedonic and eudaimonic pursuits may therefore be associated with the highest degree of well-being” (as cited in Hartwell, 2016, p. 10). Hartwell (2016) similarly notes that focusing on one over the other may miss the point, as eudaimonic travel can also include joy, and relaxation and may also open pathways to self-discovery (p. 10).

While wellness is often defined through broad contexts, such as the WHO’s (1948, 2006) definition as “the optimal state of health of individuals and groups” and “health” as a state of “complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (as cited in Hartwell, 2016, p. 7). Hartwell (2016) adds that tourism scholarship also links wellness to identity formation, emotional renewal, and purpose-driven experiences (p. 7). Valente-Mosqueda et al. (2025) imply that wellness involves psychological, spiritual, social,

emotional, and even occupational dimensions (p. 2). Their study reveals that many wellness-motivated tourists are not just looking for rest, but actively “engaging in a sequence of factors and events” to achieve mental clarity, confidence, and emotional balance (p. 12). This echoes Hindley (2020), who points out that wellness outcomes depend on trip length, involvement, and conditions, with more intense or meaningful experiences producing greater long-term benefit (p. 4).

Yet even as wellness tourism aspires to achieve emotional renewal, the literature acknowledges its limits and contradictions. Some studies suggest that the happiness gained from tourism is short-lived (Nawijn, 2011b; Nawijn et al., 2012, as cited in Piuchan, 2022, p. 6), while others argue that tourism offers lasting psychological benefits as a result of memorable experiences and post-trip satisfaction (Tuo et al., 2014; Gilbert & Abdullah, 2004, as cited in Piuchan, 2022, p. 6). Steiner and Reisinger (2006), even critique the commercialization of wellness, suggesting that many spa or “pampering” offerings fail to connect with the deeper, eudaimonic dimension of well-being (as cited in Hartwell 2016, p. 17). In this debate, several authors stress the importance of emotional connection and participation. Konu (2010) finds that lower-involvement activities like sightseeing align with hedonic outcomes, while more immersive activities, such as hiking or self-development excursions promote deeper, longer-lasting well-being (as cited in Piuchan, 2022, p. 8). Fyall et al. (2013) equally observe that eudaimonic tourism often involves community interaction, rural immersion, and emotional identification with place (as cited in Piuchan, 2022, p. 7).

What emerges across this wellness in tourism literature is the idea that it is not passively received. Instead, it is shaped by expectations, setting, activity, and social backdrop (Hartwell, 2016, p. 3; Valente-Mosqueda et al., 2025 p. 4). In this regard, Zhou and Wang (2024) define immersive tourism as *experiencescape*, which is “a holistic environment that enables tourists to temporarily experience a separation from the real, physical world through physical and mental engagement” (p. 3). This highlights how both physical surroundings and mental immersion combine to create the conditions for meaningful emotional and personal significant experiences. As Hartwell (2016) points out that tourism has long tapped into “pro-social” and identity-shaping discourses, connecting holidaymaking to deeper notions of healthy living (p. 9). Furthermore, Garcês et al. (2018) observe that tourism is increasingly seen as a site of personal development and self-realization (p. 42), which aligns strongly with my fieldwork at Shoreline, where well-being was often presented not as something to be discovered spontaneously, but as something to be felt,

expressed, and interpreted, often through the tone of communication, the curated group environment, and the alignment between guests' desires and the host's emotional scripts. This insight is particularly relevant, where the affective power of travel began long before arrival. As Uysal et al. (2016a) adds, the well-being effects of tourism may "extend to the preplanning stage," suggesting the emotional benefit begins not at the destination, but during the anticipation, imagining, and early engagement process (as cited in Hindley & Marmion, 2020, p. 5). This observation helps bridge the wellness literature with the anthropology of tourism imaginaries, where expectation and emotional shaping are seen as foundational to the tourist experience.

2.5 Tourism Imaginaries and the Influence on Expectations

The concept of tourism imaginaries offers a useful model for understanding how guests arrive at destinations already primed to interpret experiences in specific emotional and symbolic ways. Salazar (2012) defines imaginaries as "socially transmitted representational assemblages that interact with people's personal imaginings and that are used as meaning-making and world-shaping devices" (as cited in Salazar and Graburn 2014, p. 1). In tourism, these assemblages are not static; they are globally circulated, continuously adapted, and shaped by media, marketing, social networks, and personal narratives (Salazar and Graburn, 2014 pp. 1-2). As Salazar (2012) explains, such imaginaries do not circulate freely, but via "well-established conduits" such as guidebooks, brochures, international institutions, and media representations (p. 869). In the case of Shoreline, this function is increasingly fulfilled by Instagram stories, direct messaging, and curated visual content, which act as emotionally loaded onboarding tools. According to Salazar and Graburn (2014), tourism fantasies help in recreating peoples and places through processes of reinterpretation, legitimation, and institutionalization travelling along established conduits, media, word-of-mouth, picking up and shedding elements along the way (p. 11).

Skinner & Theodossopoulos (2011) mention that tourists rarely arrive without expectations, "Whatever the form of tourism indulged in, people always travel with a set of expectations derived from various sources" (as cited in Salazar and Graburn, 2014, p. 16). However, these expectations may reduce uncertainty but also operate as a form of control, shaping how travelers interact with new places and people, having tourist spaces become "spaces of the imaginary, of fantasy, and of dreaming," (Salazar and Graburn, 2014, pp. 16-17). Even where travel promises authenticity, a

sense that something is emotionally real or unfiltered, the experience is often channeled into a scripted encounter, what feels real may actually be shaped by the imaginary itself. This construction does not only apply to tourists, as Salazar and Graburn (2014) explain the importance of host imaginaries, writing that “hosts also have expectations and assumptions about what tourists want or expect, and about how they themselves should appear” (p. 15). Anthropologists, they argue, are well placed to examine this “counter-gaze,” particularly in situations that involve both “the performance of self and the orchestration of group experience” (Salazar and Graburn, 2014, p. 13). This is particularly relevant to Shoreline, where hosts were not simply responding to guest expectations, but actively guiding, filtering, and reinforcing certain imaginaries through personalized messaging, tone-setting, and selective inclusion. In this way, host imaginaries shaped which guests were drawn in, and how they would emotionally interpret their stay.

Furthermore, imaginaries do not only shape on-site experiences. They also shape pre-arrival engagement, particularly in selective tourism spaces where guests are invited or filtered based on perceived alignment. Salazar and Graburn’s (2014) observation that imaginaries influence how tourists imagine, interpret, and experience the Other (p. 17) helps demonstrate the significance of Shoreline’s pre-arrival communication. As guests experienced the early tone (whether affirming or intimate) it became a part of how they imagined their future selves within the space. The imaginary was not just a backdrop, but a felt environment, carrying emotional weight long before their plane even landed. Some scholars have described the imaginary as the blurred space between anticipation and experience, what Crapanzano (2004), calls tourism’s “imaginative horizons.” These horizons mark the boundary between the present and a desired elsewhere, filled with meaning, self-renewal, or personal change (as cited in Salazar, 2014, p. 18). At Shoreline, these imaginative horizons were carefully managed through direct messages, aesthetic signals, tone, and group energy. They created a sense of belonging before belonging had been earned, an emotional preview, curated in advance. As Salazar and Graburn (2014) explain, tourism imaginaries are socially shared, yet often experienced in ways that feel deeply personal (p. 2). The imaginary, then, is not just about fantasy, it is also about expectation, design and emotional alignment. As Salazar (2012) points out, imagination itself is “a way of knowing the world and acting upon it” (p. 864), highlighting how expectations are not just projected onto travel, but actively shape how tourists navigate and emotionally interpret their experience. At Shoreline, the imaginary was not limited

to what guests saw, it was also embedded in how they were addressed, included, and guided. This makes imaginaries impactful, and/or strategic, not just to pre-arrival communication but to the broader system of curated belonging and the imaginary cycle that this thesis seeks to describe.

2.6 The Touristic Borderzone, and the Role of Similarities

Simoni's work on the touristic borderzone (2008, 2019, 2020) offers a conceptual basis for analyzing how host-guest relationships emerge within informally organized, emotionally charged encounters. Drawing from Bruner (1999), Simoni describes the borderzone as a "performative space within, which tourists and locals meet," and a site for "the invention of culture on a massive scale," defined by dominant scripts and historical power relations (as cited in Simoni 2020, p. 12). Simoni (2019) argues, "the touristic borderzone draws our attention to the continuous invention and reinvention of selves and cultures that tourism potentiates and, I would add, of human relationships and how we imagine them" (p. 113). What makes Simoni's (2019) contribution especially relevant to this thesis is his focus on the emotional and relational texture of these encounters. The borderzone is not just a meeting point, but a creative and uncertain space where relationships are improvised and negotiated (pp. 113-114). Simoni (2019) also draws attention to how even temporary interactions can bring feelings of inclusion or exclusion into view. "Fleeting interactions (with tourists) allow different expressions of self, and hence different experiences of belonging or exclusion, to come to the fore" (p. 113). These are not minor emotional moments, they shape how people feel seen, valued, or misaligned.

At Shoreline, the borderzone was not limited to on-site encounters. Rather, it extended into pre-arrival messaging, visual signs, Instagram stories, and the tone of host communication. Simoni (2017) helps contextualize this by noting that "Encounters between hosts and guests may appear as only the tip of the iceberg, as one visible outcome of a much wider (and often less visible) network of practices, narratives, and infrastructures that make such an encounter possible in the first place" (p. 618). In this sense, Shoreline's continuous pre-arrival communication messages (Instagram and WhatsApp), online tone, and pre-selection criteria can all be understood as components of a carefully arranged borderzone, one that begins long before physical arrival and more often than not through digital channels expanding the borderzones reach. What distinguishes my use of the borderzone from Simoni is not only its pre-arrival digital reach, but its relational arrangement. At Shoreline, the hosts were not local in the traditional sense, but long-term foreign

residents who took on the role of emotional and social gatekeepers. Their presence, tone, and filtering practices shaped who felt invited, and how belonging could be experienced even before arrival.

Simoni (2017) also draws attention to how host-guest roles are not fixed, but “constantly readjusted and redefined” (p. 621). However, these shifts are rarely textbook, “In spite of his explanations, these positional shifts were most often far from being smooth, straightforward, or long lasting” (Simoni & McCabe 2008, p. 9). This aligns with my field observations at Shoreline, where early impressions, Instagram aesthetics, and message tone shaped how participants were perceived, and whether they felt they belonged. Simoni’s (2017) point that “hospitality, whether it takes place in a private house or in a hotel, carries expectations as to how hosts and guests should behave” (p. 618) reinforces the idea that emotional performance was not optional but often silently expected.

To deepen this analysis, Neville and Reicher’s (2011) work on shared identity and emotional connection helps explain why some guests felt instantly included while others struggled. In their crowd studies, participants described moments where emotional alignment and shared purpose created “a sense of connectedness or intimacy, and recognition such that one’s presence in the crowd was noted and valued by others” (p. 392). And when guests felt similar to those around them, “social barriers with strangers” seemed to dissolve, allowing them to feel “connected to, and recognised by, other group members” (p. 387). Neville and Reicher (2011) also point out that emotional experience is amplified and validated by others who share one’s identity, “A reciprocal relationship where one’s emotional excitation validated and augmented that of fellow group members” emerged in moments of perceived solidarity (p. 385). In contrast, participants who did not perceive shared identity described isolation as Neville and Reicher state, “Participants without shared identity reported experiencing isolation and detachment” (p. 394).

Together, Simoni and Neville & Reicher offer two intersecting lenses: one focusing on the improvised, communicative nature of host-guest interaction, the other showing how similarity shapes emotional access. Both stress that inclusion is not just about being physically present, but about feeling emotionally accessible and connected to others. Considering this, curated belonging emerges not just within the borderzone, but by means of it, formed by shared expectations, emotional fit, and silent codes about who belongs or not.

3 Field Site

In this chapter, I introduce the field site of my research, Boracay Island in the Philippines, more specifically, the spaces occupied by Shoreline Kitesurfing Center, inclusive of its beach treehouse, acting as the kitesurfing launch and hang out place on Bulabog Beach, and their primary accommodations, “the residence,” where select guests and kitesurfing instructors reside during their stays. Through field-based observation and personal integration into this community, I came to understand these spaces not only as physical locations, but as fluid environments shaped by communication, informal hierarchies, and selective inclusion.

While Boracay Island is known globally for its beauty and nightlife (MyRanngo, 2023), I was most struck by the contrast between the two sides of the island and their opposing beaches (White beach and Bulabog). During my study, I stayed directly on White Beach, Boracay’s most famous, and perhaps the most famous in the Philippines. The beach there was chaotic and loud, overflowing with tourists of all kinds. Locals lined the shore selling merchandise, food, massages, and activities. This beach felt performative, even aggressive in its pursuit of tourists. As I walked along the makeshift paths, I often felt like a commodity being targeted. On several occasions, after making my way through the vendors selling trinkets, boat tours, and hair braiding, I would make notes that described the scene as a giant flea market, making sure I held on tight to my bag and to keep my head down in order to not invite unwanted solicitation.

On the other side of the island, fifteen minutes away, lay Bulabog Beach, where the atmosphere was the exact opposite. The vendors were gone, and there were no kids or families or “touristy” looking people on the beach. Here, the craziness of White Beach was replaced by extreme winds, kitesurfers ripping across the lagoon with their giant kites adding colour to the sky, and their friends and kite help cheering them on from the shore. The people here weren’t asking for my attention, they were too busy moving with a purpose, tuning their gear, and reading the wind. It was less transactional, and more curious. This early contrast informed much of my understanding of the island, not just as a tourism site, but as a divided space, where different kinds of visitors were sorted, accommodated, or subtly filtered out. Rather than treating Shoreline as a stand-alone destination, I position it within Boracay’s broader tourism terrain, somewhere between

commercialized spectacle and selectively shaped community. These spaces were not beautiful, neutral backdrops, but active contributors to the experiences people had.

3.1 Boracay as a Tourism Destination

I conducted my primary fieldwork in January and February 2024, during both the peak of the kitesurfing season and Chinese New Year. At the time, the island was packed with international tourists drawn to its beaches, nightlife, and global reputation as a tropical escape. Included within this transient population was a small group of kitesurfers from around the world taking advantage of what seasoned kitesurfers described as a renowned kitesurfing destination in Southeast Asia, if not the world. Boracay Island was ranked the 10th best island in the world by Travel + Leisure in 2023, based on evaluations of natural beauty, activities, hospitality, and overall experience. Over 165,000 readers contributed to this accolade, reinforcing the island's position in the global imagination as both idyllic and accessible (MyRanngo, 2023). Yet beyond these surface evaluations lied a more complicated picture. During my fieldwork, what stood out was not the scenery but the contrast between Boracay's primary destinations, as it was divided into distinct atmospheres, one for spectacle, another for sport; one designed for passive enjoyment, and the other for active pursuit.

In general, Boracay's development as a tourist destination mirrors trends found in broader tourism research. As Burns (2024) explains, a systems approach reveals how tourism is shaped by, and contributes to, broader political, environmental, and social change (pp. 5-6). In the 1970s, the island was largely unknown, attracting mostly backpackers and adventurers. By the 1990s, that had changed, as rapid tourist development had transformed it into a major commercial hub, bringing challenges, such as environmental degradation, overcrowding, and the expansion of mass tourism infrastructure. In response to these issues, the Philippine government closed the island to tourism in 2018 for six months in order to implement environmental regulations and introduce sustainable tourism policies (EHL Hospitality Insights, 2023). This moment of pause mirrors what Butler's (1980) Tourism Area Life Cycle model describes as a stage of restructuring, when destinations either adapt to preserve themselves or decline under the weight of overdevelopment (pp. 9-11). For Boracay, after a brief pause of tourists, was imagined as having a chance to be reborn, which only time will tell.

For Eli, Shoreline's founder, these 2018 changes had direct consequences. He described how the shift towards a less hedonistic, yet more commercialized, driven by high volume and short-term stays pushed him to rethink the kind of guests he wanted to attract. "People used to come for the beach, parties, and the nightlife. They had lots of expendable income, and they would like to relax and kitesurf during the day," he told me. "Now, since the island was cleaned up, more family-friendly, and over-commercialized, along with the nightlife being toned down, people with extra money tend to go to other locations" (Interview, February 13, 2024). His frustration was not only about aesthetics or new regulations, but about how he had to adapt his once-lucrative business of thrill-seeking tourists who kite surfed by day and partied at night into a new kind of tourism, one which now relied on community building and personal wellbeing goals. From here, Shoreline's model began to rely on filtering guests more carefully, selecting for those who aligned with its informal norms of openness, curiosity, and emotional presence. Yet this shift also introduced new contradictions. The desire to maintain community and depth meant relying on careful social curation, welcoming those who fit, and quietly distancing those who didn't. Shoreline's appeal, like that of other "alternative" tourism projects, now rested on emotional connection and experiences of personal growth, but its setup still reproduced many of the familiar hierarchies of global mobility. The space may have offered a kind of intimacy, but it was also shaped by exclusion, access, and idealized authenticity. Boracay, in this sense, wasn't just a setting, it was a symbol. It represented the tensions between mass appeal and personal meaning, with Shoreline trying to position itself within those tensions, holding space for something slower, softer, and more relational, but still needing to operate within a tourism system that was anything but neutral.

3.2 Bulabog Beach and the Kitesurfing Community

The first time I arrived at Bulabog Beach, I immediately felt the shift from the over crowdedness at White Beach to a seclusion and intimacy immediately. Despite only being a 15-minute walk apart, it felt like a different island. The beach itself was much smaller than White Beach's 4.2 km length. There were no vendors, no scripted greetings, no families, and no one swimming in the water. The wind was loud and strong, pushing 25-30 knots regularly. The beach was almost empty except for the kitesurfers and the people who looked like they knew exactly why they were there. It didn't feel like a destination; it felt like a place with purpose. I remember recording a voice note on my first day, saying, "The wind is wild. It's so loud and strong I can't even hear myself think."

Bulabog's strong winds and shallow lagoon, protected by a 600-meter reef that breaks the sea's waves, made this spot uniquely suited for kitesurfing, while excluding other forms of tourism, such as casual swimming or sunbathing. Instead of being designed for mass enjoyment, Bulabog functions as a niche area, open only to those who can tame the wind, negotiate the culture, and participate in the sport. There was no need to explain why you were there, your ease with the environment spoke for you. That first walk felt like entering a parallel island, one that wasn't trying to sell me anything, one where I could think for myself, and not be on the lookout for vendors or tourists to avoid.

As I spent more time at Shoreline and moved through the island with different groups, it became apparent that kitesurfers held a distinct kind of visibility, quiet, confident, and coded. Even though they made up a relatively small group numerically, they moved with ease and recognition. At certain bars and restaurants, kitesurfers were granted discounts, remembered by name, and treated like familiar fixtures rather than temporary visitors. Once I was immersed in their world, I felt I like I could recognize kitesurfers anywhere, by the way they carried themselves, tanned, relaxed, barefoot or in wetsuits. Their energy was casual, confident, and unspoken, they didn't need to be loud. There was a noticeable difference in posture, clothing, and even tone of voice. The touchy greetings, shared slang, and laid-back attire set kitesurfers apart from other visitors, who often appeared more formally dressed or visibly unfamiliar with the beach culture. This separation wasn't only stylistic; it reflected a subtle but real hierarchy where it felt as if the kitesurfers were at ease moving with insider status.

From the beginning, and increasingly difficult to ignore, was the ethnic makeup of the kitesurfer communities I was involved with, more specifically, the absence of Filipinos in the water teaching or kitesurfing. Most instructors that I met were European, South and North American, or Israeli. The Filipinos I met along the beach were almost always staff, launching kites, preparing gear, managing bookings, or building infrastructure. Their labor kept the beach running, but they were rarely among those taking part. When I asked Leo, a South American and one of the top kitesurfers on the island about this during our interview, he paused. "Yeah, It shocked me too. I only know one Filipino kitesurfing teacher on the entire beach" (Interview, January 24, 2024). In a space so associated with freedom, flow, and emotional change, that absence became difficult to ignore and

had me think about why this might be the case, especially given that when I began my fieldwork with scuba divers, the vast majority (if not all) of the instructors I met were Filipino.

While kitesurfing at Shoreline was portrayed as a personal journey, there were barriers of entry which I observed and were reflected in Shoreline's guest selection, which seemed to rely on a set of unspoken preconditions, money, time, foreign access to mobility, and physical fitness. For many Filipinos, this version of freedom remained out of reach. I don't think Shoreline created that gap, but it operated within it, reinforcing tourism's familiar imbalance between experience and labor. The image of kitesurfing as liberating and emotionally impactful is predominant to Shoreline's appeal and was largely reserved for foreign bodies. While a few Filipinos were learning to kite at Shoreline, they were from Manila's upper class, not locals from Boracay Island. The Boracay locals remained part of the setting, with their labor making the experiences possible, but not granting them access to the experiences themselves. These observations weren't just about who gets to access a sport, but about how leisure itself can reproduce inequality, even in spaces that seem informal, inclusive, or emotionally open. In this way, Shoreline was not separate from global tourism patterns, it was shaped by them.

3.3 The Shoreline Residence, Beach Treehouse, and Management Team

The Shoreline residence is a four-story house perched on a hill in the middle of Boracay Island, designed to accommodate instructors, students, and management. Located a 10-minute walk from Bulabog Beach, it was repurposed and designed by Eli to promote communal interaction and personal retreat. When I first arrived, the 300-step climb to the house was exhausting, but at the top I was greeted by the sight of the infinity pool, water fountains, and a breathtaking view of Boracay Island. The house features multiple common spaces, including a third-floor open-concept kitchen with a large dining area, a movie screen, and two separate large couch areas. On the first floor, along with the infinity pool, were two outdoor cabanas with lounging couches and two indoor air-conditioned bedrooms, one being a private room and the other a shared four-person bedroom with a bathroom. When speaking with Eli about the design and layout of the residence, he explained that over 50 percent of the materials used in the building were recycled or repurposed from the island. He described how the couches throughout the house were inspired by his travels, particularly the freedom and connection he associated with early kitesurfing adventures after

moving out of his parents' home as a teenager, and couch-surfing for many years thereafter. Eli's goal was to offer guests the same sense of ease and welcome he had experienced abroad, transforming the residence into a space where relationships could flourish and personal growth could happen naturally.

In the residence there are six bedrooms in total, two four-person shared dorm-style bedrooms, two private ones, and one bedroom each for Eli and Rafi (the house manager and yoga instructor). Oversized couches appear on every floor, often doubling as extra beds when the house was full. The fourth floor includes a 360-degree sightline of the island, and is a utility space used for sunset gatherings, dance parties, exercise, and yoga. This physical and symbolic seclusion created a sense of sanctuary, while also setting apart those who lived there as a distinct group within the broader Shoreline community. The more time I spent at the residence, the more I came to see it not just as a place to stay but as a kind of haven where people built relationships and created memories. The atmosphere held the traces of shared stories, laughter, and late-night conversations. I saw people gather, share meals, and talk for hours as if time didn't matter. Unfortunately, I also witnessed moments when the house's layout or energy created distance. Privacy sometimes became isolation, and shared spaces didn't always translate into shared experiences. One night in particular I remember Lukas and I ended up on a second-floor couch during an exclusive party on the upper floors, which he hadn't been invited to. We talked for hours, surrounded by the sounds of barking dogs, rustling palms, and distant roosters. Even though he had been excluded, the night didn't feel like the typical transience of being a hotel guest. It felt like we were part of something quieter, something real. We were still connected, not necessarily to the party, but to the place itself, which seemed to hold us in a kind of listening stillness.

Largely, the residence reflected both the openness of shared living and the exclusivity of belonging to a select group, which created subtle boundaries for those not staying in the house. These boundaries seemed to shape social patterns, both within the residence and in shared spaces like the beach treehouse or group outings around the island, where already-integrated guests often influenced the tone, pace, and accessibility of group life. These interactions created quiet hierarchies that persisted across the Shoreline experience, as not all kitesurfing students were able to stay in the residence and had to find accommodations elsewhere. The house's elevation, seclusion, and aesthetics also raised questions about how space, comfort, and belonging are

designed and distributed in tourism settings shaped by global mobility. As a Western researcher and guest, I benefited from this environment, but I was also aware of how its aesthetic of authenticity and freedom echoed older colonial travel imaginaries, the house on the hill above the locals, the repurposed materials, the relaxed atmosphere available only to those with the privilege to linger. These tensions between inclusion and exclusion, comfort and control, continued to shape the experiences of guests and instructors, as I will discuss further in the chapters that follow.

The beach treehouse is Shoreline's kitesurfing headquarters and sits at the southern end of Bulabog Beach, about 200 meters removed from the cluster, or "hub," of other kite schools near the main beach road. The ground floor is used for gear storage and rental, administration, kite launching, and pre-lesson preparation. Guests and instructors float in and out, barefoot and sun-warmed, wet and ready to jump in and out of the water at any time. The second floor serves as a community hangout and feels like an open-air living room, with cabana-covered beds, overhanging hammocks, mismatched furniture, lounge couches, and bar-height tables facing the beach. There's a small kitchen serving local, healthy dishes, a full-service coffee bar, and workspaces with Wi-Fi and power outlets tucked behind plants. The entire structure wraps around a fallen tree, saved after a typhoon and repurposed by Eli as both anchor and aesthetic. "It's about using what's already here, and making it feel like it always belonged" (Interview, February 13, 2024). The space feels balanced, part jungle, part driftwood. Its aura struck me immediately, creating a sense of separation from the louder kitesurfing centre down the beach. The treehouse felt quieter and more intimate, a place where visitors could slow down and blend into their surroundings. Unlike White Beach, where stimulation was constant and commercial interaction unavoidable, the treehouse encouraged absorption into stillness.

Its physical layout mirrored its social feel, a bit hidden and a bit earned. The people who spent their full days here, chatting, stretching, working on laptops, were almost always from the residence, kite teachers or kitesurfers and learners already embedded in the group. While outsiders were welcome and some made their way in each day, many seemed to struggle with the pace and tone the space promoted. For the regulars and new kite students, it was designed for calmness, a safe and familiar zone that mirrored the residence's atmosphere. Even the music, slow tiki or ambient electronic, seemed chosen to keep the energy at half-speed. Inside, the hammocks and low tables created a social zone without pressure. People drifted in and out, reading, talking, and

occasionally working. The treehouse encouraged a kind of suspension of time, part retreat, part soft subtle design. Guests stayed for hours without feeling like they were doing nothing which was part of Eli's goal, to provide all the amenities guests needed so they wouldn't feel compelled to leave. It offered space for reflection, but it also shaped how people moved, lingered, and consumed, suggesting a balance between care and commercial logic. Those from the residence moved through the treehouse with comfort. They knew the best seats, the quiet corners, and how to ask for off-menu items. Their familiarity wasn't showy, but it mattered. For new guests or late-season arrivals, the treehouse could feel more like a stage than a shared zone. You had to know when to join a conversation, when to hang back as the vibe was inviting, but not neutral. Belonging here required more than interest; it required fluency in a particular tone, pace, and way of being, but most importantly, you needed to kitesurf. It amplified the group's chemistry, joy when things clicked, awkwardness when they didn't. On windy afternoons, the whole place pulsed with afterglow. Kitesurfers returned barefoot and sun-stung, flushed with adrenaline, talking over one another, bursting with shared energy.

But like the residence, the treehouse reflected the shape of the group inside it. Ease wasn't only spatial, it was social with those outside the loop often lingered at the edge, unsure when, or if, they were fully part of it. Some days it felt like a beach dream and other days, like a closed circle. The treehouse became a symbol of what Shoreline offered, a curated calm, an aesthetic of ease, but like all symbols, it was only fully accessible to those already welcomed in with Eli telling me, "If you can stay here all day and not get bored, it means you're part of it." That was the test, could you belong in stillness? The treehouse held both inclusion and exclusion in quiet suspension. It invited presence, but not without history. It reflected the emotional choreography of Shoreline itself. It was one of the most emotionally charged spaces in the entire field site, not because of what was said, but because of how it felt to be there.

Shoreline's current design was founded by Eli, an Israeli professional kitesurfer and instructor who first came to Boracay in 2016. At the time, Shoreline existed as a basic windsurfing operation, run by a long-time expat on a small patch of beachfront. After a destructive typhoon damaged the original infrastructure, Eli purchased the business license and began rebuilding. Drawing on his global kitesurfing experience and background in architecture, he transformed it from a modest surf school into a selective guesthouse and semi-intentional community, centered around emotional

connection, openness, and personal growth. Although Eli lives on-site in the residence and remains closely involved, the project also has an on-site manager. Rafi, originally from Israel as well and living abroad for more than five years, he first arrived as a guest after contacting Eli about kitesurfing during the 2023 season. After bonding over shared values of openness and slow living, he became involved in administrative tasks, promotion, teaching kitesurfing, and leading yoga sessions. While Shoreline relies on Filipino labor for construction, logistics, and daily upkeep, the social and conceptual design of Shoreline reflects Eli's background and global mobility with his outsider status shaping the project from the beginning as it was imagined not as a business rooted only in local culture, but as a selectively open space based on their personal values, travel histories, and ideas of comfort and style. This positioning influences how Shoreline relates to both the Boracay community and global tourism.

My decision to focus exclusively on Shoreline did not come from advanced planning, but from a specific fieldwork moment. After several disheartening attempts to study scuba diving instructors, I found myself increasingly drawn to the kitesurfing scene on Bulabog Beach. When I was introduced to Shoreline by Isabel, a friend of a friend who was staying there, everything shifted. Within hours, I had met the community, arranged interviews, and was welcomed as "the researcher." That kind of access, social, emotional, and logistical, felt rare. Shoreline offered not only a visually and structurally distinct environment, but one shaped by ongoing, intentional communication between hosts and guests. Unlike other kite schools, which functioned mainly as businesses, Shoreline operated more like a separate social world. Given the time constraints of my fieldwork and the level of access Shoreline enabled, I chose not to split my focus across multiple kite school sites. For an anthropologist interested in communication, belonging, and wellness, it was a near-perfect case, Shoreline became not just a site of observation, but the ground on which my questions began to take shape.

4 Research Question

This thesis examines how communication, particularly host-initiated messaging and interaction shapes guest experiences at Shoreline Kitesurfing Center. Rather than treating tourism as a purely individual pursuit of leisure or self-development, I conceptualize it as a socially fashioned and emotionally charged experience, where belonging and personal change are influenced by the ways people communicate before and during their stay.

My research question guiding this study is: **How does pre-arrival and on-site host communication at Shoreline Kitesurfing Center shape experiences of wellness, personal growth, and belonging, in a short-term tourism setting?**

Based on fieldwork, I address this question with a working hypothesis that intentional host communication shapes guests' emotional readiness, sense of inclusion, and interpretation of personal change. Drawing on Simoni's work on touristic borderzones, Salazar and Graburn's theory of tourism imaginaries, and Hartwell's model of eudaimonic wellness, I investigate how emotional expectations are guided before arrival, and interpreted through informal interaction on site. From this foundation, I developed the concept of curated belonging (discussed further in my methods chapter) to describe how Shorelines hosts shape emotional alignment and group inclusion using communication, tone-setting, selectivity, and interpersonal care.

To address my research question, I approached the material using two connected lines of analysis.

1. Emotional priming before arrival

How do early host-initiated communications shape guests' expectations of connection, inclusion, and personal change? This line of inquiry focuses on pre-arrival messaging and interactions through platforms like Instagram, WhatsApp and E-mail which were part of my participants accounts. It examines the ways tone, timing, and responsiveness act as a filtering mechanism and invite and create emotional investment before any physical encounter. I explore how guests come

to imagine belonging by way of subtle signals, personalized interaction, and the feeling of being chosen.

2. Belonging and Communication On-site

How is group belonging sustained, or at times disrupted in everyday social interactions during the stay? This section explores both formal and informal communication practices at Shoreline, such as shared meals, body language, digital group chats, and the unspoken rules that shape participation. It also addresses moments of emotional mismatch or exclusion, especially when guests' expectations collide with on-site realities.

Adding to this, my thesis also reflects on what happens after guests leave Boracay, including how connection and growth are carried forward, or fade with memory, continued messaging, and post-departure reflection. In addition, I touch on financial matters which were often left unspoken, yet they influenced who could arrive, who could stay, and who could return. Rounding out the empirical chapters I focus on a final set of ethnographic cases tracing more critical perspectives, where inclusion falters, emotional pressure builds, and curated belonging breaks down. These examples highlight not only the power of communication, but also its limits.

5 Methodological Approach

“Ethnography is a whole-body experience” (Madden, 2017, p. 30), and for me, that experience unfolded in a community built around wind, water, and a carefully structured sense of belonging. Immersing myself within the kitesurfing culture at Shoreline Kitesurfing Center provided a rare opportunity to study a space where bonds are shaped not only by shared activities, but by emotion, attention, and informal hierarchy. I moved from observer to participant by gradually adapting my field strategy, learning when to engage, when to step back, and how to build trust without disrupting the group dynamics.

In this chapter I outline the tools I used during my fieldwork and analysis, why I chose them, what they revealed, emotional tone, communication, and patterns of inclusion. My method combined participant observation, active participation, and a range of interviewing techniques, both formal and informal. Rather than working from a fixed hypothesis, I followed what Malinowski (1922) and Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) describe as “foreshadowed problems.” This strategy encouraged responsiveness to the setting itself, allowing questions to emerge not in advance, but through the unfolding relationships, tensions, and affective moments that marked my stay (as cited in Edwards, 2020, p. 94). I remained attentive to informal communication, social codes, and group dynamics, especially where these intersected with my dual role as guest and researcher.

I conducted fieldwork during two intensive periods in early 2024 (January 14 - 27 and February 9 - 14), engaging with Boracay’s seasonal kitesurfing community. Participants ranged from long-term residents, such as instructors and returning guests, to short-term visitors exploring kitesurfing for the first time. This range of participants allowed me to examine how belonging, emotional attachment, and personal growth were experienced differently depending on time spent, social integration, and host interaction. Including both main and peripheral figures helped me observe how roles were negotiated and how inclusion and exclusion were in play in ways that were not always explicit.

In the sections that follow, I detail my participant observation, active participation, interview strategies, data collection practices, reflexivity in practice, and ethical considerations. These

methodological choices lay the groundwork for the analysis in the next chapter, where I turn more directly to the question of how communication framed the conditions for belonging and personal wellbeing at Shoreline.

5.1 Participant Observation

This section describes how I utilized participant observation, the backbone of my fieldwork, balancing active participation with moments of intentional distance. I engaged with the field through two overlapping modes: watching from the margins as a newcomer and, increasingly, participating from within (Johnson et al., 2006). Initially, I planned to observe the group from a distance before transitioning into more immersive role. However, that intention shifted earlier than expected when I was introduced to the community by my primary gatekeeper Isabel, whom I connected with after meeting her mother on a flight from Manila to Cebu two weeks earlier. Isabel and I began chatting online the week before my arrival in Boracay and we finally met in person on January 17th, when we had coffee, and wandered the island together before arriving at Shoreline's beach treehouse and kitesurfing area. There, she introduced me to her best friend Joy, and to Leo and Rafi, the main kitesurfing teacher and Shorelines manager. Realizing the access this introduction provided, I quickly adapted and I set aside my plan for a slower transition and signed up for kitesurfing lessons the same day. Isabel's early endorsement helped a lot; it gave me a one-time pass legitimizing my presence before I had to earn it myself. That initial positioning mattered, especially with such a short field-site timeline. It smoothed over awkward introductions and allowed me to begin from a place of tentative trust. Being aware of my quick insider access I later made an effort to not abandon detached observations altogether and I dedicated moments to observe how people behaved when they weren't directly interacting with me. This balance between immersion and detachment is a core principle of ethnographic fieldwork (Johnson et al., 2006; Shah, 2017). Shah (2017) writes, participant observation is not just a method but "a form of production of knowledge through being and action; it is praxis." (p. 49). That idea stayed with me and became especially relevant in my tourism setting, where roles were always shifting.

Considering Frohlick and Harrison's (2008) point that tourism ethnographers must remain aware of how observations unfold in environments structured around consumption (p. 5). I suspected that I could subtly influence how others acted, spoke, or positioned themselves socially. When not

actively participating in lessons or socializing, I discreetly took notes with a small scratch pad or used the voice memos app on my phone trying to achieve anonymity. However, people knew I was a researcher, and I sometimes wondered how that awareness shaped their behavior toward me as I remained open about my role yet also tried not to appear too distant. In addition, I followed Shah's (2017) four core "centers" of participant observation, these being long-term engagement, revealing social relations, holism, and the balance between intimacy and estrangement (p. 47). Unfortunately, the length of time was something I lacked, as my schedule didn't allow for sustained presence, and I recognize this as one of the most visible limitations of my fieldwork. Certain developments, especially seasonal shifts or long-term tensions may have passed beneath my radar. Still, the speed with which I was integrated allowed me to explore the other three centers in more depth. I built enough trust to support formal interviews and observed how relationships were formed, tested, and sustained in short timeframes. The balance between intimacy and distance became not just methodological, but personal. By joining daily lessons and participating in communal routines, I was able to witness and experience the emotional flow of Shoreline life, with these early encounters helping me shape what would become a main concern of my thesis: how informal and intentional host-guest communication helped instigate and sustain a holiday experience where guests feel a strong sense of belonging and emotional openness promoting a safe environment for personal growth and wellbeing to evolve if desired.

5.2 Active Participation

If participant observation positioned me at the edge of the group, active participation brought me into its center. From the outset, I had planned to transition into a more participatory role, anticipating that this method would enable deeper integration and more layered data collection. With limited time on site, I moved quickly into active participation, recognizing it as the most effective way to become embedded in the group. Thanks to Isabel's introduction, this shift unfolded more smoothly than expected, saving time but limiting opportunities for extended peripheral observation. This method was not just a practical adjustment; it was a strategic necessity. At Shoreline, trust and access were closely tied to emotional and physical presence, described by multiple participants as "energy" or "vibe", along with "getting into the water and kitesurfing" which was mandatory for inclusion and brought me into straight into the community (Various field notes, January-February 2024). This enabled me to gain trust and acceptance

quickly, opening up space for more honest conversations with participants. Additionally, it granted me access to notable social gatherings and private areas, such as the residence and closed-group events (pizza night, sunset dance parties), which were necessary for understanding the community's internal dynamics. Adler and Adler (1987) describe a natural progression in ethnographic fieldwork, from peripheral to active and complete membership rolls (as cited in Johnson, 2006). While this progression may unfold organically over time, I argue that in short-term research, some steps must be compressed. For example, on my second day at the site, I began taking kitesurfing lessons with Aria, a principal figure in the group which positioned me not just as an observer, but as an active participant. As Ingold (2017) writes, "To practice anthropology means to study with people, not to make studies of them just as we might study with our teachers at the university" (p. 23).

This immersive stance facilitated access, but it also introduced emotional and ethical tensions. I often found myself enjoying the experience alongside guests, only to question afterward how fully I had been analyzing the moment. Kite lessons with Aria helped me build trust, but they also blurred the line between observation and participation. To many in the group, including Claire, getting in the water signaled that I wasn't just writing about kitesurfing, I was living it. That commitment, while not part of my original plan, accelerated my integration into the group's inner circle. An unexpected benefit of this approach was the opportunity to be open about my research intentions. I found that early disclosure helped build trust and encouraged curiosity. Without that transparency, I might have been seen as an outsider, or worse, as someone suspicious or out of place. Few non-kitesurfers lingered at the beach treehouse without social ties, and identifying myself as a researcher gave me a defined role in the group. As I remarked in a voice memo on January 19, simply explaining what I was doing often sparked conversations that might not otherwise have happened.

Still, active participation came with trade-offs. I frequently felt the pull between experiencing and documenting, especially during fast-moving, emotional situations. Balancing my role as a participant with the responsibility of observation was not always easy. I managed this by using voice memos to document events discreetly, especially when pulling out a notebook would have felt invasive. At house parties or communal dinners, visible note taking would have broken the social flow, instead, I often excused myself when I needed to quietly record important impressions,

ensuring that I could preserve field notes without disrupting rapport. My participation also extended beyond organized activities into the mundane, everyday moments as well, walking to the beach, sharing meals, listening to music, or shopping for groceries made up a substantial part of my research. These informal routines offered insights into the social and emotional patterns of the group. They also helped build deeper trust, as I was no longer positioned as someone “studying them,” but as someone who simply belonged there, at least temporarily. Fine (1993) writes, “To observe is not, in itself, to objectify. It is to notice what people are saying and doing, to watch and listen, and to respond in your own practice” (p. 280). This principle helped guide me through the limitations of immersion. While active participation inevitably involved moments of entanglement or distraction, it also allowed me to witness how belonging was shaped through shared experience, emotional investment, and unspoken rules of access.

5.3 Interviews

Here, I outline my interview strategies, both formal and informal. I explain how tone, emotional trust, and small acts of positioning helped build rapport and shaped the stories participants shared. A primary part of my initial strategy when arriving on-site was to have the kitesurfers “want” to be involved in my project and agree to formal semi-structured interviews, rather than me being seen as a disturbance or someone to avoid. To do this, I purposefully played it cool and observed the group’s behaviors and hierarchy before making any direct approaches. An example of this strategy took place during my first visit to the field site, when I noticed Irina, who seemed like a leader and somewhat suspicious. Intentionally, I did not engage with her for the first few days thereafter, not even making eye contact. Meanwhile, I had conversations with virtually everyone else, creating a sense of curiosity and social contrast. On day four, as I was speaking with my kitesurfing teacher Aria in the café area of the beach treehouse, Irina suddenly appeared and stood directly between the two of us, only 30 cm away. She asked Aria a question, but it seemed like she was just making her presence known. Recognizing my opportunity, I looked her straight in the eyes and said, “Hey, I’m David, we haven’t met yet.” To my surprise, she responded warmly, putting her arm around me, maintaining eye contact, and smiling as she said, “I know who you are, you’re the anthropologist, and I’m going to pick your brain later,” and then she walked away. It wasn’t until the following week, during a formal interview with her, that she asked me about my strategy for going from a total stranger to having a one-on-one interview with her. Her question

made me reflect on the way I had used communication to build intrigue and awareness, and how that strategy had helped me transition from outsider to trusted insider.

The formal interviews were indispensable within my ethnographic approach, especially for accessing personal narratives and inner reflections (Chase, 2005, p. 652). These interviews were set up to be semi-structured, but they often evolved into open-ended conversations. By preparing questions in advance, I avoided a robotic tone and allowed the interviews to flow naturally. Following Madden's (2017) advice that "one does not want to provide a participant with the possibility of only a yes/no answer or a more/less option" (p. 70), I used a range of open-ended prompts that produced rich, detailed responses. Conversations often spanned participants' childhoods, emotional experiences, and motivations for joining the kitesurfing community.

I purposefully chose interviewees carefully, ensuring a mix that included instructors, long and short-term guests, and management. I wanted to capture a broad spectrum of roles and relationships within the community. Surprisingly, the use of two-person interviews such as those with Joy and Selin, or Eli and Rafi proved more effective than I anticipated. Participants often built on each other's responses, reminded one another of overlooked details, and appeared more relaxed with a friend present. These sessions were longer and livelier, creating natural breaks and shifting tones that encouraged openness. For instance, Joy and Selin's joint interview lasted two and a half hours.

In addition, I also had to consider who to interview and in what order, to capitalize and generate interest among potential interviewees and set the tone for what to expect. Considering this I intentionally chose Joy and Selin as my first interviewees. Their energy and social standing helped create momentum, as their enthusiastic reaction to the interview circulated within the community the next day, leading others to accept my invitations, and even approaching me themselves. Another strategy I used was to lay the groundwork in advance by planting the idea of interviews several days before formally requesting them. By sharing my background in podcasting and talk-radio, and using conversational tone-setting I made the interviews seem easy, enjoyable, and low-risk.

The setup and takedown of formal interview locations was also strategic. Most took place in the four-person shared bedrooms at the residence. I ensured the space was cleaner and more organized when I left than when I arrived. I believe this subtle sign of respect mattered, as even small missteps could have shifted a participant's perception. Timing and location for formal interviews remained important throughout. One morning, I arrived at the residence around 11am ready for two 1.5-hour interviews only to find the property empty because strong winds had drawn everyone to the beach early. This experience reminded me of the importance of flexibility and awareness to participants' priorities, especially in a sport-structured environment. For this reason I started to schedule formal interviews between 4 and 7 p.m., after kitesurfing but before dinner or nightlife. This window helped ensure participants were both available and relaxed. It also encouraged post-interview discussions over dinner, which generated additional interest. Most of my interviews lasted around 90 minutes, which I found to be an ideal length of time for depth without fatigue. My goal in the formal interviews was to create a setting that felt immersive, similar to a relaxed podcast or radio show. I used a high-quality audio microphone at the center of a small table, sat across from the participant, and placed an iPhone on a tripod nearby to record body language and provide audio backup. This semi-professional setup surprised some participants and seemed to elevate the experience. Many commented on how it felt "real" or "legit," which helped them take the process seriously while still feeling at ease.

My informal interview strategies were equally deliberate. I focused on identifying the right people and choosing moments when they would be most open to talking. I found that persuading someone to participate felt similar to dating, where using open-ended questions that encouraged people to talk about themselves proved effective. This strategy helped participants feel valued and reversed the exchange as I wasn't now chasing them, they were now opting in. Another strategy I used was ending informal conversations before they felt complete. This often left people curious, increasing the likelihood of future interactions and it also sparked word-of-mouth discussions, which enhanced my visibility and credibility. I often said things to participants like, "I can't wait to hear more about that," or "Maybe we can talk more later," which hinted at future interaction without applying pressure. These small remarks helped create a shared momentum, where people felt their stories were both wanted and valued. Madden (2017) refers to this tactic as "expressing cultural ignorance," a way for researchers to invite explanation and narrative by prompting participants to

teach or guide them (p. 73). For me, it was also a way of practicing subtle invitation, giving people a reason to return, to speak again, and to feel seen in the process.

The following table summarizes the participants I formally interviewed, along with relevant metadata such as dates, data formats, and their use in empirical chapters. All participant names listed in this table are pseudonyms. Direct quotes used throughout the thesis are drawn from interviews, field notes, and digital messages (e.g., WhatsApp or voice messages), and are treated as personal communications. These are cited in-text with the date and source type (e.g., Interview, February 13, 2024). When multiple quotes from the same participant appear within a single passage, a consolidated citation is placed at the end of the paragraph for clarity and readability. Narrated scenes from my own field experience are reconstructed from memory and field notes. These are presented without in-text citation, as part of my participant observation.

Name	Role	Interview Date	Data Format	Empirical Chapters Used	Notes
Joy	Guest	Jan 23, 2024	Joint interview, field notes, text messages	Ch. 2	Joint interview with Selina. Discussed search for community and emotional safety. Remote worker, stayed longer than planned, returned after leaving. Best friend of Isabel. Returned to the Philippines after living in Australia. Remote worker. On site for 6 weeks, returned shortly after. Age 22-28.
Selina	Kite teacher	Jan 23, 2024	Joint interview, field notes	Ch. 2	Joint interview with Joy. Part of Turkish instructor group. Did not live at residence. Based in Boracay for seasonal work. Age 20-25.
Leo	Kite teacher	Jan 24, 2024	Interview, field notes	Ch. 2	Instructor and tour host. Military background. Close friend of Aria. High-level kitesurfer. Based in Boracay. Originally from Argentina. Age 22-28.
Claire	Guest	Jan 26, 2024	Interview, field notes	Ch. 1	Worked for Louis Vuitton. Returned to Greenyard after a one-night chance earlier visit. Contemplated leaving corporate life. Based in London. Returned to Greenyard after short earlier visit. Originally for 1 month, extended to 2. Age 22-28.
Irina	Guest	Jan 26, 2024, Mar 12, 2024	Interview, field notes, text messages	Ch. 1 & 2	Executive in global fashion. Met Greenyard in July 2023 for 2 days. Returned to Greenyard in Dec. for 10 weeks. Long-term WhatsApp contact. Broke up with boyfriend post-visit. Lives in Dubai. Age 40-45.
Lukas	Guest	Jan 25, 2024	Interview, field notes, text messages	Ch. 1 & 2	Musician. Came to escape winter and reinspire career. Left 3 weeks early. Had a girlfriend at home. Lives in Germany. Age 35-40.
Aria	Kite teacher	Feb 10, 2024	Interview, field notes, text/voice messages	Ch. 1 & 2	Recently broke up. Sought community. Stayed due to war in Israel. Viewed Boracay as affordable refuge. Israeli citizen, previously in Australia. Age 22-28.

Eli	Shoreline Owner	Feb 13, 2024	Joint interview, field notes, text/voice messages	Ch. 1 & 2	Greenyard owner. Hosts WhatsApp group. Emotional investment in guests. Girlfriend is a local lawyer. Israeli native has lived in California and the Philippines. Age 32-37.
Rafi	Manager/ Kite teacher	Feb 13, 2024	Joint interview, field notes	Ch. 1 & 2	Initially a guest, became manager. Stayed longer than planned. Interviewed with Eli. Originally from Israel, became long-term resident in Boracay. Based in Boracay. Age 25-30.
Isabel	Guest	Feb 29, 2024	Online interview, field notes, text/voice messages	Ch. 2	Leisure travel consultant. Wanted to try kitesurfing and expand travel experience. Best friend of Joy. Engaged. My introduction to the community. Age 28-33.
BJ	Guest	Jan 22 - May 16, 2024	Field notes, text/voice messages	Ch. 2	French guest. Financial company owner based in California. Stayed much longer than planned. Originally came due to weather change in Vietnam. Recently divorced. Age 33-38.

5.4 Data Collection

This section details my day-to-day data collection process, from field notes and voice memos to transcription routines. I discuss how emotional tone, pacing, and technological tools shaped the material I gathered. Ethnographic guides often advocate that researchers should integrate their lifeworlds into the study, presenting ethnography as a holistic and immersive scientific practice (Atkinson and Hammersley, 2007, pp. 3-4). I began my daily fieldwork routine at 8 a.m. by reviewing my notes over breakfast to reflect on previous data and outline my plan for the day. Around 10 a.m., I would walk the 20 minutes from my hotel on White Beach to Bulabog Beach, where the Shoreline Kite School was located. Once there, I spent five to six hours actively participating and observing, integrating myself into the kitesurfing community through informal conversations and direct interaction, then headed back to my hotel. These field interactions were recorded with real-time note taking and voice recordings to capture spontaneous observations and emotional shifts. Once I returned to my hotel, I would organize my materials and began transcribing both voice recordings and handwritten notes. Depending on the day, I either continued transcribing into the evening or returned to the residence for more observations (dinners, outings, etc.) and/or formal interviews. Most of my days ended with late-night reflections and transcription work, creating a rigorous but rewarding routine of field involvement and documentation.

For my field notes I relied heavily on voice memos (notes), spoken reflections recorded in real time, often within minutes of memorable field events. Using voice memos was not just a matter of preference, it was a strategic adaptation to the social environment. With my headphones in, I could appear to be making a phone call, which allowed me to discreetly record observations without interrupting the atmosphere. Visible note taking, especially during meals or social events, tended to shift the energy or make others self-conscious whereas voice memos allowed me to remain fully present while still collecting meaningful data. Each night after my field work, I would use my laptop, microphone, and a main notebook to transcribe the voice memos and highlight standout moments for later reference. I also kept a second notebook for tracking emerging themes and patterns that could inform later analysis.

Despite its value, voice notes presented some challenges. Transcription was time-consuming and at times frustrating, especially due to wind interference that often-distorted audio. To manage this, I used Otter.ai, an AI transcription tool that filtered background noise and achieved approximately 90 percent accuracy across more than 35 hours of voice memos, interviews, and narrated videos. This AI platform became indispensable for managing the volume and challenges of audio data, especially when single recordings often included layered material such as observational narration, commentary, and early analysis.

Often, I tried to maximize the value of each formal interview by recording voice memos immediately afterward, usually on my walk back to my hotel from the residence and interview site. These post-interview reflections allowed me to record environmental influences, emotional shifts, and interpersonal processes that might not have been evident in the recorded session. I also used these moments to reflect on how the interview format itself affected what was shared. One pattern I identified early was that participants tended to open up more deeply after 30 to 45 minutes. Early parts of interviews were often upbeat or surface-level, while later parts revealed fatigue, ambivalence, and emotional richness. Recognizing this helped me adjust my pacing, modify question order, and even reconfigure the seating layout to support greater comfort and emotional access from the start.

5.5 Reflexivity in Practice

I reflect here on how my shifting role shaped the data I could access. These reflections complicate assumptions about neutrality, detachment, and the notion of “authentic” experience (as defined below). From the start of my fieldwork at Shoreline, my position was never static. I moved between being a guest, a friend, a listener, and a researcher, sometimes all at once. This fluid positionality became both a strength and a complication at times, especially in a setting where belonging, openness, and emotional ease were being produced, negotiated, and interpreted. While I was welcomed into the community with warmth, I was also aware that my presence altered the atmosphere. As Frohlick and Harrison (2008) remind us, tourism ethnographers must be especially cautious in “contact zones” shaped for consumption and self-performance (p. 5). This awareness became a recurring trend throughout my fieldwork, especially during interviews, where I often wondered, were participants telling me their true story, or the version they felt matched the tone I had set? In retrospect I believe my role as “the anthropologist” influenced these exchanges. Some guests saw me as a neutral outsider, while others viewed me as someone already inside the group. On one occasion, Eli, the owner, walked in on my formal interview with Aria while giving a house tour to potential guests and used the moment as a kind of performance, telling them that there was “always something going on” at the house. At other moments, my status gave me access. Irina, for example, referred to me as “the anthropologist” before we’d even spoken. That label gave me legitimacy but also created expectations.

My own sense of belonging was also unstable. There were nights, such as the group pizza dinner, when I reflected in a voice note afterwards while walking home alone. I recorded thoughts on how that night I felt intensely included and emotionally secure. In that recording there’s a long pause before I begin speaking, followed by a quiet laugh as I say, “That was... intense.” I then trail off, only to regain my voice as I reflect on what it meant to feel like “one of them,” if only for an evening. This method of capturing field notes using voice recordings allowed me to preserve tone, hesitation, silence, and breath. These were not just details of speech, but signs of how emotionally involved I was and how much I was processing in real time.

Additionally, my own story wasn’t separate from the field, it was embedded in it. I often found myself emotionally drawn into the group, balancing the tensions between documentation and participation. There were times when I chose not to take notes, or not to record, because the

moment felt too intimate, or because my presence as a researcher felt too visible. As Hazel Lukass (2009) puts it, tourism ethnography often unfolds in “moments of being” heightened states of presence that reveal something emotionally charged (p. 17). These were the moments I came to recognize most directly in my voice notes, and they were also the moments that shaped my analysis later on. My shifting role between insider and observer became a method in itself, revealing how curated belonging operated not only for guests, but for me as well.

These reflections also shaped how I understood and used the concept of authenticity in this thesis. In this context, authenticity, refers to whether guest experiences and narratives arise in ways that feel genuine and self-directed to the guests themselves. Although all experiences are shaped by social and environmental influences, this concept acknowledges guests’ perception of their wellness and personal growth as personally meaningful, even when these may be shaped (consciously or unconsciously) by the host or my “researcher” presence. This interpretation allowed me to approach authenticity not as a fixed quality, but as something co-constructed, experienced, staged, and believed into being. Understandably, my positionality and emotional involvement also complicate common assumptions about the authenticity of my ethnographic experience. If belonging at Shoreline was selectively produced through tone, inclusion, and shared emotional similarities, then so too was my own sense of insight. As Salazar (2012) suggests, tourism experiences are shaped by shared imaginaries, visions of connection and self-development that guide what is seen as authentic (p. 865). In this sense, both host-curated and externally influenced imaginaries help produce the conditions for emotional meaning, not just reflect them.

5.6 Ethical Considerations

In this section I explain the ethical principles that guided my research. I address consent, privacy, and the dilemmas that arose in my emotionally intimate and socially embedded settings. For my project I followed the principles of the American Anthropological Association’s (AAA) ethics guide and the European Commission’s Research Ethics in Ethnography/Anthropology (Iphofen, 2023) to continually reflect on my position in the field and to guide how I applied ethical standards in practice. I relied on the AAA’s seven ethical criteria as reminders throughout my research: (1) do no harm, (2) be open and honest about your work, (3) obtain informed consent and necessary permissions, (4) weigh competing ethical obligations to collaborators and affected parties, (5)

make your results accessible, (6) protect and preserve your records, and (7) maintain respectful and ethical professional relationships. I focused particularly on points 1, 2, 3, 6, and 7.

Once on site I prioritized transparency and openness about my project from the onset, both for ethical reasons and to legitimize my presence in the field, which helped build trust among participants. I ensured that people felt informed and empowered to ask questions or raise concerns by openly communicating my research objectives and methods. Informed consent was obtained through an ongoing process that included both informal verbal understanding as well as formal video recorded confirmations of consent at the beginning of all formal interviews. I also reminded participants of their right to withdraw at any time, or request the removal of their data, and I assured them of confidentiality and anonymity. This was especially important given the intimacy of many interactions. Interviews often took place in shared bedrooms, emotional voice notes were recorded in communal spaces, and I was frequently perceived more as a fellow guest than as a distant researcher. These blurred boundaries created moments where emotional proximity conflicted with the ideal of formal research distance. To protect sensitive material, I used password-protected external hard drives and limited access to my data files to prevent potential breaches.

Apart from that, I evaluated the potential for harm and adjusted my behavior accordingly. For example, one participant invited me to visit his hometown after several personal conversations we'd had, which made me reflect on the ethics of over-integration. I realized that close involvement in the group could lead to misunderstandings or feelings of discomfort. In response, I scaled back some of my engagement while continuing to maintain the trust and rapport that had already been built.

Throughout the research process, I remained attentive to how participants positioned me. Many treated me as someone they could confide in. Recognizing this, I was careful not to guide or reshape narratives during interviews. I actively tried to avoid introducing my own interpretations and prioritized letting participants tell their stories in their own way. I also made frequent reflexive observations about my positionality, including how my presence, body language, or tone may have influenced conversations. These reflections helped me remain accountable to both the ethical obligations of fieldwork and the emotional well-being of my participants.

During the writing process, I used participants' real names in drafts to avoid confusion and maintain continuity with my field data. Before submission, I anonymized all names and altered identifying details such as, nationality, profession, and background when necessary. In cases where individuals were already visible in public forums, such as instructors featured on social media, I would modify their descriptions to maintain privacy while still preserving the coherence of their stories.

5.7 Limitations

I end this chapter by acknowledging the constraints and trade-offs of my fieldwork. I reflect on what may have been missed due to time, emotional proximity, and methodological choices. I conducted my fieldwork over two separate intensive periods, which restricted my ability to observe long-term social patterns and changes. This constraint may have limited my data collection, potentially affecting how I represented seasonal or extended interactions within the kitesurfing community. Active participation allowed me to engage immediately and immerse myself, but the absence of sustained, long-term peripheral observation meant I might have overlooked certain subtleties.

My positionality as a researcher, and having a different entry path into Shoreline also shaped what I could observe. I did not personally experience Shorelines pre-arrival communication, which was the primary part of how most guests were introduced. Instead, I entered the field directly, and later participated in post-departure communication, which gave me a distinct perspective on how connection is maintained beyond the physical site. This difference allowed me to observe the continuity of belonging, but also positioned me differently from other participants. The immersive and emotional nature of the setting also made it difficult to maintain consistent observational distance. There were moments I chose not to record or document out of respect for the social atmosphere, or because my own emotional state felt too involved. These absences are part of the data too; they reflect the limits of what can be ethically and meaningfully recorded in human research.

I also recognize that the same qualities that enabled access (emotional proximity, shared leisure, and social immersion) may have shaped what was being said, withheld, or brought forward by participants. The data I collected emerged from relationships that developed in real time,

sometimes unevenly, and were shaped by moments of trust, power, and impression management. These dynamics inevitably influenced both the stories I was told and the ones I was able to hear. My background in audio recording and in-depth radio interviewing may have led me to prioritize emotional tone and storytelling over systematic comparison, which added depth but introduced its own blind spots.

In addition, I had originally hoped to conduct follow-up interviews with select participants several months after their stay at Shoreline, but logistical and time constraints made this difficult. Fortunately, I was able to connect with a few participants after, but perhaps not enough to get a broader picture of how personal wellbeing evolved and/or continued after their holiday experience. What's more, I was also unable to observe early and late-season kitesurfing, which may have revealed different patterns of group change, emotional fatigue, or guest rotation. These absences reflect the limits of short-term immersive fieldwork and shaped the contours of what I was able to capture.

Another notable absence in this research is the perspective of local Filipino residents or workers. While Shoreline is located in the Philippines, the social world studied here is primarily composed of non-local actors. This reflects both the setup of the site itself and the scope of the research, but it also limits how local presence, labor, or perspectives are represented. These absences should not be overlooked, and they mark an area for future research into how place and local communities are involved or excluded in such curated tourism environments.

6 Approaching Analysis and Conceptual Framework

In this chapter, I outline how I managed the process of interpreting my fieldwork data. It traces how I moved from a large volume of raw material, voice notes, interviews, scratch notes, and personal reflections into an analytical focus on communication, emotional connection, wellness, and belonging.

While I continue to refer to thematic patterns in the chapters that follow, my initial analysis began with three broad elements: People, Place, and Activity. Over time however, I found that two supplemental threads ran through all three of them, these being communication and personal motivations. In particular, host-initiated communication (beginning long before guests arrived and continuing throughout their stay), emerged as a dominant theme. It shaped how inclusion and exclusion were negotiated, how possibilities for change were imagined, and how emotional connections formed. While the other categories remained useful, communication became the most consistent mechanism by which belonging and personal growth were made to feel possible. This focus eventually contributed to the development of *curated belonging* a concept term for describing how belonging is socially organized via communication, emotional alignment and selective interaction. These elements and ideas developed through a combination of inductive and reflexive analysis, grounded in both fieldwork experience and theoretical reading.

6.1 Making Sense of the Field

Initially, I began with a grounded theory and inductive method, listening to my voice notes and reviewing my field notes to allow patterns to emerge organically. As the process unfolded, I noticed that much of my data aligned with the three elements Eli often used to describe Shoreline's identity, his Holistic Triangle, in which People, Place, and Activity formed the foundation. These elements were central not only to the success of his business, but also to the kinds of outcomes his guests described experiencing.

After several months of analysis, I gradually moved away from my original grounded theory stance and adopted a hybrid thematic strategy, drawing on Clarke's (2006) model, which combines

inductive coding with a guided search for interpretive patterns (as cited in Alhojailan, 2012, p. 42). This shift occurred as communication and personal well-being consistently emerged across the three core pillars of the Holistic Triangle. When considered together, people, place, activity, communication, and motivation appeared most influential in shaping the emotional atmosphere and the felt sense of belonging that guests often described.

Over the course of my fieldwork, and in ongoing communication with guests I collected over 170 field site voice notes and 128 video logs from the field site, amounting to more than 15 hours of observations. I conducted 10 on-site formal interviews and 3 follow-up ones, generating another 14-plus hours of video and audio recordings. On top of that, I also supplemented these materials with extensive written scratch notes, vignettes, and reflections. While transcribing my voice notes and interviews, I focused not only on captured participants' words, but also on tone, pace, and body language. This attentiveness deepened my reflections, though I remained aware that my interpretations were shaped by my dual role as both participant and researcher.

Although the five elements that emerged helped me organize the data, they also reflected who was most visible and vocal during my fieldwork. Topics such as exclusion, disillusionment, or social tension also surfaced, often during longer interviews or casual conversations. This suggests a bias toward participants who were emotionally open or socially integrated. My analysis, then, does not represent every guest equally; it reflects those who felt safe enough to speak, and the moments I was there to hear them.

6.2 Analytical Orientation and Theoretical Tools

This thesis is situated within the anthropology of tourism, with a focus on emotional experience, temporary community, and the social conditions that support personal self-development. Rather than beginning with a fixed theoretical lens, I allowed theory to enter gradually, as patterns in my data became more visible. Communication, both digital and face-to-face, emerged as a key structuring force. To interpret how emotional tone, inclusion, and belonging were shaped in the field, I drew primarily on Simoni's concept of touristic borderzones, Salazar and Graburn's work on tourism imaginaries, and Heather Hartwell's model of eudaimonic well-being, supported by a number of additional sources where relevant.

Simoni's (2020) concept of the touristic borderzone (pp. 110-111; 155-158) became especially useful as I began reflecting on how inclusion and exclusion at Shoreline were not only experienced on-site, but often prepared in advance. The idea of the borderzone as a space of informal scripts and social improvisation resonated with my field notes, yet what I observed felt far from spontaneous. Hosts seemed to anticipate emotional developments, setting the tone and shaping access days, weeks, and even months before a guest's physical arrival. What I extend from Simoni's concept is a focus on emotional and communicative thresholds, not just cultural or spatial ones, as key to how temporary communities like Shoreline are assembled.

This focus on expectation-setting and anticipation also connects to Salazar and Graburn's (2014) work on tourism imaginaries (p. 7), which helped me understand how many of the guests arrived already imagining Shoreline as a space of healing, openness, and self-development. These imaginaries were rarely made explicit, yet they were felt, and they were actively reinforced. While much of the literature draws attention to how tourists project meaning onto a place, I found that the hosts played a direct role in sustaining and enhancing these projections through their own curated imaginaries. The consistency of tone, message content, and interpersonal warmth all contributed to an atmosphere that aligned with those imagined ideals.

Hartwell's (2016) model of eudaimonic well-being (pp. 17-18) provided an additional way to understand the type of wellness Shoreline promoted. This was not about luxury or self-pampering, but about emotional strength, connection, and a sense of clarity. Guests often described feeling "stronger," "more present," or more themselves after their stay (Interviews and field notes, January-March 2024). While Hartwell highlights meaning and purpose as foundational elements of well-being, what I observed was how these meanings were not simply discovered, they were shaped by daily interactions, emotional investment, and the communal energy of the space.

To position these ideas more firmly within tourism studies, I also drew on Dwyer, Chen, and Lee's (2019) work on tourism place attachment, which addresses both affective and behavioral dimensions (p. 645). Their model helped clarify that emotional bonds at Shoreline were not purely spontaneous; they were shaped through repeated actions, shared routines, and subtle social indicators that reinforced connection over time. This interpretation is echoed in Garcês et al. (2018), whose work on positive psychology in tourism suggests that emotional fulfillment and

relational meaning have become increasingly central to travel experiences (pp. 42-43). Guests at Shoreline did not simply describe the activities they participated in, they reflected on how those experiences affirmed personal goals, deepened relationships, and shaped emotional narratives about change and growth.

Extending this scope a little deeper, I build on Valente-Mosqueda et al.'s (2025) analysis of how wellness experiences are defined around emotional and social dimensions (pp. 6-9). While their study does not directly address group pressure, I observed during fieldwork that settings which promote emotional openness may also involve subtle expectations to participate, share, and connect. Their discussion of vulnerability and social demand helped me see that emotional connection at Shoreline was not simply encouraged, it was at times expected. This contributed to my understanding of the interpersonal labor involved in maintaining group tone, and how curated emotional environments depend on both voluntary and unspoken forms of participation.

Together, these ideas supported my interpretation of Shoreline as a curated emotional environment, not in a totalizing or artificial sense, but in the daily work of selecting guests, managing tone, and holding space.

My anthropological concern here lies in how tourism spaces like Shoreline facilitate emotional attachment, curated inclusion, and perceived personal change. This does not happen by individual intention alone, but within structured social environments and host-guided communication. While the theories above provided valuable perspectives, each had limits in my field. Simoni (2019) highlights informal inclusion, but at Shoreline, much of the inclusion and exclusion felt pre-scripted (pp. 113-118). Salazar and Graburn (2014) describe how tourist expectations are shaped, but my data showed hosts actively reinforcing those imaginaries just as much as guests projected them. Hartwell (2016) offers a model of deep well-being, but says little about the emotional labor or quiet exclusions that may accompany such curated spaces.

These tensions opened space for my own analytic contribution, not to replace existing concepts, but to extend them by foregrounding communication and affect as tools for structuring belonging. While my analysis focuses on emotional and communicative structuring, I also began to recognize that access to Shoreline was shaped by less visible forces. One of these was money, not its

presence, but its silence. Financial cost was rarely mentioned in messaging or conversation, and this omission reinforced the impression that belonging was about energy, not economics. Yet this silence may have served as part of the communicative tone, projecting an illusion of organic community while quietly filtering for those with financial and cultural capital. This pattern reflected certain expressions of surfer culture at Shoreline, where guests described money as something not talked about or not the point, even though participation required considerable resources. In some cases, this strategic silence resembled a kind of soft marketing. It avoided overt commercial language while using warmth and emotional suggestion to present the experience as priceless or beyond value. These communicative absences helped sustain the aesthetic of authenticity that curated belonging depended on.

6.3 Curated Belonging: Developing a Concept from Fieldwork

The concept of curated belonging emerged gradually throughout the development of this thesis. Its earliest traces can be linked to the MA thesis *Promoting Health or Otherwise* (Heisse, 2022), recommended to me by Professor Kehr, which influenced not only how I organized my writing, but also how I approached the process of building an argument. Following that model, I began outlining my thesis chapter by chapter, identifying what each section needed to achieve. I even drafted the signposts, phrases like “In this chapter I will demonstrate...,” before filling them with material drawn from my data. While doing this, I noticed something that shifted how I related to my own project. Heisse (2022), in her thesis, had coined a term, *infrastructure of care*, for her conceptual analysis. It was a small, field-based concept and she used it as a foundation to build her chapters, to develop her argument, to test its relevance, and to convince the reader that it mattered. Seeing how that concept gave her thesis both direction and purpose made me realize that I needed something similar. I needed a way to anchor my data, not just describe it. It was during this writing process that the idea of curated belonging began to take shape.

Fortunately, curated belonging had already been present in my fieldwork from the very beginning. I recall one moment in particular during my third day at Shoreline when I was standing on the beach, asking Claire how long she planned to stay. She told me she had booked for one month but already wanted to extend to two. I mentioned that several people I’d met the day before had said the same thing, that they had either extended their stays or were planning to. Claire laughed and

said, “Yeah, everybody tries to.” That brief exchange stayed with me and it raised a question that would quietly shape the rest of my research: Why do so many people extend their stays here? What makes this experience so difficult to leave?

At first, I viewed this and my entire project through the lens of place attachment and began developing a neuroanthropological idea I called Energy Attachment Theory (E.A.T). It proposed that emotional bonds were being formed subconsciously, triggered by the social stimulation of “happiness hormones” released throughout the day and night by the people, the environment, and the activity of kitesurfing. But as my fieldwork progressed, it became clear that the attachment wasn’t just to the place or the sport. While the people played a role, what stood out in my data was something less tangible: the emotional experience of belonging. Participants often described feeling seen, cared for, and fully alive. For some, this sense of connection extended well beyond their time at Shoreline. Guests like Irina stayed in close contact with others long after leaving, meeting up in other countries to ski, surf, or visit one another. Their attachments had moved beyond the site itself. Other early conversations with guests I had revealed another pattern: the significance of Shoreline’s pre-arrival communication. Many participants said this was why they had chosen Shoreline in the first place. Some described it as the only place that returned their calls and others recalled receiving personal messages or videos from Eli or Rafi, which made them feel wanted before they had even arrived. These small gestures were mentioned repeatedly across interviews as well. These two patterns (guests extending their stays and the emotional pull of early communication) became difficult to ignore. On their own, they might seem unremarkable, but together they pointed to something more intentional. This marked the beginning of what I came to describe as curated belonging.

Another thread through-out my fieldwork was the question whether this pre-arrival communication was simply just a good business practice. From a commercial perspective, fast responses and personal attention make sense as strategies for attracting and retaining customers. But in this setting, the emotional stakes seemed higher. Some guests described feeling emotionally attached, or even experiencing emotional lows after leaving. Participants like Joy spoke openly about financial strain, including the risk of overspending during her extended stay. These reflections raised difficult questions: Was this genuine care, or a form of emotional manipulation? Was it

connection, or just a strategic business model? Or perhaps, for the right kind of guest, it genuinely offered something fulfilling.

In my search for language to describe this process, I experimented with terms like belonging attachment, community attachment, and created belonging, but none of these felt quite right. Eventually, I came across the word *curated*, defined as “carefully chosen and thoughtfully organized or presented” (Merriam-Webster n.d.). This term captured what I had been observing, a deliberate process of inclusion and exclusion shaping social and emotional experiences. As I continued writing, reflecting, and returning to my data, the term gained conceptual weight. This process mirrored what Alhojailan (2012) describes as the recursive nature of thematic analysis, where researchers shift between data, codes, and emerging themes (p. 43). It also echoed Hartwell’s (2016) argument that eudaimonic well-being in tourism is not simply about place or activity, but about how experiences are emotionally interpreted and socially mediated. Curated belonging builds on this by focusing on the host’s role in shaping emotional expectations and attachments, both before and during the stay.

Curated belonging continued to evolve in my project, especially as I began to see how inclusion and exclusion at Shoreline did not happen spontaneously, but were shaped by guest selection. This process of selection reminded me of my past experience hiring staff for a large big box retail chain in North America, where I was never just hiring for skill, but also for fit. I would consider how someone might contribute to the culture we aimed to create and what they would bring into the group. At Shoreline, Eli was doing something similar, choosing or turning away guests not only based on interest or money, but also on emotional and social compatibility. What felt spontaneous or authentic to guests was, in many cases, maintained through careful attention to tone, selective messaging, and group coordination.

I define curated belonging as follows:

I use the term *curated belonging* to describe the subtle, deliberate creation of emotional and social inclusion and exclusion through communication, group shaping, and continuous host interaction. In its first phase, curated belonging begins with Shoreline’s guest selection and continues with sustained pre-arrival communication. This process expands Simoni’s (2019) concept of the

borderzone by showing how inclusion can be prepared well before physical arrival by means of host-driven communication and social media exposure. It also supplements the work of Salazar and Graburn (2014) by illustrating how hosts can influence, reinforce, and even help construct guest expectations and imaginaries both before arrival and as the stay unfolds. Curated belonging in this phase draws attention to how emotional alignment, often perceived as spontaneous or authentic, along with the formation of emotional attachments and shared identity with the community, is shaped by deliberate communicative acts and selection practices that manage social inclusion or exclusion. Salazar (2012) notes that tourism imaginaries are not neutral; they are “structured by dichotomies,” circulated via institutional and media channels, and capable of shaping how tourists relate to people and places (p. 864). Curated belonging builds on this by asking who influences these imaginaries at the micro level, and how they are emotionally calibrated to attract particular types of guests. At Shoreline, belonging was not simply a natural outcome. The imaginaries were filtered through visibility, messaging, and perceived similarity, so that guests arrived already primed to belong and socially aligned to fit. While Salazar highlights how imaginaries create meaning, curated belonging considers how that meaning becomes emotionally charged and personally felt as a result of subtle acts of filtering, selection, and tone-setting.

In the second phase, curated belonging shifts from the pre-arrival period to the time when guests are physically present. This phase involves the host’s continuous interactions with guests, including managing messaging channels for events and weather updates, planning parties, creating spaces for connection, and shaping the social atmosphere through daily engagement.

As mentioned above, curated belonging at Shoreline does not only begin once guests arrive. It starts earlier, through digital forms of pre-arrival communication that shape expectations and emotional alignment. Over time, I came to identify a secondary pattern within this process, which I call the *imaginary cycle*. While this cycle is not required for curated belonging to succeed overall or potentially in other situations, it does reveal how guests are prepared in advance by interacting with Shoreline’s digital content, particularly Instagram stories and direct messages. These pre-arrival interactions guide guest expectations, emotionally prime them for the experience, and align them with the identity of the community, allowing them to rehearse their future inclusion and fuel their imaginations. Once on site, guests who have spent time imagining their stay through these

posts often integrate more quickly, not only because of their social compatibility but because they have already envisioned themselves as part of the group. Over time, their sense of belonging strengthens, as they begin living out the imaginaries they once consumed. While many retreats operate in a similar way, where guests imagine themselves in the location and then arrive to fulfill that vision, Shoreline adds another layer. New guests are soon featured in the same style of Instagram stories they once followed. They now appear in the very narratives that shaped their own expectations, thus becoming the new imaginaries for future guests and restarting the cycle. With this addition, curated belonging is not only built through tone and direct messaging. It is also reinforced through recursive visibility, a cycle of representation that sustains emotional alignment and group identity over time.

Nevertheless, this concept also raises tensions, it blurs the line between spontaneity and design. Guests often described their belonging as natural, but my fieldwork suggested that tone, messaging, and selection played a role in that perception. Curated belonging is useful for describing recurring patterns, but it is not a universal experience. Some guests, like Lukas and Isabel, felt excluded by the very system that seemed to invite others in. This term is not meant to idealize or simply restate host-guest power. Instead, it is a working concept, grounded in field observations, that illustrates how emotional fit can be encouraged, even as its effects are uneven. Additionally, those who felt included, and who experienced curated belonging according to my analysis appeared to shape how they interpreted their own well-being, guiding not just participation but the meanings they attached to their experiences. Communication as Emotional Infrastructure

Throughout my fieldwork, I came to see communication as the connective tissue that shaped the emotional atmosphere, guest expectations, and social compatibility at Shoreline. It was more than a practical tool; it became the channel through which personal change, inclusion, and misalignment were managed. The following six insights, drawn from my analysis, summarize how communication functioned across different stages of the guest experience:

1. **Pre-arrival communication built emotional trust:** Guests often described Eli's initial responses to inquiries as "warm," "quick," "personal," and "consistent." These early messages presented the space as open and intimate even before physical arrival. This

emotional tone became a foundation that made guests feel wanted and shaped their expectations of connection. In doing so, it also contributed to the way guests imagined Shoreline as a space of belonging and transformation (Interviews and field notes, January-March 2024).

2. Continuous pre-arrival communication depicted the experience as meaningful:

Shoreline did not describe the stay in terms of logistics or luxury. Instead, they interacted with guests using digital channels, portraying the visit as an opportunity for growth, connection, and community. This shaped the sense that something promising might happen. It aligns with Hartwell's (2016) idea of eudaimonic tourism, where wellness is constructed by means of meaning and purpose rather than enjoyment alone, and also supports Salazar's (2012) argument that imaginaries shape how tourists relate to people and places. At Shoreline, the imaginary of emotional openness and group bonding was transmitted and reinforced through the tone, content, and frequency of host communication.

3. Communication personalized inclusion and emotional tone: Eli and Rafi selected guests based on perceived fit, not just interest in kitesurfing, but qualities like "energy," "openness," and "vibe" (Interviews and field notes, January-March 2024). Communication style, emoji use, response time, and even punctuation became subtle indicators of compatibility. These choices shaped emotional tone and inclusion, often without guests being fully aware. Over time, shared communication norms contributed to a sense of group identity. This supports Neville and Reicher's (2011) argument that shared identity can "transform intragroup social relations to produce a sense of relatedness" (p. 388).

4. Communication defined boundaries of inclusion and exclusion: While many guests felt included, others struggled to find their place. Interviews with Lukas and Andreas, for example, revealed how not being part of tone-setting group messages contributed to feelings of distance. Communication didn't just create connection; it also acted as a sorting mechanism. For some, this meant their experience conflicted with the dominant imaginary and the group identity being reinforced.

5. **Communication involved emotional labor:** Shoreline's team was expected to be emotionally available, responsive, and attuned, especially Eli, who stayed in contact with many guests even after their departure. While this created a strong sense of care, it also raised sustainability concerns. As Lean et al. (2019) argue, emotionally impactful tourism often depends on emotional performance and constructed narratives, which can place ongoing pressure on those facilitating the experience (p. 6)
6. **Communication had the potential to create long-term attachment:** Many guests stayed in touch with Eli or other group members after leaving. For some, this led to return visits or reunions elsewhere. For others, it shaped how they thought about travel, work, or relationships. As Tsai (2016) explains, emotional and behavioral forms of place attachment tend to develop as a result of positive prior experiences and emotional satisfaction with a destination (p. 127). At Shoreline, this attachment was often tied not only to the experience itself, but to the emotional tone and imagined identity shaped through communication.

While the power of communication at Shoreline was evident, so were its weaknesses. Some participants felt excluded or unsure how to "read" the group tone. Others described anxiety around not responding fast enough to messages, or being unsure how to interpret a lack of response from the host. While the communicative environment shaped emotional alignment, it also introduced subtle forms of pressure, surveillance, and social ambiguity. Communication built connection, but not for everyone, and not always without cost.

Taken together, these insights show how host-guest communication functioned not just as coordination, but as emotional infrastructure. It extended Simoni's touristic borderzone (2019) into the digital and temporal space of pre-arrival. It demonstrated how the imaginaries described by Salazar and Graburn can be manipulated in order to create a shared or increased personalized imagined experience. And allowed the possibility of a eudaimonic tourism experience to unfold, not with the help of abstract wellness ideals, but with the help of attentive messaging and tone, daily updates and chats, and subtle emotional mirroring.

This chapter has outlined how I moved from field saturation to conceptual clarity by listening, rereading, visualizing, and interpreting. The next two chapters apply this analytic lens to examine

how host-guest communication at Shoreline before and during guests' stays shapes emotional experiences of wellness, belonging, and personal change. Using ethnographic scenes and participant accounts, I trace how curated belonging is produced, interpreted, and sometimes challenged within a selectively constructed tourism space. In the first empirical data chapter, I show how curated belonging takes shape through guest selection and pre-arrival communication. In the second chapter I lay out how those emotional expectations are enacted, challenged, or strained within daily group life, host messages, and emotional labor. In both chapters, I remain aware that my presence may have shaped the field, and that my background made me especially attuned to pacing, silence, and tonal shifts of not just in what was said, but in how it was said. This influenced both my method and my way of seeing.

7 Curating Arrival: Pre-arrival Communication and Imagined Belonging

7.1 Introduction

Booking a vacation at Shoreline involves more than selecting dates, making a payment, and showing up. Unlike standard holiday resorts, Shoreline isn't listed on popular travel platforms such as Booking.com or Expedia, and its official website showcases kitesurfing and adventure exclusively. Instead, guests directly contact Eli, Shoreline's owner and self-proclaimed visionary, via Instagram or Facebook, where he selectively responds to inquiries based on perceived compatibility. At Shoreline, Eli's deliberate filtering helps create a sense of emotional investment and alignment with his idea of community. He aims to ensure that guests not only fit, but also reinforce the community's envisioned identity, resulting in what I call curated belonging. This process reflects what Neville and Reicher (2011) describe as the emotional and social power of shared identity. Their research suggests that in group settings, feelings of belonging emerge not only through physical presence, but through recognizing similarity in others. When participants believed they shared an identity with those around them, social barriers were seen to dissolve, encouraging feelings of ease, connection, and mutual recognition (p. 383). This helps explain why Shoreline does not accept all who inquire. By filtering for emotional, social, and financial alignment, Eli increases the likelihood that new arrivals will feel a part of something already familiar. Belonging is not left to chance, but is carefully shaped in advance, priming guests to step into a group that already seems to fit. "We go on karma here, not everyone who wants to come can," Eli told me in our conversations. "Usually, when someone sends me a message, I can immediately sense their energy. Something cool, something authentic. I like to bring in people from around the world. I like diversity" (Interview, February 13, 2024). This strategy also reflects a managed entry process that aligns with Simoni's (2019) observation that tourism encounters are shaped by pre-existing social scripts and institutional expectations, which influence who is welcomed into particular spaces and under what terms (p. 113).

In this chapter, I argue that guest filtering, along with consistent pre-arrival communication by the host, strongly shapes guests' experiences of wellness and personal growth. Drawing from Simoni's

concept of the touristic borderzone (2019), Salazar and Graburn's (2014) work on tourism imaginaries, and Hartwell's (2016) model of eudaimonic tourism, I suggest that host communication at Shoreline functions as a deliberate system to select guests, shape expectations, and promote emotional investment. My central research question guiding this analysis is: How does pre-arrival and on-site host communication at Shoreline Kitesurfing Center shape experiences of wellness, personal growth, and belonging, in a short-term tourism setting? By selectively messaging, setting expectations, and maintaining ongoing engagement, Shoreline primes guests to interpret their experiences through a wellness lens, expanding the borderzone well before arrival and preparing them for a sense of belonging even before they set foot on site.

During my fieldwork, I discovered that the wellness experiences many guests were seeking and attested to including Claire, BJ, Joy, and Lukas often began before they ever set foot on the island. The Shoreline team invested time and care in screening prospective guests, striving to select individuals whose personal goals aligned with the environment they had cultivated. Shoreline's ideal was to provide a smooth arrival experience and a wellness journey that felt underway by the time of check-in. Pre-arrival digital communication, text messages, Instagram stories, and voice messages worked to ease anxiety, build emotional momentum, and reinforce a sense of anticipation. Using ethnographic insight, I revisit Shoreline's inclusion criteria, messaging strategies, and the interpretive weight guests assign to these practices. Although multiple factors shape a transient tourism holiday, I believe, host-guest communication acts as the connective tissue, linking people, place, and activity in ways that shape how wellness is imagined and experienced.

Drawing from MacConnell's (1976) perspective, tourists seek more than mere authenticity in distant cultures; they also pursue self-discovery and meaningful connection with environments that reflect their aspirations (as cited in Scott, 2014, p. 3). Tourism providers often shape experiences to fulfill these desires, creating communities that appeal to visitors' longing for belonging. This chapter builds on that observation by showing how Shoreline's intentional and sustained pre-arrival communication primes guests to interpret their stay as personal and emotional journey. Raising the question: if guests come seeking more than just kitesurfing or leisure, if they hope for some renewal, how much of that sense of well-being arises naturally, and how much follows a storyline already laid out for them? That structure, I argue, is part of Shoreline's curated

belonging, where emotional tone, social interaction, and aspirational framing work in tandem with selection and messaging.

While earlier studies concentrated on tourism's impact on host communities (Simoni, 2020, 2019), this chapter turns toward the emotional labor and affective strategies involved in pre-arrival communication. Salazar and Graburn (2014) write, "Tourism is shaped as much by its expectations as by lived realities, with imaginaries of travel significantly influencing tourist experiences" (p. 16). At Shoreline, these expectations are not passively received; they are cultivated through messaging. Pre-arrival contact becomes as meaningful as face-to-face interaction, not only shaping perceptions, but also preparing the emotional terrain on which guest experiences will later be interpreted. Simoni's (2019) research on "touristic borderzones" helps clarify how the host-guest boundary is negotiated in advance of the encounter (pp. 112-115). At Shoreline, emotional filtering and direct messaging are used to smooth this boundary in advance, establishing a collective mindset and shared language before physical arrival. As Simoni (2017) states, host-guest relationships involve subtle forms of power and gatekeeping, managing who is permitted entry and under what conditions (p. 620). This kind of relational gatekeeping shows how wellness ideals and expectations of personal growth are not neutral; they are curated before arrival, influencing how guests come to understand and reflect on their experience once they're there.

Throughout this chapter, I show that guest selection and pre-arrival communication at Shoreline are not simply logistical. They determine who gains entry and how they make meaning of their experience. Communication begins the process of emotional orientation, creating bonds, easing uncertainty, and aligning expectations. In this way, wellness and personal change don't just happen; they are made legible in connection with early interaction. Tourists like BJ, Claire, and Joy reported feeling "handpicked" (Field notes, and interviews January to February 2024) for deeper journeys, resonating with literature suggesting that travelers who experience emotionally charged pre-arrival communication engage more deeply with their host community (Nawijn, 2016; Garcês et al., 2018).

From an anthropological perspective, this chapter raises pressing questions: Is Shoreline genuinely inclusive, or does pre-arrival communication subtly filter out those who don't fit the expectation of wellness and "good energy"? Are guests engaging with Shoreline as a physical space or as an

idea constructed long before their arrival? Here, I demonstrate how pre-arrival messaging contributes to an “imagined experience,” adding depth to tourism imaginaries (Salazar & Graburn, 2014). Therefore, communication at Shoreline not only enables experiences, but also actively shapes how they are understood. As Salazar and Graburn (2014) explain, tourism imaginaries act as “meaning-making and world-shaping devices” (p. 1). At Shoreline, guests do not arrive neutral toward kitesurfing or communal living; rather, their understanding is actively shaped by Eli’s communicative patterns. Shoreline’s messaging functions as a cultural bridge, ensuring guests interpret kitesurfing lessons not just as a sport but as metaphors for resilience, freedom, and growth. Accordingly, communication is more than an organizational tool; it is a meaning-making framework, positioning guests’ experiences within personal and social storylines.

Conversely, intentional wellness imaginaries do not guarantee actualization. Guests who arrive prepared for personal growth may feel disappointed or isolated if their expectations do not align with lived experience. Salazar and Graburn (2014) acknowledge that tourism imaginaries are powerful structural forces, but they do not always match the unpredictable realities of travel (p. 17). In section three of this chapter, I examine this tension by focusing on Lukas’s experience, in which his pre-arrival expectations were not sustained on-site, resulting in his near-immediate exclusion from the core group. Watching and hearing this unfold, I felt torn between the desire to document the situation objectively and the instinct to intervene, knowing that any action I took could reshape his entire experience.

In sum, this chapter hypothesizes that intentional communication practices (pre-arrival and on-site) are fundamental to how Shoreline operates as a place of wellness and personal reinvention. Through selective guest screening, expectation-building, and sustained engagement, Shoreline influences participants well before arrival, and continues to guide their interpretations of experiences once on-site. Skinner and Theodossopoulos (2011) maintain, “people always travel with expectations derived from various sources,” and Shoreline confirms or reshapes these expectations pre-arrival (as cited in Salazar and Graburn, 2014, p. 16). Examining host communication as the primary gateway into Shoreline’s social world, this chapter spotlights the often-overlooked role of hosts in actively shaping wellness tourism encounters. Based on interviews, participant observation, and my own reflections, I assess whether this system supports guests’ desire for change or acts as an understated form of gatekeeping.

In what follows, I provide ethnographic examples from my fieldwork at Shoreline that show how Shoreline's selective and intentional communication shapes guests' wellness experiences in practice. I organize this chapter into three interconnected sections to explore these dynamics. First, I analyze Eli's pre-arrival selection process and how potential guests respond emotionally to being chosen, drawing on select dinner discussions, the influential leadership roles adopted by guests like Irina, and the immediate emotional openness shown by new arrivals like Giselle. Next, I explore sustained pre-arrival communication by examining the experiences of Claire and Lukas, showing how these interactions shape tourist imaginaries and contribute to each guest's sense of curated belonging. Finally, in a short discussion, I reflect on these ethnographic examples and transition into an examination of on-site communication by the host, demonstrating how ongoing dialogue reinforces or challenges these initial imaginaries. Across these sections, I reflect on my own positional role as both an ethnographer and a temporary member of Shoreline's community, critically considering how my presence influenced interactions and interpretations.

7.1.1 Guest Selection and Filtering Through Initial Messaging

When Eli spoke to me about diversity, he seemed to be referring to nationality and language, even though his suggestions pointed toward a particular type of person, someone adventurous, attractive, culturally flexible, financially stable, and able to connect with others effortlessly. In practice, this created more similarities than differences among guests. Unfortunately for some, Shoreline's kind of diversity did not always mean inclusion; rather, it functioned as a form of social gatekeeping. While financial status was not one of the direct criteria, social capital expressed through emotional openness, community orientation, and a certain kind of coolness seemed to matter. Eli's idea of "good energy" was not random; it served as a social filter, shaping who could participate in Shoreline's envisioned wellness community.

One night, after a long day at the beach kitesurfing, I arrived at Shoreline's main residence for a ritualistic communal dinner. The scent of curry and grilled vegetables lingered in the air, mingling with the salty ocean breeze, while the soft sound of the Beatles played in the background. The long wooden table, worn from years of shared meals, pulsed with conversations among the many guests and kitesurfing teachers. Conscious of my dual role as participant and researcher, I intentionally sat beside Eli at the head of the table, hoping to better understand how guests and instructors were

selected. Over the next couple of hours, I began to piece together his methods, with Eli occasionally leaning back in his chair, gesturing with his hands as he explained his philosophy. “Look, I don’t want just Israelis,” Eli said, his eyes scanning the room. “I like to mix it up, bring in people from all over, different cultures, different backgrounds. You feel it, right? The energy?” As he motioned toward a group of kitesurfing instructors and guests laughing over drinks at the far end of the table, with some only just arrived but already interacting like old friends. “This is what I mean. This is the vibe” (Interview and field notes, January and February 2024).

As we sat at the dinner table, Eli pointed to different guests, explaining why he had accepted them, and his descriptions made explicit his intentional strategy. “See him?” he nodded toward BJ, a French photographer living in California. “He just got divorced. He messaged me saying he needed to find himself again. I knew he’d be a good fit. He even extended his stay once he got here.” Then he signaled toward Aria, an Israeli professional surfer. “He told me he was broken from a recent breakup in Australia and couldn’t go home because of the war. He wasn’t just looking for a place to stay, he was looking for a reset. He needed a community.” Next, he pointed to Michael, a Polish university graduate. “This guy? He was lost. Didn’t know what to do with his life. Said he needed a challenge. That’s why I told him to come, because kitesurfing is a challenge. It changes people. It boosts their self-esteem, and they can take this confidence back with them for the rest of their lives. And even better... You can kite six days a week here!” Finally, he motioned toward Joy. “She’s from Manila. She hates the city life and loves the water. She said she’s looking for her type of people again” (Field notes January 2024).

Watching this “gang,” as I came to call them, it was increasingly apparent that Eli had filtered for something deeper than personality; he had selected for people already in transition, people looking for change, people who shared this sense of in-betweenness. Eli’s selection process didn’t just look to build a social community; it aimed to ensure that guests arrived already primed for personal change, making that change at Shoreline feel natural, perhaps even inevitable. Later in the evening, as Eli’s voice blended into the general hum of conversation, I noticed BJ leaning toward Irina, speaking softly but intently. BJ’s expression was deep, eyebrows wrinkled as he quietly shared, “When I first messaged Eli, I wasn’t even sure what I needed. I was stuck in Thailand and going nowhere. He told me just to come, and that I would love it and never want to leave. And once I got in here, I felt like I could finally slow down, you know?” Irina nodded in agreement, responding

softly, “Yeah, it’s weird. I came here mostly because I needed to learn how to chill. Eli talking about kitesurfing and building my self-esteem made me realize I’d been looking for something deeper.” They exchanged a knowing smile, briefly holding each other’s gaze before Irina gently wrapped her arm around BJ’s shoulder, a subtle gesture suggesting mutual support (Field notes January 2024).

The communal dinner that night, like many others, didn’t feel like a gathering of strangers, it felt like a reunion. This wasn’t accidental considering Eli had already curated the group before they arrived. Their pre-arrival conversations had shaped their expectations, setting them up to bond effortlessly. Each guest had been subtly prepared through messages, voice recordings, and social media exchanges to arrive with an understanding of what Shoreline was about. Their interactions weren’t just spontaneous; they were the result of a carefully designed pre-arrival social filtering system. To explain his strategy, I asked Eli what a typical message from a guest looked like, and he quickly pulled out his phone and scrolled through his Instagram. “Look at this one,” he said, reading aloud: *Hey, I’ve been working nonstop for the past two years, and I just need to disconnect. I want to be around good people, learn to kitesurf, and figure out what’s next in life.* Eli nodded. “This is the kind of guest I say yes to.” Then he showed me another message: *Hi, do you have rooms available? What’s the price?* He shrugged. “This one? I probably won’t even respond.” Eli rarely accepted guests immediately. Instead, he let conversations unfold slowly. Sometimes, he sent a simple voice message instead of a text. “I want to hear their reaction,” he explained. “Do they sound excited? Do they have questions? Are they curious?” Enthusiastic replies were welcomed, while logistical or strictly financial ones ended in silence. His selective responsiveness signaled a deliberate attempt to manage the guest community’s composition (Interview February 13, 2024; Field notes January 2024).

Nearing the end of that evening, Eli disclosed something revealing; before replying to inquiries, he always examined their social media. “It’s about feeling out their vibe. Kitesurfing is an extreme sport, they need to be active, fit, fun,” he confessed, casually showing me more Instagram feeds filled with adventure photos, people surfing in Bali, hiking in Peru. “These people look great; they would fit in for sure. And this one,” he said, pointing to a yoga teacher with a profile filled with travel photos, “I made sure to invite her immediately.” Then he pulled up a few more profiles, this

time dominated by corporate events and family photos. “These ones? Probably not” (Field notes January 20, 2024)

In these moments, it became clear that guest selection was not just about personality. It was about aesthetic appeal, lifestyle alignment, and potential contribution to Shoreline’s projected image. Even though Eli and Aria talked about striving for diversity, there seemed to be an undercurrent of sameness at play between the guests and teachers. By filtering guests, Eli also aimed to create a community of like-minded individuals with shared reference points, making their assimilation into the group more seamless as they pursued the personal well-being goals Shoreline promoted. This intentional and ongoing selection process reflects Bruner’s (1994) idea that touristic borderzones are shaped not only by individual preferences but also by pre-existing social scripts and institutionalized expectations (as cited in Simoni, 2020, p. 12). Through pre-arrival guest selection and ongoing pre-arrival communication (discussed further later in subsequent sections), Eli wasn’t just choosing guests; he was actively scripting their experiences before their arrival, and therefore expanding the borderzone into digital spaces. As a result, interactions at Shoreline were not entirely organic, but structured around Eli’s ideal community vision. Guests may have believed they formed spontaneous connections, but these experiences were largely pre-conditioned by Eli’s intentional pre-arrival filtering.

The pre-arrival messaging at Shoreline functioned beyond basic logistics. It operated as a form of emotional groundwork. Prospective guests who expressed interest in adventure, personal well-being, and community received warm, enthusiastic replies, subtly signaling that they were the right fit. In contrast, those who inquired primarily about pricing or amenities received brief, neutral responses, discouraging further engagement. Through this process, guests were not only filtered but also prepared for Shoreline’s social environment before their arrival. The act of being selected had the potential to reinforce their desire to participate, beginning to instill a sense of belonging and increasing their willingness to embrace the cultural ideals. Yet this approach raises important anthropological questions about inclusion and exclusivity. Shoreline’s selection process functioned as a form of social gatekeeping. While Eli danced around the suggestion that Shoreline deliberately excluded certain individuals, the patterns in guest selection imply otherwise. The preference for guests who were youthful, physically fit, socially active, and seeking personal growth points to a deliberate, if informal, process of curation. By prioritizing individuals who

aligned with Shoreline's "karma" model, the team may have unintentionally reinforced exclusivity, shaping not only the guest experience but also the broader community relations.

Reflecting later, I began to question my own position among these intentionally selected individuals. Surrounded by laughter and personal revelations, I felt my own energy shifting. But was this genuine, or was I being influenced by the very expectation of wellness embedded in Shoreline's framework? I later began to wonder whether my initial conversations with Eli, sharing my previous business experience, current talk-radio show, and role as a researcher, had subtly aligned me with his ideals, or if I was viewed simply as another paying guest. As guests openly shared their wellness stories with me, I also questioned whether these accounts were truly authentic or performed to align with Shoreline's promoted image. More importantly, did my presence as a researcher encourage or reinforce these stories of personal growth?

7.1.2 Strategic Inclusion and Performative Leadership

After my first week at Shoreline, I was invited to a private Saturday night sunset party at its primary residence, a social event intentionally shaped by Eli and his team. They invited current guests and resident instructors, as well as select kitesurfers and potential future guests from around Boracay. The gathering wasn't just festive; it revealed how social experiences at Shoreline were orchestrated in advance to shape the community. It was here, within the soft glow of string lights, dance music from a live DJ, and the gentle ocean breeze, that I noticed Irina, a 42-year-old business executive whose presence felt immediately magnetic. She moved through the crowd with ease, encouraging guests to dance, sing, and socialize, naturally assuming a leadership role without any formal designation. Her confidence was obvious, as was her ability to activate others. When guests hesitated, Irina pulled them off couches and chairs, laughing warmly and drawing them into the group's momentum. Later that evening, as the group transitioned from Shoreline's residence to a local dance club, she took charge again, organizing tuk-tuks and rallying people enthusiastically: "Let's move, everyone!" At the club, she anchored the group's energy, pulling people onto the dance floor and setting a tone of playful connection. Looking back on my first few days, I realized that Irina had already been performing this role informally. She was often the first to welcome kitesurfers coming in from the beach, greeting them with a friendly arm around the shoulder, a playful hip bump, and a familiar, "How was that session?" Her style reminded me of the

charismatic managers I had once worked with in my previous business career, people who shaped social tone through warmth, visibility, and responsiveness (Field notes January 20, 2024).

Curious about her role, I brought up my observations in a later interview with Eli and Rafi. Both confirming my suspicion immediately. “Absolutely, we chose her for this exact reason,” Eli said, smiling. Her background as an executive, he explained, had been obvious from her first few messages. “She had leadership written all over her profile” (Interview, January 23, 2024). For Eli, those early signs of tone, confidence, and purpose aligned perfectly with what Shoreline needed. She also spoke openly about wanting to “learn how to chill,” which matched the narrative Shoreline promoted around self-work through leisure. Listening to Eli, I began to wonder: was Irina chosen for her wellness goals, or for her social influence? Eli shared that multiple guests, including Leo, Claire, Aria, and BJ, had extended their trips to match Irina’s two-month stay. From my prior business career, I recognized this pattern as strategic talent curation, where selecting influential personalities positively impacts group dynamics, brand image, and customer loyalty.

When I asked Eli directly whether this strategy was about money, he brushed it off. “Money is important, but that’s not why we’re here. I want people who bring energy, who add value to the community. Irina helps people connect. That’s the kind of person I want here” (Interview, January 23, 2024). His comments echoed Hartwell’s (2016) description of the eudaimonic tourist, someone drawn not just to escape, but to self-renewal through community, purpose, and shared values (pp. 8-10). Still, I remained cautious. Eli’s comment about energy sounded generous, but it also reflected an unstated logic: certain people could steer others toward longer stays and deeper buy-in. Was the selection of charismatic figures like Irina just intuitive hospitality, or also a form of strategic influence that supported soft marketing and economic success?

This type of explicit filtering through pre-arrival communication carries significant effects. The goal is to create an environment where guests like Irina already primed with leadership qualities and self-development goals naturally assume an influential role within the community. As a result, other guests, observing and interacting with her, are subtly encouraged to participate more actively, enhancing the communal experience and increasing the likelihood of meaningful personal change. Eli consistently favored guests who expressed interest in personal well-being, communal engagement, and emotionally meaningful experiences, especially those who could contribute to,

and elevate Shoreline's appeal. His willingness to barter accommodations and kitesurfing with yoga teachers, influencers, and fitness instructors further reinforced this approach. Shoreline actively sought out people who could offer something of value to the group, whether through teaching or simply by demonstrating emotional openness. Guests were chosen not only for what they might receive at Shoreline, but also for what they could bring to it.

As I continued to reflect on my own place within this environment and the possible gains Shoreline stood to make by allowing me into their community, whether monetary or not, I began to question what I had to offer. What role was I now playing in this group? Was I perceived as a neutral researcher, or someone strategically included? These reflections forced me to confront the blurred boundary between observation and participation, and to recognize ways I may have contributed to shaping the culture and emotional tone of the community. My questions about authenticity and intentionality therefore extend not only to Eli's guest selection, but also to my role as a researcher, actively influencing and perhaps reinforcing the accounts of interpretations surrounding wellness and personal growth at Shoreline.

7.2 Pre-arrival Communication and Immediate Belonging

One evening, shortly after 9 p.m., I descended from Shoreline's second-floor residence after interviewing Lukas, intending to speak with BJ about his impending departure. However, upon knocking on his bedroom door I found that BJ had already checked out (only to return a week later), and a new guest, Giselle, occupied his room. Slightly uncomfortable with my unexpected intrusion, I introduced myself as a fellow guest and researcher studying the community at Shoreline right away. Surprisingly, Giselle immediately invited me in, warmly initiating a conversation that quickly became personal, making me question how effectively Eli's selective communication prepared guests emotionally and socially before arrival.

Giselle, a high school teacher from Germany on a sabbatical exploring East Asia and the South Pacific, explained that Shoreline had stood out immediately because of Eli's prompt, genuinely welcoming responses to her initial inquiries. She vividly described previous disappointments in finding authentic communities elsewhere, often encountering transient, superficial connections. "Most travelers I met before were drifting, a bit aimless and without real direction," she explained, her tone reflective. "But Shoreline felt different right away. Eli's messages made it clear this was

a place with purpose, a community of people who cared deeply about their own journeys and each other.” Giselle’s emphasis on the emotional tone of Eli’s messages highlighted how effective his intentional communication was in attracting guests already primed for deep emotional openness, whether or not they were fully aware they were being “selected” (Field notes, January 25, 2024).

Over the next ten minutes, Giselle and I talked primarily about her commitment to her yearlong sabbatical and the goals she had set for herself. Giselle’s openness surprised me, especially given that she had arrived less than two days earlier and yet quickly shared emotional reflections about her search for meaningful connections. Giselle’s immediate sense of belonging was precisely what Salazar & Graburn (2014) describe as a result of powerful tourism imaginaries shaped long before the actual travel experience. Reflecting inwardly, I again wondered whether my presence as a researcher encouraged Giselle (and others) to include narratives matching Shoreline’s promoted ideals, or if this openness authentically represented the types of guests Eli carefully selected. Regardless, our dialogue reinforced the critical role Eli’s pre-arrival messaging played in attracting guests seeking emotionally meaningful and self-reflective experiences, and how this selective communication aligns closely with Hartwell’s (2016) discussions of eudaimonic tourism, which centers on experiences offering “deeper meaning, focusing on a search for self and identity, self-empowerment, and connectedness with others” (p. 8). Giselle’s arrival, already emotionally invested and socially involved, highlighted how Eli’s deliberately structured communication practices contributed to the production of a sustained wellness experience rather than a short-lived touristic visit. By carefully selecting guests predisposed toward deep emotional connection, Shoreline actively cultivated an environment that increased the likelihood of meaningful personal change, a strategy that became increasingly evident through Giselle’s example.

Nonetheless, observing guests like Giselle and Irina prompted critical reflections on the authenticity of their well-being journeys. Were guests genuinely undergoing significant emotional changes as a result of the on-site people, place, and activities, or were their desired reinventions partly constructed through anticipation established long before arrival? Eli portrayed Shoreline’s guest selection as inclusive, yet my observations indicated it operated as a subtle process of exclusion. Although financial status wasn’t a direct barrier, implicit factors such as confidence, physical fitness, adventure-seeking, and desire for change seemed compulsory. The concept of “good energy” functioned beyond mere personality compatibility; it was a social filter determining

belonging. Those fitting Eli's vision were enthusiastically welcomed, whereas others were gently steered away, often without awareness. Despite its effectiveness, Eli's selective filtering process was not without complications. In the next sections of this chapter, I examine the ongoing pre-arrival communication between Shoreline and selected guests (specifically Claire and Lukas) as they prepared for their stay. Their contrasting experiences reveal how pre-arrival messaging not only sets expectations but can either amplify emotional resonance or bring attention to points of exclusion. I trace the subtle patterns of inclusion and detachment that emerged when guests encountered mismatches between the emotionally inviting tone of the pre-arrival communication and the realities they later faced.

Eli's selective strategy aimed at community cohesion and personal growth, yet it risked unintentionally marginalizing guests who slipped through initial screening but didn't fully align with implicit expectations. This tension raised broader anthropological questions about the inclusivity and accessibility of wellness tourism: was emotional change and well-being universally accessible, or was it subtly restricted to those who already matched preconceived ideals? While Eli's selective pre-arrival communication initially filtered guests who aligned with Shoreline's vision, the deeper emotional connection promoted by ongoing pre-arrival exchanges also set them up for the emotionally resonant transformations they were seeking. In the next section, I turn to how Eli's continuous and emotionally engaging digital interactions prior to arrival deepened guests' sense of belonging, shaping their readiness for the wellness experiences they pursued. These ongoing exchanges solidified the foundations laid during initial guest selection, expanding the relational of the "borderzone" (Simoni, 2019), and actively constructing powerful imaginaries (Salazar & Graburn, 2014) that guests brought with them into Shoreline.

7.3 A Chance Encounter and the Beginnings of Emotional Attachment

Claire hadn't planned to stay; it was mid-October 2023, and it was her last full day in Boracay. She and her two friends were wandering along the beach, waiting for the sun to drop and their boat the next morning to the airport. They weren't searching for a kitesurfing school or a community, just a place to pass the time. That's when they met Eli and Rafi, at a local beach bar not too far from Shoreline. The conversation started easily, almost offhand, with small talk about where they were from, where they'd been, and their plans for leaving. "They weren't trying to sell us

anything,” Claire recalled. “It was just, like, normal. Friendly. They told us we should come check out the kite school,” she said. So they did. The beach was quiet, with a few kites still in the air and boards stacked near the water’s edge with a group of guests hanging around after a kite session. “Someone gave us a drink, and then suddenly we were being invited to dinner,” Claire laughed. By that evening, they were being driven uphill on the back of some scooters with a group of guests, heading to the Shoreline residence. “It all happened fast, but it felt natural,” she said (Interview January 26, 2024; Field notes January 2024).

The house buzzed with energy, with a few people cooking in the kitchen and others sitting by the pool. The place felt more like a friend’s home than a guesthouse. Claire later said, “It felt like something I didn’t even know I was looking for.” That night, they stayed over and slept on a couple of couches on the top floor of the residence overlooking the island. “We hadn’t planned to stay, but no one made a big deal of it. It was just like, ‘of course you’re here.’” Claire and her friends left early the next day, but that night continued to stick with her, and she began messaging with Eli and Rafi not long after. At first, it was small things, a thank you for their time and some small talk with the guys who were slowly trying to entice her to come back. Claire started to leave comments on Shoreline’s Instagram stories, keeping active with the community and reminding herself of the impact Shoreline and Boracay had left on her since returning to London. Claire started checking Shoreline’s Instagram stories every morning. She would comment on dinner scenes, the beach parties, and guests hanging out at the treehouse. “It became a habit,” she told me. “I’d wake up, make coffee, and check what was happening there” (Interview January 26, 2024; field notes, January 2024)

When I asked Claire about the types of messages she was getting from Shoreline, she noted that they were daily, sometimes multiple times a day, similar to friends just laughing, complimenting each other, and talking kitesurfing. Eli once sent her a picture of the path to the beach with no caption. Rafi sent a quick video of someone jumping off a boat with a kite trailing behind. “It just made me feel like I was still connected,” she said. “Like I hadn’t totally left. We even had a few video calls together.” When I asked her more directly if she felt the tone of the messages was to get her to come back, she said, “Not always, but they knew I wanted to come back, they knew that.” I then hesitantly asked, not to offend her, if she thought they were trying to get her to come back for the money, and she quickly said, “No, not at all. It was never promotional. It was more

like... here's what's happening. It felt personal. They are always fully booked here, they didn't need my money, and it's actually really cheap" (Interview, January 26, 2024)

At the same time, Claire was also facing a choice back at home in London, where her job had offered her a promotion. "It was a big deal," she said. "Stable money, more responsibility. But I didn't know if I wanted it," she said, adding that she avoided talking to her family about it. "They would've said take it, of course. But I wasn't sure. I needed to figure it out myself. After seeing how the people were living at Shoreline, I couldn't stop thinking about my own life, and what I wanted to do." Instead, she turned to her friends. "I talked to them more about Shoreline and going back for the high season than about the promotion," she admitted. "I kept asking, should I go back?" As she was describing this to me, I noticed how the idea of returning had become more than a holiday decision. "It felt like a test," she said. "Like, if I still felt the same way once I got there, then I'd know something about what I wanted." Claire's hesitation didn't last long. After a month of correspondence with Shoreline and support from her friends, she finally asked Eli if there was space. His reply came quickly: "I haven't checked, I'm in Amsterdam at the moment, but come anyway, we'll find a spot." That message was enough. "That was it," Claire said. "I booked my one-way flight the next day and planned to stay at least a month" (Interview January 26, 2024).

When Claire arrived back in Boracay, it didn't feel like arriving at all. "I didn't even stop to check if I was nervous," she told me. "I just walked in. It was like I had never left," she said. Perhaps this feeling, of walking back into a life that had already been imagined, is what made Claire's return so distinct. It wasn't just that she had been to Shoreline before. It was that she had been watching it, talking to it, and being gently reminded that it still existed, and that she was still remembered. "That message from Eli, 'come anyway', that wasn't about a bed," she said. "It was like, we want you here." This sense of inclusion before arrival reflects what Simoni (2020) describes as the extended borderzone: "Borderzones are not just physical interfaces where tourists and locals meet, but social spaces shaped by expectations, performances, and emotional investments that often precede the actual encounter" (p. 12). Claire's relationship with Shoreline didn't begin at the beach or the residence; it began through a series of emotionally rich communication touchpoints that gave her a sense of belonging long before she re-entered the space. The tone of those communications seemed to matter. Claire described it often in emotional forms, as light and unforced, almost like checking in with a friend. "It was just... them being

normal with me. Being warm. It made me feel like I was already part of it.” She compared Shorelines messages in a similar fashion to way her friends spoke to her, “like I belonged before I showed up.” This return wasn’t centered around escape, but alignment. “I wasn’t running away from London,” she said. “I was trying to figure out if what I felt here the first time was real.” The days leading up to her arrival had been filled with anxiety about work and purpose. “I didn’t want to go back to just doing things. I wanted to feel things again” (Interview January 26, 2024; field notes January - February 2024).

Within hours of arriving, Claire was re-integrated. “From the minute I arrived, someone invited me up to the treehouse,” she told me. “By the end of the first day, it felt like I’d been here forever” (Interview January 26, 2024). This matched my field observations, where she never appeared to be trying to fit in, she simply did. Her re-entry worked not because she demanded space, but because her emotional tone already matched what Shoreline tried to hold together. What struck me most though, was how much her presence helped set the tone. Claire’s openness wasn’t just internal, but social as well. Her animated gestures, expressive face, and ability to make others laugh created warmth around her. Reminding me that curated belonging isn’t only produced by hosts, but also shaped by guests who can carry and reflect the emotional tone. As a researcher still negotiating my own place in the group, I found that being around her made things easier. She was one of the first participants to open up to me and to make sure I was included. She had a way of smoothing over awkwardness, and drawing others in, including me.

During our interview I asked Claire why she thinks Shoreline, and more specifically why this community, seemed to click. She replied, “It’s the energy. I like big energy, people who show emotion, who laugh a lot. That makes me feel safe.” Then added, “But it only works if people respect the place. You can’t treat it like a hostel. You have to take care of it.” That line, “you have to take care of it,” came up more than once in our conversations. For Claire, the feeling of being welcomed wasn’t a free-for-all. It was tied to mutual responsibility. “Respect is key,” she said. “Clean up after yourself, be kind, don’t bring in weird drama. It’s not about rules, it’s about being able to relax together.” Building off this, we started to talk about a recent conflict between Lukas and Tomer, noting how easily things could unravel when that respect wasn’t there. “The vibe is fragile,” she said. “You feel it when someone isn’t aligned.” But for her, alignment came quickly. She described herself as someone who learned to adapt early. “My parents divorced when I was a

kid. I had to figure things out. I moved between my mom and dad a lot. You learn to read people. You learn how to connect fast.” That adaptability, combined with the emotional preparation of pre-arrival communication, seemed to make her return feel less like a choice and more like a continuation (Interview January 26, 2024).

By the second week of her stay, Claire had slipped into a kind of flow. She woke up early, journaled each morning, helped in the kitchen without being asked, and joined kite sessions on the beach. She didn’t talk much about “wellness” in abstract terms, but her actions reflected what Valente-Mosqueda et al. (2025) describe as a search for emotional renewal through wellness activities that often take place in socially and environmentally embedded settings, such as group experiences, outdoor environments, or intersectional social events (pp. 5-8). For Claire, the daily rituals of Shoreline were not just routines, but ways of creating a sense of home.

Her shift from distant observer back in London to a visible participant didn’t just mark a social change, it confirmed the version of Shoreline she had imagined and started inhabiting from a distance. As Salazar and Graburn (2014) write, “Tourism imaginaries are powerful structuring forces. They influence the practices and behaviors of both hosts and guests, often well before actual encounters take place” (p. 16). In Claire’s case, it shows how that structure can enable ease, attachment, and emotional clarity, so long as what’s imagined aligns with what’s lived. One afternoon, while I was hanging out at the beach, I noticed on Shoreline’s Instagram story a couple of posts of her laughing in the treehouse with Irina and Nina, and I decided to ask her about it. “When I saw it, it reminded me exactly how I felt, relaxed, included, just genuinely happy. This is my happy place” (Field notes January 2024). Claire had now shifted from observer to participant. This shift wasn’t just symbolic; she was living her imagined self. She had become a kitesurfer in a community posted on Shoreline’s Instagram. She was now that person, the online figure others were imagining themselves to be.

This movement from watching, to arriving, to living, and then appearing in the very stories she once followed which future guests now imagine themselves into is an example of the imaginary cycle. As Salazar (2012) writes, tourism imaginaries do not circulate freely, but “through well-established conduits,” such as media, marketing, and visual platforms (p. 868). At Shoreline, this conduit was Instagram, algorithmically positioned and emotionally curated. Claire’s sense of

belonging began long before arrival, shaped by the repetition of story snapshots showing group dinners, laughter, and kite sessions. She was not just imagining a destination, she was imagining herself already part of it. Her story reflects the moment Salazar (2012) describes when imaginaries move from narrative to enactment: tourism fantasies help in (re)creating peoples and places (p. 869). By the time Claire returned, she was no longer a viewer. She was becoming part of the imagery that future guests might also come to imagine themselves within. Equally important, this also could have reinforced her belief that her return had been the right decision. “It made me feel like I’d done something for myself,” she said. “Like I’d chosen something real” (Interview January 26, 2024). Still, I wondered whether the strength of that feeling also made it harder to see where the space was shaping her experience, rather than the other way around.

Claire’s feelings of clarity extended into how she described her life in London. “When I went home after the first trip, I kept thinking, what am I doing? I wake up, sit in traffic, go to a job that’s fine but doesn’t mean anything.” She didn’t describe it as burnout, but as a kind of emotional emptiness. “I kept wondering, is this it? Is this how it’s going to be?” Seeing Shoreline online gave her a different vision. “The messages from Eli, the videos, the posts reminded me that something else was possible. That’s what made it hard to ignore.” That feeling, Claire’s sense of being personally invited back, formed the emotional ground for her wellness experience. She repeatedly referred to Shoreline as her “safe place” and her “happy place.” The physical environment helped as well, the bamboo furniture, ocean breeze, wild dogs barking below, it was the emotional consistency that made it stick. “You don’t have to try too hard here,” she said. “You just show up” (Interview January 26, 2024).

Unfortunately, this outcome didn’t happen for everyone. “Some people don’t connect. Or they come in too fast and expect everyone to adjust to them. That never works here.” Claire didn’t say this with judgment, just matter of fact. “It’s not a hotel. It’s something else. You have to want to be part of it. You have to fit the vibe” (Interview January 26, 2024). This shift reveals the fragility of the very same mechanisms that made Claire feel so at home. Like Claire, Lukas was drawn in by emotionally rich communication before arrival, messages filled with warmth, stories, voice recordings, and the promise of creative openness. But where Claire found recognition, Lukas encountered silence. His story shows what happens when the emotional expectations shaped by

hosts aren't met on-site. It illustrates that imagined belonging may be vivid and compelling, but not always fulfilled. And when the promised intimacy breaks, the disappointment cuts deep.

For Claire, that alignment held. The communication she received before returning was personal, friendly, emotionally warm, and reflected in the experience she had when she arrived. In this way, Shoreline's messaging didn't just market a place, it helped her make sense of her life, her goals, and her next steps. It was, in her words, "the first place I felt like I could listen to myself" (Interview January 26, 2024). While not stated explicitly, Dwyer et al. (2019) suggest that meaningful place attachment emerges more easily when emotional expectations about a place are reinforced by lived experiences, particularly through repeated social and spatial interactions (pp. 645-646).

Taken together, Claire's story demonstrates how wellness in tourism is not only encountered on-site, but actively constructed through the emotional tone of pre-arrival communication. I believe her sense of belonging was not accidental, it was curated by way of personal messaging, visual storytelling, and the ongoing invitation to imagine herself already part of the place. In this way, Claire's positive experience reflects the very system outlined throughout this chapter, showing how host-guest relationships begin pre-arrival, priming guests for inclusion and personal growth, and how curated communication, when matched by on-site experience, can support Hartwell's (2016) eudaimonic well-being. As Simoni (2019), Salazar (2012), and others have argued, tourism is never just about moving across space, it is about negotiating imagined futures and lived realities (p. 874). In Claire's case, these elements aligned. Yet, as the next story shows, the same communication practices that prepared one guest for belonging can also set another up for disappointment. This contrast reveals the limits of curated belonging and shows the emotional stakes of selective tourism experiences.

7.4 An Early Investment and the Disappointment of Disconnection

It was on January 25th when I ended up sitting alone with Lukas. I had gone to the residence to interview Aria, only to arrive and find a private party happening upstairs with some guests, most of the kite teachers, including Aria, making him no longer available. The music was loud, the mood lively, and I could hear people laughing and having fun even from the first floor. As I walked up the stairs, not knowing at the time what was going on, I noticed Lukas sitting by himself on the second floor, almost out of place in his stillness. Something about the mood felt uneven. Upstairs

was loud and full of connection; down here, he was alone. Feeling a weird sense that something was off, and that I was missing something, I decided to take a minute and took a seat on the couch across from him, not intending to begin an interview, but a long conversation began to take shape. Over the next four and a half hours (the first 2.5 hours being casual and the following two hours being a formal recorded interview), Lukas and I moved between stories about his open relationship and Tinder profile, his father's windsurfing, his music career, and his desire to feel something different in Boracay. The setting, the time, and the tone all helped me begin to see how expectations and disappointments unfolded, not all at once, but in pieces.

Lukas is 37 year old musician from Germany. When we spoke on the couch that night, his reasons for coming to Shoreline emerged gradually, through anecdotes and half-joking metaphors (Interview, January 25, 2024). He talked about how his music had plateaued, "playing weddings and restaurants instead of festivals," and how he was hoping a change of setting might re-ignite something creatively. There was a softness in the way he described his goals, not with grand declarations, but with the tone of someone trying to reawaken a part of himself. He wasn't just visiting; he was looking for something immersive, a place where energy might spark inspiration. There was something earnest in the way he described wanting to feel excitement again, to make music that mattered. "It's like John Mayer said," he told me, smiling. "You throw the fish back in the water to see if you can catch it again. Maybe even catch a bigger one" (Interview, January 25, 2024; field notes, January 2024).

What initially drew Lukas to Shoreline was not just the appeal of Boracay or kitesurfing, but the tone of communication he received from Eli and Rafi. "They got back to me immediately," he said. "Rafi was super open to my idea of combining kitesurfing with my music," he explained. "The fast response, it was a game-changer." He had written to about 20 different places, mostly hotels and kite schools, but received no responses. Then he messaged Shoreline. They didn't just reply with a confirmation text. Lukas described how they continually sent him short videos of guests laughing in the kitchen, nighttime dinners, and close-up shots of the beach lined with wild dogs and kites, even after he booked his stay. There were clips of kitesurfers lifting off the water, all set to upbeat music. "It felt like I was already there," he said, describing how the sound of the wind and the beach scenes made the place feel alive before he ever arrived. These were not just promotional images; they carried the atmosphere of inclusion, making him feel that the door was

already open, and that someone was holding it for him. In addition to these forms of communication, they also had a few video calls. “Rafi had this calm energy,” Lukas said. “Not harsh. Just open. I really liked that.” That early engagement had a clear emotional effect on Lukas as he reflected further, “I felt wanted. I didn’t even write to anyone else after that” (Interview, January 25, 2024; field notes, January 2024).

When I asked Lukas if the pre-arrival treatment he received made him feel special, he smiled, “Yeah, of course.” Rafi had said, “We’ve never done this before, but why not try it?” referring to the idea of allowing Lukas to play and work on his music in the residence alongside kiting. Lukas said that the tone of those calls was casual but encouraging, as if Rafi genuinely believed in the idea and was open to experimenting. “It wasn’t formal, it felt like talking to a friend who wanted me to come over,” Lukas recalled. That easy-going warmth created an emotional connection that went beyond logistics. These weren’t generic messages. They were intentionally crafted to make Lukas feel anticipated and emotionally welcomed. He felt like their investment was in him and not just in his reservation. “They said, ‘We’d love to have you here.’ That felt really good” (Interview, January 25, 2024; field notes, January 2024).

As Simoni (2020) explains, borderzones involve more than physical proximity; they are shaped by emotional tone, imagined scripts, and prior expectations (p. 12). Lukas’s connection to Shoreline had already begun taking shape through emotional messaging, curated media, and personalized attention, all before he stepped on the island, in a way that aligns with Hartwell’s (2016) argument that emotional experiences such as a sense of purpose and social connectedness are core aspects of eudaimonic tourism (p. 2). However, the warmth didn’t last. Lukas liked to call himself a “snowflake,” someone unique, someone who doesn’t always blend in. “Sometimes being a snowflake is good,” he said. “You’re special, but sometimes it’s bad and people don’t want that. They want you to be like them” (Interview, January 25, 2024). This idea came up often in our conversations. He said that most people at Shoreline seemed to be “kitesurfers first, not a kitesurfer second or third.” Lukas claimed he wasn’t, and that he was a musician first who also loved kiting, and that difference seemed to set him apart from the beginning.

Lukas arrived in Boracay with high expectations, ready to kitesurf during the day and play music in the evenings. At first, things seemed fine, but very quickly, he noticed a shift. “Eli and Rafi

seemed busy,” he said. “Rafi especially, he was cold, not how he was before.” Lukas described how Rafi, once warm and responsive on WhatsApp, now barely acknowledged him. “I saw him joking around with Leo and Aria. But with me, it was like I wasn’t even there” (Interview, January 25, 2024). Personally, I observed several moments like this. They weren’t loud or openly hostile, but they carried weight. They showed up in glances, in silences, in small missed chances to connect. One of the most noticeable examples happened on January 24th, when I was talking one-on-one with Irina in the kitchen and Lukas walked in. Irina instantly rolled her eyes, cut herself off mid-sentence, and walked out. The shift in atmosphere was immediate. Lukas hesitated mid-step, then quietly walked past us toward the fridge, avoiding eye contact. I didn’t say anything, but I noted the tension. It was one of several moments that made Lukas’s exclusion visible. These acts of exclusion, however subtle, point to how belonging at Shoreline is curated not only through invitation, but also through silence and selective interaction, not just in what was said, but in what was withheld.

Lukas also had a falling-out with Tomer, a main group member, which I return to in the next chapter. He didn’t go into detail at first, but the consequences were noticeable. In addition to the main WhatsApp thread, I learned that other informal subgroups had formed with some relying on in-person planning, others on selective messaging. Lukas said he would often hear about activities the next day, after they had already happened. This created a dual-layered communication system, one that functioned both digitally and socially to reinforce belonging or exclusion.

He and Michael, another guest, were left out of dinners and social plans. “We weren’t on the group chats,” he told me. “They planned things in person and never told us. So we just... weren’t there.” (Interview, January 25, 2024). The warmth of pre-arrival messaging had made Lukas feel chosen. But the absence of follow-through, being left out of group chats and not included to some dinners amplified a disconnect that felt quietly humiliating. It wasn’t just disappointing. It made the gap between imagined welcome and lived reality feel more acute. Salazar and Graburn (2014) argue that tourism imaginaries are “constructed and transmitted through mediated discourses” (p. 16), which shape not only anticipation but interpretation. Lukas’s expectations had been carefully nurtured through Shoreline’s communication, the videos, chats, even the sense of being “chosen.” But when those expectations weren’t met, the emotional cost was more than disappointment. It left him exposed.

As my fieldwork unfolded, I found myself caught between roles when it came to Lukas. I liked him, we had long thoughtful conversations. But I also noticed the more time I spent with him, the more others distanced themselves from me. One night at a local dance club, I felt that shift in full, and I had to decide: do I stay close to Lukas and risk being pushed to the edges, or do I step back to stay included in the main group? The dilemma I faced felt more than strategic, it felt personal. I was aware that aligning myself with Lukas, who had already been marked as an outsider, could affect how others saw me, not only socially, but also in terms of legitimacy within the group. I recall sensing the subtle shift in body language from others when I stood too close to him. I chose to distance myself from him, but it wasn't a clean or easy decision. It was shaped by my own desire to remain in the field, to not be closed off from the interactions I had come to study. The ethics of fieldwork are not always clear-cut. Loyalty, empathy, and access are often in tension, and I began to see how my own position was shaped by the very social dynamics I was trying to understand. And yet, I still reflect on the ethics of that choice, the discomfort of prioritizing access over solidarity, and what it revealed about the fine line between participation and complicity. It wasn't easy, and I still think about what that choice says about belonging at Shoreline. That moment continued to influence the remainder of my time on site. It revealed something that I would keep returning to later: inclusion at Shoreline wasn't just about being physically present. It required emotional synchronization, timing, and a feel for unspoken group signals.

As Hartwell (2016) points out, wellness tourism depends not only on beautiful surroundings or activities, but on emotional connection and a sense of inclusion (p. 13). In Lukas's case, the emotionally rich pre-arrival communication of personal calls, tailored videos, and enthusiastic voice messages heightened the emotional cost when that same care wasn't extended on-site. The space that had once felt designed around him, where music, identity, and adventure might align, began to slip out of reach. Lukas never said it outright, but there was a heaviness in the way he described his days that made the absence of belonging almost tangible. He often talked about watching others leave together for dinner, or realizing after the fact that an event had been planned without him. The feeling of being left out, and going unseen, seemed to gnaw at him, slowly dimming the excitement that had built up before his arrival. What he had imagined as a place of inclusion began to feel like a space he had to move through cautiously, unsure of where he stood. Watching the group from a distance, Lukas described how he saw others thriving. "Selin told me

on her first day, she felt like she'd been here for a month," Lukas said. "For me, it never felt like that." Eli had told him on arrival, "Once you're here, you'll never want to leave." Lukas said, "I see that in other people, but I don't think it'll happen for me" (Interview, January 25, 2024).

For Lukas, his perceived alignment fell apart. What had been warm and immediate before arrival turned cool and distant on-site. Lukas put it simply: "I thought they were excited to have me, but now it's like I'm invisible" (Interview, January 25, 2024). He described trying to engage others after kite sessions, only to be brushed off mid-conversation. In field site observations at the treehouse, I witnessed this several times. That disconnect became the emotional center of our final interview. Lukas spoke not with anger, but with confusion, trying to reconcile the vision he had been invited into with the experience he was living. As I listened to him, I started to realize how much weight pre-arrival communication carries on the micro level of individual expectations, and also at the meso level of group dynamics and the macro level of tourism strategy. The messages he received were deeply personal, shaping his sense of self and purpose for travel. Yet they also reflected Shoreline's broader efforts to attract guests through curated messaging, centering on lifestyle and inclusion. His disappointment wasn't isolated. It was a window into how communication intersects with identity-making and social cohesion in small-scale tourism spaces. When that connection is not maintained, the break feels personal. In this sense, Lukas's experience sheds light on the fragility of curated belonging: when emotional alignment is promised but not sustained, the result can feel like personal failure rather than structural exclusion.

Lukas's story also opened a space for me to reflect on my own presence. As someone navigating the roles of ethnographer and participant, I became increasingly aware of how my own interactions mirrored the exchanges I was studying. My experience of being included or distanced, depending on who I spent time with, echoed Lukas's trajectory. It reminded me that host-guest relationships are not fixed; they are co-produced, negotiated, and sometimes fragile. This realization brought me back to my research question about how host communication shapes wellness and belonging. It made me think not just about what was communicated, but how those messages lived or unraveled once someone stepped into the physical space. I had arrived at Shoreline as a researcher, but quickly found myself swept into the group. My relationship with Lukas made me question how I was being seen, who I aligned with, and what that meant. Ethnography isn't just about observation; it's about being implicated. This fieldwork made that especially clear.

As I listened to Lukas talk about how things had changed from what he expected, I began to think again about Salazar and Graburn's (2014) idea of tourism imaginaries. They describe how imagined versions of places can strongly influence experiences. In Lukas's case, the imaginary of Shoreline as both a creative retreat and a welcoming community felt real at first, but slowly faded. His story reminded me that these imaginaries are not invulnerable. They can shift, break, or dissolve in the face of subtle social exclusion. The idea of Shoreline as a creative, welcoming space was not false, but it wasn't universal. For some, like Claire and Irina, that imaginary held strong. For Lukas and Isabel, it did not.

Lukas's case helps bridge this chapter to the next. While guests like Claire and Irina found their pre-arrival imaginaries reinforced by a warm and continuous host relationship, Lukas's experience reveals the other side of how carefully constructed expectations can fray when the on-site reality doesn't match the promise. His story illustrates that host communication doesn't just build anticipation. It forms belonging, wellness, and social positioning. By showing where this system breaks down, Lukas helps shift our attention from the imagined to the lived. He reminds us that curated messaging alone cannot sustain emotional connection or personal change. What matters is how those messages are embodied and maintained on site.

In the chapter above, I focused on how pre-arrival messaging creates emotional pathways into Shoreline. Lukas's experience shows that this pathway is not guaranteed to lead where the guest hopes. Chapter 2 continues this thread by asking what happens when those imaginaries are challenged, when the dream of belonging meets the friction of daily group life, emotional fatigue, or exclusion. Lukas's story opens the door to a closer examination of how communication, once on site, becomes more complex, inconsistent, or even disorienting, themes explored in the next chapter.

7.5 Discussion: Curating Belonging Before Arrival

In this chapter, I have identified how pre-arrival communication at Shoreline helped construct emotional expectations, shaped guest imaginaries, and functioned as a soft form of selection. Through interviews, messaging histories, and my own observations, I was able to trace how guests were not just informed, but emotionally prepared by the tone, timing, and personal style of pre-

arrival interaction. At Shoreline, communication was more than logistical; it acted as an emotional overture, setting the tone for the kind of experience the trip was imagined to become.

During my fieldwork, I began to notice that the way people entered Shoreline, the timing of their invitation, how they were spoken to, and how quickly they were answered carried meaning that went far beyond logistics. Claire's excitement, for instance, wasn't just about returning to a place she already loved. It was built through messages that made her feel remembered, wanted, and emotionally connected. Lukas, on the other hand, described a sense of early intimacy and validation that in hindsight, may have raised his expectations too high. I also began to see that access to this emotional "onboarding" was not evenly distributed. Some potential guests received quick replies, voice notes, or personalized encouragement. Others were met with silence, slow responses, or no invitation at all. While Eli and Rafi rarely described this as selection, it was clear that they were filtering for social compatibility, what they often called "energy," or an intuitive sense of emotional and interpersonal fit. As Simoni (2019) notes, tourism spaces are often shaped by informal social scripts and host-guest negotiations (p. 113). While he highlights the informal nature of host-guest decisions, my data shows that even casual or unspoken forms of communication can have lasting emotional consequences. At Shoreline, this process was subtle, relational, and rarely made explicit but it had visible outcomes. Some guests were drawn in early and often, while others were filtered out before they ever arrived.

This chapter contributes to answering my research question by showing that host communication does not merely welcome guests; it actively shapes how they emotionally anticipate their trip and prepares them to interpret their experience through a lens of wellness and personal growth. The tone, responsiveness, and selectivity of pre-arrival exchanges act as a kind of emotional script, setting expectations well before the guest even arrives. In doing so, communication becomes an early structure for belonging, one that is felt rather than formalized.

I use the term *curated belonging* here to describe this process, a pattern of communication and emotional signaling that selectively draws people in and helps them interpret their place within the imagined community of Shoreline. This is not a question of overt control, but of the small, affective gestures, tone, timing, perceived sincerity that shaped who felt drawn in. As this chapter has shown, belonging at Shoreline was often prepared before it was lived, through moments of warmth,

responsiveness, or silence that helped guests anticipate what kind of experience they were stepping into. Neville and Reicher's (2011) work on shared identity and collective participation helps clarify how emotional connection at Shoreline is not simply a result of being present in the same space, but of perceiving others as similar. Their research shows that when participants in collective events feel a shared identity with those around them, social barriers seem to dissolve, allowing strangers to feel like friends (p. 383). This was reflected in Claire's experience, where she described feeling "at home" almost immediately, even though when she arrived there was no one on site that she knew from before. What guests described as "good energy" or "a vibe that just fits" can be seen as a process of recognizing shared social markers of lifestyle, attitude, humor that make people feel emotionally connected. However, as Neville and Reicher (2011) also demonstrate, this emotional ease breaks down when participants do not perceive shared identity (p. 386). This was especially visible in Lukas's experience, where the emotional tone shifted from excitement to detachment as he struggled to feel recognized as part of the group. Shoreline's communication practices, from selective guest invitations to on-site attention to group energy, seem to operate as mechanisms for managing this process of inclusion using perceived similarity. This includes my *imaginary cycle*, a sequence where guests first imagine the experience through Shoreline's social media posts and messages, then enact those imaginaries on site, and finally become part of the visual material that draws in the next guests. These observations suggest that belonging at Shoreline is not open to all, but carefully managed through emotional and social alignment, echoing what Neville and Reicher (2011) describe as the emotional rewards and costs of collective participation.

Naming this process helped me recognize what many guests described but didn't always name themselves, the sense that being part of the group was something subtly crafted, and that this emotional alignment mattered. This, I argue, is where curated belonging begins. Before any group dinners, kitesurf lessons, or late-night chats, guests were already participating in a process of emotional alignment. Through digital tone, timing, and perceived sincerity, Shoreline signaled not only who was welcome, but how they should feel when they arrived.

This raises potential questions about how access to wellness spaces is granted. Who gets to enter into these emotionally resonant tourism experiences? Who is considered a good fit, and based on what criteria? While Shoreline's selection process was not explicitly exclusive, it relied on

communication styles, digital literacy, emotional openness, and certain types of capital, mainly physical and financial. Guests who understood how to perform sincerity, enthusiasm, or playfulness in their early messages, or intuitively expressed the kinds of emotions that resonated with the hosts' expectations, were more likely to be brought in. This process reflects Simoni's (2019) concept of the touristic borderzone, where inclusion is shaped not by formal rules, but by emotional tone, perceived compatibility, and informal gestures. At Shoreline, this emotional borderzone begins long before arrival, taking shape in the form of selective messaging, voice notes, and tone-sensitive responsiveness (p. 113).

I also uncovered the question of emotional risk. As I have shown, early connection was often experienced as something deeply meaningful, something that made guests feel seen or even special. But this same depth could become a point of friction later on. When on-site experiences didn't align with the tone of pre-arrival messaging, guests could feel misled or confused. As Salazar and Graburn (2014) point out, tourists rarely arrive empty-handed; they carry shared imaginaries of what an experience is supposed to feel like, and these imaginaries are often reinforced by host messaging (pp. 1-10). Lukas's story illustrates this: the same hosts who had made him feel excited and validated in advance later appeared distracted or withdrawn. For him, the dissonance between imagined welcome and lived interaction shaped the entire arc of his stay.

These shifts invite a more critical reflection on what communication can actually do in wellness tourism. It doesn't just convey information, it produces feeling. It creates an emotional framework that primes guests to experience their trip in a particular way, often viewed through the lens of personal self-development or healing. As Hartwell (2016) proposes, tourism marketed with well-being narratives often centers purpose, meaning, and connection (p. 11), but these ideals are not automatically realized. They require emotional labor before, during, and after arrival. For Shoreline, that labor began well before anyone arrived on-site. They were not simply selling a product; they were co-creating a shared storyline. Communication became the bridge between marketing and meaning, between fantasy and participation, and between inclusion or exclusion. But bridges can sway, and not all guests crossed them with ease. Some felt supported, others found the connection unsteady or incomplete.

Looking back, I see the pre-arrival period not just as preparation for the trip, but as a threshold. It is an in-between space where belonging is imagined, extended, and quietly negotiated. As a researcher, I found myself moving through this threshold too, shaping my own messages in the group chat and in private conversations, aware that how I communicated affected how I was received. This part of the fieldwork reminded me that ethnography does not begin with arrival. It begins the moment we are either invited into, or quietly held at the edge of the spaces we hope to understand. In Chapter 1 I traced how Shoreline filtered guests and built emotional anticipation through pre-arrival communication, Chapter 2 turns to what unfolds next. It asks what becomes of those promises when guests arrive, when excitement wears thin, and when in-person social dynamics take over. Where Chapter 1 followed how belonging was initiated via digital communication, Chapter 2 focuses on how it is lived, sustained, or sometimes unsettled on-site.

8 Belonging in Practice: Feeling Chosen, Feeling Left Out

8.1 Introduction

In Chapter 1, I examined how Shoreline used pre-arrival communication through Instagram posts, private messages, and selective guest filtering to shape expectations and build emotional investment before guests even arrived. I argued that this early messaging not only shaped who felt invited to come, but also encouraged guests to imagine emotional connection, personal growth, and self-discovery as part of what their trip could offer. In this chapter, I shift the focus to what happens after arrival, exploring how communication (both spoken and unspoken) shapes the emotional experience of being there. Here, I look at how group belonging is built or disrupted through everyday interactions, including shared meals, body language, digital group chats, and the social signs that shape inclusion or distance. I also look at moments of emotional mismatch or exclusion, particularly when guests' expectations meet the reality of group life.

While this chapter centers on on-site communication, I also reflect on what happens after guests leave, considering how feelings of connection or personal change extend through memory, messaging, and post-trip reflection. Toward the end of the chapter, I introduce more critical cases where inclusion falters, emotional pressure builds, or curated belonging breaks down. Although rarely discussed openly, I reflect on how financial and mobility barriers shaped who could participate, stay longer, or return and how the same practices that build inclusion can also create feelings of exclusion or pressure, revealing the emotional stakes of belonging at Shoreline.

Guiding this chapter is the same research question introduced earlier: How does pre-arrival and on-site host communication at Shoreline Kitesurfing Center shape experiences of wellness, personal growth, and belonging, in a short-term tourism setting? I continue with the argument that greater well-being outcomes in tourism can be actively shaped through host-initiated communication, both before and during a guest's stay. Drawing on Simoni's (2019) understanding of tourism sites as "borderzones," along with his (2020) extension of the idea to include expectations formed before arrival, I examine how informal and often unspoken social practice's shape inclusion and exclusion on site. This is complemented by Salazar and Graburn's (2014)

reminder that tourists do not arrive as blank slates, but carry imaginaries of connection, healing, and excitement (pp. 4, 9). At Shoreline, these expectations are either reinforced or quietly challenged through daily interactions between hosts, instructors, and guests.

Building on Hartwell's (2016) distinction between hedonic and eudaimonic tourism, I suggest that Shoreline presents itself as a space for personal growth, purpose, and emotional connection, with communication playing a principal role in sustaining that narrative, shaping how guests interpret their experience as meaningful and personally significant. However, this process also involves emotional labor. Hosts and instructors work to maintain a sense of care, positivity, and shared purpose. Eli's motivational style helps guests feel like participants rather than clients. Yet this responsibility can be emotionally demanding. As the chapter will show, even those who seem fully integrated sometimes describe quiet anxieties about fitting in, keeping up, or being left out.

This chapter also asks what happens when emotional expectations are not fulfilled. As Hindley and Marmion (2019) suggest, the social environment within tourism spaces plays a significant role in shaping how guests experience well-being (p. 4). If belonging is curated, what are the emotional costs of falling outside its boundaries? How do social markers, host energy and attention, and peer interaction not only support wellness but also create pressure or prompt withdrawal? Following Frohlick and Harrison (2008), I include my own presence and emotional responses as part of the ethnographic record. The times I felt welcomed, overlooked, or affected shaped what I could notice and how I interpreted it. Like other guests I observed, I was influenced by the group's tone and drawn into its everyday rituals, making my reactions a part of the fieldwork itself.

The chapter takes shape through five sections:

- The first section examines how both digital and face-to-face communication shaped moments of participation and exclusion, using Pizza Night as a representative example.
- The second section details how subtle, everyday interactions supported emotional ease and belonging through stories from Joy and Irina.
- The third section looks beyond the island to reflect on emotional carryover after departure, comparing Irina's continued connection with BJ's post-trip disorientation.

- The fourth section offers a more critical view, exploring how communication can create pressure, emotional labor, and quiet forms of gatekeeping, using examples from Lukas, Isabel, and long-term hosts.
- The fifth and final section offers a short discussion bringing the chapter's examples together to reflect on how communication shapes belonging, pressure, and emotional meaning at Shoreline.

These sections draw on a combination of interviews, digital group chats, field notes, and participant observation collected during my time at Shoreline. I argue that communication does not simply support the tourism experience; it makes the experience possible. It shapes expectations, reinforces group norms, conditions emotional relationships, and guides how people participate and feel. At Shoreline, wellness was not something accidental. It was carefully shaped through host communication, social tone, and repeated emotional signals, sustained by those willing or able to meet its terms. In doing so, this chapter contributes to the understanding of how short-term tourism spaces like Shoreline use communication to shape emotional belonging and present guest experiences as meaningful, whether or not they fully succeed.

8.2 On-site Communication in Action: The Case of Pizza Night

In this section, I outline the lead-up to, and the experience of, a group dinner that took place on Monday, January 22nd, known as “pizza night.” These dinner plans slowly came together through casual conversations at the treehouse, back-and-forth texts in the Shoreline WhatsApp group chat, and a mix of opinions about whether to stay in and cook at the residence or go out to a restaurant. I use this day to show how plans were made, how people communicated across physical and digital spaces, and how certain gestures and decisions signaled inclusion and exclusion. By staying with this single evening, I show how seemingly small acts of coordination, like who was included in digital threads, how plans were confirmed, and who took on quiet roles of social management, reflect the curated belonging I observed throughout my fieldwork. These moments reveal how communication not only organized activities, but shaped emotional access to group participation and the feeling of being part of something more than just a temporary community.

It didn't start as a plan, not exactly. It started as something softer, more like a low buzz that slowly picked up after lunch in the treehouse. All morning the kitesurfers were drifting in and out, shaking

rain off their shoulders, settling onto the couches and hammocks, half-scrolling, half-talking. Most of the time I was sitting next to BJ on the bar bench near the railing, both of us working and watching the water with no wind in sight. We were talking about the previous day and how it had ended quietly with a movie night at the residence, where a few people had lounged around on the floor, watching a movie Irina chose without much conversation. BJ described it as the tail end of Saturday night's club outing, after everyone had used up their energy and now there wasn't much left to give.

This Monday didn't offer much to work with either, the rain kept coming and going, and the beach stayed empty. I could feel an uneasiness building as people grew restless, like they needed something to break the quiet. By early afternoon, talk started to pick up between Irina, Leo, and Claire. They moved in and out of the treehouse, tossing ideas back and forth about what to do for dinner, what to cook? Should we stay in? Should we go out? It felt like no one really wanted to make the call. Some were fine with another night at the residence, but others were obviously hoping for more. Claire dropped onto the bench beside us, pulling her wet hoodie tighter around her shoulders. "I need a night out," she groaned, rubbing her face, as if the idea of another quiet night might crush her. A few of the core group members sent Rafi a private message to see what he thought, and then someone posted in the Shoreline WhatsApp group asking for ideas. I wasn't in that group chat yet, and not knowing there was one, I hadn't really thought much about it until that instant. Moments later I leaned toward BJ and asked who was in the chat, and if that was how things usually got planned. He glanced at me, then turned his phone toward us both, scrolling through the thread.

I watched as the messages stacked up: weather updates, dinner plans, reminders, and little jokes. It was like the heartbeat of the house appeared directly on his screen. I asked if I could read a few of the dinner messages, "for research purposes," half-jokingly. He handed me the phone without hesitation, and we leaned in together, reading through the thread. "Who's got dinner ideas?", "Home-made or let's go out?" Then Aria replied with "I don't feel like cooking," which carried weight since he did most of it. Claire immediately jumped in, backing the idea of going out. BJ typed something in agreement. Then Selin added, "I can go, but not too expensive, Saturday night was a lot." There were a few more exchanges before Eli posted a message that shifted the energy completely: "50% off pizzas and drinks at Cabana restaurant tonight for kitesurfers. Station 1, on

the beach. There's also a little dance club on the top floor." The reactions came in quickly with likes, emojis, and short replies from Leo, Irina, BJ, Aria, Claire, and others whose names I didn't know yet. Sitting there on the edge of the conversation, it felt like the decision had already been made.

About five or six of us were still in the treehouse when they started checking the weather again, agreeing that if it stayed dry, we'd meet around 7 or 7:30. Someone called out a rough headcount, "About fifteen people, yeah?" before sending a confirmation back to Eli in the chat which all played out over a couple of hours. On the surface, the chat and the place looked casual, just people hanging out, talking, passing the time, but I could feel a quiet coordination underneath. The plan wasn't coming from one person, but it also wasn't random. There was a flow, a pattern, a kind of soft coordination running between the face-to-face moments and the WhatsApp thread. Watching from the side, I realized how much I had been missing by not being part of that digital space, not just the plans, but the subtle sense of inclusion, of being visible in the group even when nothing seemed to be happening. People said I was welcome, but it didn't feel stable. I was being pulled in verbally, but I couldn't shake the feeling that I was hovering just outside the real flow of things. I wasn't staying in the residence, so I couldn't overhear the last-minute shifts, the calls from the hallway, the quick kitchen updates, the sound of people getting ready together. Without a phone data plan, I was cut off as soon as I left the beach Wi-Fi each day until I got back into my hotel room and I continually kept thinking: What if they change the time? What if they move to another place? What if it gets canceled and I'm the only one who doesn't know? I noticed the tension building in my body especially in my tight shoulders. I felt the small, creeping anxiety that I might miss something, and that it would somehow mean I had stepped back from the group, even if I hadn't meant to. Would they think I bailed? Would that small distance undo the connection I had started to build?

Part of me wanted to get into the WhatsApp group to study it, to see how people communicated when they weren't physically together. But if I'm honest, it wasn't just for research. I wanted in. I wanted to send a thumbs-up, reply to a joke, and post messages like everyone else. I wanted to be part of it. Digital inclusion didn't just feel like a research tool; it felt like subtle social proof that I belonged. Sitting there with BJ, I must have given something away in my face or the way I kept

glancing at his phone. He leaned toward me, dropped his voice a little, and said, “Go ask Rafi. You’re one of us. You’re kitesurfing, hanging out, doing interviews.”

By the time I decided to head back to my hotel, most of the others had already drifted off, heading back to the residence to get ready. Fortunately, Rafi was still on site, sitting in the kite office working on his computer. I walked in slowly and waited until he looked up, then I asked trying to sound casual if he could add me to the Shoreline WhatsApp group. He didn’t hesitate. “Of course,” pulling out his phone and tapping away without looking up. A few seconds later my phone buzzed. I was in, and the shift I felt was stronger than I expected. For a place that looked as relaxed as it gets, bare feet in the sand, hammocks swaying, no real schedules, I felt something internal lift. I didn’t have to keep asking around or guessing. I could now follow the same thread as everyone else, read what they were reading, reply when they replied. It felt like a deeper kind of invitation; one I hadn’t wanted to ask for too directly, but had been quietly hoping for since I arrived. While it felt casual in the moment, being added to the WhatsApp group made me realize how much access to plans and belonging depended on quiet acts of permission. It wasn’t a public decision, but a private one, controlled by those already inside. This made me think about how easily people could be left out, not only because they were unwelcome, but because they simply weren’t added, seen, or remembered in time.

After leaving the beach around 4 p.m., I headed back to my hotel. I stretched out on the bed, phone in hand, refreshing the Shoreline WhatsApp group every few minutes. There wasn’t much activity, which made sense, most of the group was probably already back at the residence, talking face-to-face, sorting things out in real time. Even though I was in the group now, I stayed quiet. I didn’t want to overstep, not on my first day in. I watched the silence in the thread for a while before finally messaging BJ directly at 6:02 p.m.: “Hey BJ, it’s David. You guys heading to the pizza place for 7:30?” He instantly replied: “Haha yep!” I wrote back: “Ok cool, I’ll head there soon.” BJ: “Same, hopefully it stops raining.” I stared at the last message for a moment. The rain had picked up again and without data, I knew the risk. I could easily miss an update while walking, a change of plan, a canceled dinner, a new meeting spot but I didn’t want to hesitate any longer as it had already taken me days to get to this point. At 7:00, I threw on my jacket, left the hotel Wi-Fi behind, and started walking toward Station 1 and the Cabana restaurant in the rain.

The restaurant was dimly lit, half-empty, and the staff seemed only semi-aware of what I was looking for and I started to feel that familiar tension again. Was I too early? In the wrong place? Had I missed something? Then at 7:25, BJ messaged: “Arriving now! Are you already here?” I made my way back to the entrance when I replied: “I’m out front.” (WhatsApp messages, January 22, 2024). Even though I had already walked up and down all three levels of Cabana, trying not to look as unsure as I felt. Moments later I looked up and BJ waved from the terrace where he was already sitting at a low table in the lounge with two mojitos in front of him. I felt a quiet rush of relief as I went back in and sat down across from him. For the next twenty minutes, we waited together. During this time BJ kept checking his phone, sending out photos of the menu to the group chat and also privately so everyone could pre-order. He leaned over to show me the messages, explaining that Cabana was notoriously slow and in sending the menu out they could beat the wait. It didn’t feel like he was just managing logistics, It felt like he was doing something more, saving time, prepping everyone on the half-price menu items, or perhaps trying to stay connected, keeping updated on what was happening elsewhere. He was doing the invisible work of holding the evening together before it had really started.

As we sipped our drinks, BJ kept messaging Irina, updating her on where we were sitting, and who had arrived. I asked him who else was coming from the house and he listed a few names, “Claire, Leo, Aria, Eli, Shy guy,” then he stopped, with no mention of Nina, Michael, or Lukas. I asked about Lukas and BJ shook his head lightly. “No. He doesn’t really come to these things.” silence hung there for a second before BJ went back to his phone. To be fair, I wasn’t surprised when BJ said Lukas wouldn’t be coming. I was starting to take it as a given, not something to check or question. Moments like this reminded me how easy it is for social gaps to feel accepted, with people who aren’t part of the coordination quietly slipping further to the edges without anyone really noticing. This contrasts with the way wellness tourism is often represented in the literature as an open and socially beneficial experience. Hartwell (2016) and Valente-Mosqueda et al. (2025) suggest that wellness tourism supports emotional connection, social belonging, and personal growth for all participants (p. 6; p. 33). Yet my data shows that these outcomes depend on quiet acts of social filtering. Being part of the group that night wasn’t just about showing up. It started earlier, in digital channels, face-to-face moments, and soft invitations that some, like Lukas, were

never fully part of. What looks like open community can, in practice, be carefully curated through selective emotional and communicative inclusion (Field notes, January 22, 2024).

The first to arrive after BJ and I were Irina, Aria, Leo, and Claire. Not long after, the Turkish crew of kitesurfers showed up, six or seven arriving all at once, filling the entrance with sound and motion. The shift in the restaurant was immediate. The space, which had been half-empty and low energy, suddenly felt loud and alive. Staff started dragging tables together, pushing smaller groups to the edges to make room for us. I watched as the long table took shape, taking over the room as if we had reserved it. As people gathered, the volume kept climbing along with hugs, cheek kisses, and arms slinging over shoulders. It didn't look like a group of tourists who'd only just met, it looked like a reunion, like people who already had something in common. Most of the guys were wearing loose Hawaiian shirts, open to the middle of their chests, paired with shorts and worn-out flip-flops. By contrast, the women had dressed with more visible care, long dresses, sandals and some makeup. It wasn't overdone, but you could tell effort had been made as it was casual, but not careless. The contrast caught my attention, like an unspoken split in how people showed up, one that seemed small but somehow meaningful. The seating felt almost choreographed and without much discussion, the Turkish crew settled toward the far end, helping staff finish setting up. The rest of us drifted toward the middle with the seat at the head of the table, closest to the stairs open, left for Eli and Rafi, though no one said it out loud. I noticed the small details of how the group arranged itself, how people seemed to know, without being told, where they fit. Even after most of us were seated, the WhatsApp group stayed active. People were still messaging Eli and Rafi, getting their orders in early. BJ sent another round of menu screenshots, making sure no one missed the chance to order ahead and it felt like the digital thread was still holding us together, even though we were sitting side by side. These updates weren't just functional; they helped create a shared sense of what the night should feel like. As Salazar and Graburn (2014) note, tourism imaginaries circulate through communicative acts, shaping what kinds of experiences are anticipated and enacted in the first place (p. 1-2). In this case, pre-arrival messaging extended into the evening itself, syncing those who were still enroute and holding the group together across distance.

Rafi, Eli and his Filipino girlfriend finally walked in about twenty minutes later and I ended up sitting beside her, with Eli just beyond. It wasn't planned, but it was the second time in three nights that I'd sat beside the two of them. Small as it was, it felt like another quiet step toward being

inside something I'd been circling since I arrived. The Cabana restaurant was the kind of place designed to look laid-back, whitewashed walls, blue trim, open windows facing the beach. It had the kind of styling that could have been lifted from a postcard of the Greek Islands. From where I sat, I guessed it could fit maybe eighty people on the second floor with our table stretched through the middle. Around us, smaller groups sat at their own tables, and I noticed more than a few watching ours. Maybe I imagined it, but from where I sat, our group didn't look like passing tourists. It looked like something tighter, more rooted, like a crew. Pizzas were cheap, half price for kitesurfers around six euros and the drinks even cheaper. People were ordering without hesitation, multiple pizzas, extra drinks resulting in slices and glasses being shared across the table without anyone really announcing it. I found myself leaning in, shifting to let others pass food, reaching for a slice, raising a glass when someone caught my eye. The table felt small for the number of people, but no one seemed to care. Knees bumped, arms brushed which felt ordinary by now.

The mood of the table swung between quick, playful exchanges and louder bursts of group laughter. Conversations looped around kitesurfing, weather, gear and at one point, two of the Turkish guys pitched the idea of taking a kite trip to another island for coffee. People nodded politely, but no one from Shoreline really picked it up. The energy felt grounded here, no one seemed ready to jump to the next thing just yet. Still, I noticed the table wasn't fully unified all of the time. The Turkish group, while part of the buzz, also felt a little like its own sub-group, talking more with each other than with the rest of us. It wasn't a barrier exactly, but there were moments when it felt like two parallel groups sharing the same space. Throughout the night I noticed there were things no one talked about, topics like age, family, or jobs stayed unspoken. No one asked me how old I was, or whether I had kids and I didn't offer this information up or ask others either. It made me think about what people leave out, the parts of life that feel too weighty or too defining to bring into a space like this and I knew from experience, how quickly being labeled "divorced dad" could shift how people saw me. Burns (2024) talks about this when describing tourism's potential to reconfigure personal identity, offering spaces where individuals can momentarily step outside the social roles that typically define them (p. 9). I wasn't ready to carry that here. Here, it felt easier to stay light, undefined.

Noticeably, no one complained about the rain. No one mentioned the slow service, even when food came late or was wrong, as it was met with teasing, not frustration. The earlier coordination in the WhatsApp group had done its job. By the time everyone was seated, the night felt like it was running on its own. It felt practiced, as if the ease of the moment had been rehearsed long before I ever arrived.

After the meal, most of us wandered upstairs to the top floor, a small dance lounge with low lights, music playing and a couple of bars. The Turkish crew said their goodbyes at the stairs, slipping out with quick handshakes and waves while the rest of us, mostly the Shoreline group clustered into one corner of the room. Eli was stretched out on the couch; his girlfriend's legs draped across his lap. Rafi sat at the other end, with a drink in his hand. BJ leaned against the edge of the couch, sitting on a pillow. Shy Guy, someone who never spoke much, had settled on the floor in front of Irina, letting her press her hands into his shoulders, slow and steady. Leo and Claire had squeezed into a lounge chair together, legs tangled, heads tilted close. I pulled up a low chair beside them, close enough to feel part of it without having to say much. I observed that no one looked uncomfortable and the closeness felt natural. People leaned on each other without hesitation, arms draped, knees touching, hands brushing without apology. It was the kind of ease that only shows up when a group has already crossed the invisible line between strangers and something more. It felt lived-in, familiar, like a house party at a friend's place rather than a restaurant lounge in a tourist town.

After another round of drinks and quiet exchanges, Eli and his girlfriend stood up, stretching, saying they were calling it a night. Rafi and Shy Guy followed along with them. As our group thinned out, the rest of us decided to leave shortly after, but our energy didn't dip. BJ, Irina, Leo, Claire, and I piled into a tuk-tuk outside with our bodies pressing in to fit. I ended up wedged between Claire and BJ, knees knocking, shoulders touching. The ride was loud, and messy in the best way, laughter cutting through the buzz of the small motor, hands grabbing for balance as the tuk-tuk bounced over potholes and puddles. BJ and Irina kept teasing each other the whole ride, joking about babies, laughing about BJ being too immature to handle it. Claire sitting quiet but smiling, soaked in the banter without needing to add much. Leo rode up front with the driver, leaning forward, bracing himself with one hand on the rail as the tuk-tuk swerved and bumped its way through the dark streets. It was short, chaotic, and perfect. No one was looking at their phones

and no one seemed to care where we were in the town or how long the ride took. For those few minutes, it felt like the night had stretched itself out, holding us in something that didn't need to be planned or named.

I was dropped off first. The tuk-tuk slowed in front of the alleyway heading to my hotel and I climbed out to a round of hugs, handshakes, and high-fives with someone calling out something I didn't catch, but it didn't matter. I walked away with the sound of their laughter fading behind me toward my room where just a few days earlier I had been messaging other researchers about how alone I felt here. That night, I lay on my bed and recorded every detail I could remember, not just the layout of the restaurant or the food, but the way the night had been held together by small, almost invisible acts. As Frohlick and Harrison (2008) write, anthropologists in tourist spaces are never just observers, but become "entangled in complex dialectic relationships," where researcher and tourist narratives blur (p. 9). That night, I felt that entanglement more sharply than before, not just recording the experience, but being pulled into it, emotionally and socially. The WhatsApp group, the way people checked in, the pictures of menus sent hours before. It hit me how much easier it was to feel part of something when you didn't have to ask, when the system was already in place.

The next morning while compiling my notes I kept thinking about how something had shifted. I wasn't just a guest tagging along anymore. I had found a seat in something that felt real, even if it was temporary. As Dwyer, Chen and Lee argue, social and emotional bonding are fundamental elements of place attachment (p. 647) and in tourist spaces like Shoreline, it isn't just the place itself that creates this attachment, but the small moments of shared presence, or what Neville and Reicher (2011) claim as building blocks to social identity leading to emotional attachments. By being hugged in a tuk-tuk, knowing who's coming to dinner, or reading a message in a group chat the feeling of being part of something didn't happen in one moment, it had built slowly adding up to something more. Looking back, I see how inclusion and exclusion that night wasn't left to chance. It was carefully shaped through digital coordination, subtle seating patterns, and small acts of social confirmation.

8.2.1 Feeling at Home: Emotional and Financial Belonging

While the previous section followed a single group dinner, this section shifts toward the smaller, everyday moments that shaped individual experiences and emotional responses. Rather than focusing on major events, I examine micro-level interactions such as WhatsApp replies, casual check-ins, physical closeness, and small gestures of reassurance. Using the stories of Joy and Irina, I suggest that wellness at Shoreline was not a fixed state, but something assembled and interpreted through informal social communication. This suggests that emotional well-being in tourism is shaped not only by place or activity, but by the ongoing experience of being seen, included, or unsettled by moments of doubt or miscommunication.

8.2.2 Emotional Safety, Vulnerability, and the Edges of Inclusion

I first met Joy when I arrived at the beach treehouse with her best friend Isabel, when she originally introduced me to Shoreline. From the moment we met, Joy stood out, full of energy, chatty, and immediately warm. She jumped out of a hammock to greet me with a hug, already grinning as she said, “I heard about you from Niki, Isabel’s mom, on the plane!” She bounced on her toes as she spoke, clearly excited. After a couple of minutes of chatting on the beach, we all went up into the treehouse and sat with another one of their friends, talking about kitesurfing and what Joy called “the vibe” of the place. She encouraged me to sign up for lessons right away and sent me over to Rafi, who was sitting shirtless at the bar, scrolling on his laptop and checking the wind forecast (Field notes, January 17, 2024).

Joy was originally from Manila but had flown in from Melbourne, where she had been working and studying law, living what she later described as a “super city life,” driving to an office job and stuck in routines that felt empty. “What am I doing in the city? This is my life,” she told me later in our interview, her voice rising with conviction. She talked about Boracay not just as a vacation, but as a place she imagined could be home. “I’m looking for my people,” she added, almost as if she was daring me to dig deeper (Interview, January 23, 2024).

These themes of belonging and imagined home came into sharper focus during our formal interview which took place in my hotel room, with her kite instructor Selin sitting beside her sharing a vape pen throughout, passing it back and forth between answers. The energy in the room

was high, casual, full of movement and laughter. But halfway through, the vape started to die. Joy began shifting in her seat, fidgeting with her hands, glancing at the pen, then at Selin. The atmosphere started to tighten, like something was slipping. I asked if they had a charger, and when they said no, I offered mine. As soon as I plugged it in, both of them lit up again, literally standing and stretching, like something had been released. The energy snapped back almost instantly. Looking back, I realized how something so small, like a dying vape, could shift the emotional temperature in the room. It wasn't just a habit. It was a grounding object, something that kept their bodies and focus steady.

As the conversation continued Joy's story came in waves. She told me about her dad, a scuba instructor, who had passed away in front of her suddenly when she was fourteen, and how she had followed his path for a while, training, teaching, trying to fit into that world, but said it never felt fully hers. "It was my dad's thing," she said quietly, her eyes fixed on the table. Then she looked up, smiling. "Now that I'm kitesurfing, I finally feel like I'm getting the stoke... it's mine. Nobody in my life kitesurfs. This is mine." I remember the way she leaned forward when she said it, her face lighting up in a way I hadn't seen before (Interview, January 23, 2024).

Despite her easygoing presence in social spaces, I started to notice small signals of something more fragile underneath. Joy talked openly about her struggles with OCD, describing herself as hypersensitive to changes in group energy. "I'm very particular with judgment," she admitted. "I always feel like people are judging me, even when they're not. So I run away. I'm a flight person." I had already seen some of this, how she would light up in group settings, but then glance around the room, scanning for reactions, as if looking for signs that she might be out of place (Interview, January 23, 2024).

This tension showed up again when she talked about the group WhatsApp thread. On one hand, it made her feel included, connected to the flow of daily life at Shoreline, but on the other, it also became a source of anxiety. "One of our friends said he wasn't going to dinner anymore and I thought it was because I was going," she told me during the interview. "I started asking myself, did I say something wrong?" (Interview, January 23, 2024). Selin reassured her quickly that it wasn't about her at all, but Joy described how fast her mind spiraled in those moments. Joy admitted that she often checked in with others, asking if she had done something wrong, because

she feared being left out or misread. Her experience was a reminder that even in close-knit spaces, digital communication can carry risks. Messages without tone or context can feed doubt instead of easing it. For Joy, communication was both connected and unsettled, inviting her in while leaving space for worry to creep in. Garcês et al. (2018) suggest that emotional support in wellness tourism often comes from shared routines and the feeling of being seen (p. 43). But as Salazar and Graburn (2014) argue, tourism spaces also carry expectations, imaginaries that shape what people believe they should feel (p. 16). Joy's experience reflected this push and pull. She felt included, but she also carried the weight of performing that inclusion, wondering if she was doing enough, or too much.

Notwithstanding the self-checking, Joy often spoke about Shoreline with something close to love. "What I need is freedom and safety," she said. "To feel like I can be myself without being judged. If I fail, it's okay. There's no judgment here," she alleged with a kind of defiance, like she had found something rare and wanted to name it out loud. Yet this feeling of freedom was more complicated than it first appeared. In earlier conversations, Joy had quietly admitted that she felt like she was drinking too much, pushing herself to go out every night because she didn't want to miss out or fall behind the group. She told me she normally lived a healthy lifestyle, eating well, exercising, and avoiding alcohol, but here she felt she had to shift who she was to fit in. "I'm normally so healthy" (Interview, January 23, 2024), almost as if trying to remind herself. Having me wonder whether Joy felt she had to become more like them: more relaxed, more fun, more carefree, in order to be accepted by the very people she called "her people". Or whether this pressure came from the group itself, perhaps from her own imagination of being unclear, either way, the effect was the same.

This tension around inclusion and adaptation wasn't unique to Joy. While Joy adapted to match the group's social energy, Isabel took a different approach. She quietly resisted. She held onto her detox routine, avoided alcohol, and kept her distance from the nightly drinking. But instead of being accepted for standing apart, she seemed to be quietly pushed to the edges, overlooked, dismissed, even when she tried to join in. This contrast between Joy and Isabel revealed how inclusion was not simply about being present, but about aligning with the group's unspoken norms.

Neville and Reicher (2011) argue that group belonging often depends less on diversity and more on perceived similarity, on recognizing shared qualities that mark someone as part of the “us” (pp. 383-388). Joy’s adaptation, and Isabel’s quiet exclusion, reflect this process. Belonging seemed to favor those who mirrored the group’s energy, lifestyle, and social habits. This raised questions about the kind of freedom being performed at Shoreline. Was it really about being yourself, as Joy hoped, or about learning to perform the right kind of self, one that felt similar enough to belong?

Seen this way, the idea of curated belonging becomes even more significant. Through his role as gatekeeper, Eli carefully selected who got to come to Shoreline in the first place. By filtering guests not just for their interests, but for their social and emotional fit, and perhaps even financial position, he shaped the group before they ever arrived. When this alignment worked, it created the kind of atmosphere Joy described, where people felt free, connected, and understood. But when it didn’t, as Isabel’s experience suggests, it could quietly lead to disappointment or exclusion. The success of the experience depended not only on guests managing their own presence, but on how well the group had been assembled from the start. Still, the need for Joy to stay close to the group never fully left. She admitted to people-pleasing, to saying yes just to be part of the action. Yet, she also saw her own progress by staying longer than planned, moving in with friends, and finding a pace that felt more like her own.

At one point, while we were talking about group dinners, I had a quiet realization I didn’t share with her, but I wondered if she felt the same. This was the kind of group I used to admire from the outside, a table full of tan, smiling, stylish people, the kind tourists watch from a distance. And yet, here I was, sitting among them, not just observing but laughing, hugging, eating, and kitesurfing. It was a feeling of inclusion, but also of performance. We were both navigating how to stay inside something that looked effortless but wasn’t. Joy’s story, like many others at Shoreline, wasn’t just about the sport or the place. It was about the messages, the gestures, the shared meals, the quiet checks for reassurance. It was about feeling seen, sometimes deeply, sometimes only in passing, and more importantly, knowing you mattered.

8.2.3 The Price of Belonging: Money, Silence and Social Pressure

While emotional presence and tone shaped much of what belonging looked like at Shoreline, staying long enough to feel that belonging also required a certain kind of access. On paper,

Shoreline was affordable, with shared rooms at the residence costing just €14 per night, and the Philippines in general being a relatively low-cost destination. Many guests talked openly about this as part of the appeal. But those who stayed the longest or most easily extended their trips often paid for private rooms, kite lessons, or social outings that made the experience more immersive. BJ, for example, who stayed in a private room and frequently joined group dinners and surf sessions, told me his room cost €40 per night. “I thought it would be cheaper,” he said, and in a field note from that same day, I wrote down my own question: why were none of us paying upfront? I began to suspect that the relaxed payment system wasn’t just about ease. It may also have encouraged longer stays by deferring financial reckoning until the end, or it was simply a savvy business decision.

The longest-staying guests were often those with flexible or high-paying jobs. BJ owned a media company in California with contracts to major financial firms like Vanguard and Blackrock. Irina was a senior executive at a global fashion company based in Dubai. Claire held a corporate position with Louis Vuitton in England. These roles gave them the freedom to shift plans, stay longer, and become more integrated in daily life. Joy, by contrast, eventually had to leave because she ran out of money. Financial access wasn’t the only condition for belonging, but it quietly shaped how fully and how long some guests could remain inside the experience. While some guests were able to extend their stay and gradually settle into the social life of the house, others found themselves feeling emotionally at ease from the start. Irina’s experience offers another view, not of quiet exclusion or effortful participation, but of immediate connection, consistent care, and post-departure continuity.

8.2.4 Feeling Loved: Ease, Respect, and the Shared Emotional Space

Following Joy’s story, Irina’s experience offers another view of how group tone and small acts of care shaped emotional ease and belonging at Shoreline. On the afternoon of January 26, I met Irina in one of the shared guest rooms at Shoreline for a formal recorded interview. By then, she had already been living at the residence for several weeks, and we had previously spoken (both on and off the record). By the time we sat down that afternoon, there was an ease between us. The shared room we were using, still marked by other people’s things such as bags in the corners, towels hanging from the bunks, and dogs barking outside felt less like a formal setting and more like an

extension of the life we were already both part of. We sat across from each other with a small table and microphone between us. Outside, we could hear people coming in and out of the communal area, laughing and joking around. It was warm and quiet in the room, especially since we had to turn the air conditioner off due to the noise. I started the interview with a question about how she usually opened up to people, and instantly she laughed and smiled, twirling her hair between her fingers as she answered. “I would say I hold back a little bit, but not that much... I don’t open up completely right away, of course.” For her, openness wasn’t automatic; it developed through watching how people behaved, whether they showed honesty, whether they treated others well. “Behavior is important,” she told me. “Respect. Not just toward me, but toward others” (Interview and field notes, January-February 2024; messages, January-December 2024).

By then, Irina had already become part of the daily flow at Shoreline. She had been teaching Pilates for free, joining group meals, and spending long afternoons stretched out in the treehouse with the others. “We all pitch in,” she had told me during a dinner, after helping clear plates. “It’s part of what makes us feel like a family here, not just a bunch of tourists.” Her way of participating wasn’t loud or attention-seeking, but it was steady. She was there, helping, sitting close, staying behind when others drifted off. These quiet acts rarely stood out to the group, but they carried weight. They were part of the background that made the place feel held together.

Irina often spoke about comfort, about what it felt like to finally let go of her usual pace. She described Shoreline as a place where she could slow down, where there was no pressure to perform or explain herself. “It took me one month to just recharge and learn to fully chill,” she said, then smiled as she told me about a recent call with her mother. “I had a call with my mom the other day, and she’s like, ‘Did you do something to your face?’ and I said, ‘Actually, Mom, I’m just happy.’” For Irina, this sense of ease wasn’t just about the place itself, it was also about the people she was with. “Just having the possibility to actually do what I want fully. Without too much pressure.” She laughed softly when she said it, looking around the room as if trying to hold onto the feeling she was describing. She said, “I just feel like I belong because I don’t need to be a grown-up or to be my age, because I don’t feel my age.” She laughed, then added, “Honestly, how many 43-year-olds do you see on the couch every night this way and that way, with a glass of wine or a cigarette, just talking shit about anything, together with 25-year-olds?” (Interview and field notes, January-February 2024; messages, January-December 2024).

On a separate afternoon, I walked with Irina and Claire to a local market to buy mangoes and watermelon. The path was quiet, far from the tourist areas, just local vendors calling out prices as we moved between the stalls. Irina walked with ease, holding fruit up to the light, talking about recipes as if she had done it a hundred times before. It was such a small moment, but it stayed with me. These ordinary gestures of walking, chatting, slicing fruit felt like part of something that was building, even if none of us named it at the time. Garcês et al. (2018) suggest that wellness in tourism is often built in these small, shared interactions, not through big or structured experiences, but through meaningful, everyday engagement (p. 43).

Irina spoke continually about slowing down, about what she called “flow,” trying not to jump into fixing things too quickly. She told me she had started to notice smaller things, like group dinners, shared laughter, or someone offering her a drink. By the end of her stay, she was no longer talking about work, schedules, or strategy. She was talking about people. Respect came up repeatedly in our conversations. “When I see that they like it, what I am doing, that they respect what I do, we do, not me, but what we do together, I give more,” she told me. For Irina, giving wasn’t automatic. It came when she felt the group cared about what they were building together. Later, she described herself as “a giver,” but added, “When I see that people are not responding the way that I need them to respond... I stop giving” (Interview, January 24, 2024). Her reflections didn’t seem to come from nowhere. They were shaped by the way people treated her, by the way the group held space for both silliness and care.

When I asked her what she meant by “healing,” she didn’t mention meditation or quiet reflection. She talked about cooking together, lying on the floor for movie nights, walking to the market with friends. “I feel younger, I even look younger. When I see photos of myself here, I think, ‘Wow, I feel good, I look good, I am good.’” She pointed out the small details of the space too, the recycled materials, the open walls, the way people moved easily between indoors and outdoors. “It’s sustainable and thoughtful,” she said. “Like you’re living in harmony with nature.” But she always came back to the people. She described the way people communicated at Shoreline as “honest,” “playful,” and “respectful.” I often saw her pulling new guests into the group with small glances, teasing and jokes, or by just making space for them. Even in moments when she pulled back, she never described the space as unsafe. She described it as a place where she could “just chill” (Interview and field notes, January-February 2024; messages, January-December 2024).

Irina described her time at Shoreline as “recharged,” “relaxed,” and, in her words, “loved.” She didn’t just say these words once; they came up again and again. When I checked in with her a few weeks after she left, she told me she had cried when she got back to Dubai. “It was grey and miserable,” she said. “And I started thinking about how I want to live the next part of my life.” She wasn’t just remembering the place; she was still living in the afterglow of it, shaped by the lasting emotional impact of her time there. She told me she was still in touch with the people she met at Shoreline. “I talk to Aria every day,” she said. “Also Leo, Nina, Claire, Tomer” (Interview and field notes, January-February 2024; messages, January-December 2024).

What happened at Shoreline wasn’t self-discovery, she said, it was mutual care, built from group routines, small conversations, and what she called “low-stakes intimacy.” Hartwell (2016) describes eudaimonic tourism as something that feels meaningful not because it is relaxing, but because it is socially and emotionally charged (pp. 2-3). Irina’s story reflects this. For her, wellness came not through solitude, but through being held in the energy of the group. Her experience also reflects how curated belonging can emerge, not through overt instruction, but through subtle invitations into shared tone and care.

After she returned to Dubai, Irina started making small changes. She adjusted her work schedule, ended a long-term relationship, and started planning trips to see her Shoreline friends in Europe and Israel. She started calling herself a “nomad,” half-joking, half-serious. She didn’t describe these changes as dramatic or life-altering. She described them as something that had already started while she was still on the island. Irina’s story shows that emotional ease at Shoreline wasn’t something that just happened. It was built in small, everyday moments, checking in, sharing food, making space. For guests like Joy and Irina, wellness wasn’t guaranteed. It was something they shaped, moment by moment, through group tone, openness, and participation. And while it didn’t end when they left, it didn’t stay the same either.

In the next section, I follow Irina beyond the island, alongside another guest, BJ, to examine what remains after these emotionally charged experiences are left behind. If wellness at Shoreline was shaped through tone, communication, and informal group rituals, what happens when that framework dissolves? What gets carried forward, what fades, and how do guests make sense of the contrast between group belonging and solo reflection? By tracing their post-departure

reflections, I begin to outline the emotional afterlife of curated belonging and the limits of its influence once the space that supported it is gone.

8.3 The Afterglow: Emotional Continuities Beyond Shoreline

So far, I've focused on how communication at Shoreline shaped guests' emotional ease and group belonging while on-site. This next section asks what happens afterward. Do those experiences carry forward? Does personal change last when the group dissolves? Using the stories of BJ and Irina, I look at how guests adjusted to everyday life after Shoreline, and how ongoing or absent communication shaped that transition. These contrasting experiences offer a closer look at the emotional afterlife of curated belonging.

8.3.1 Belonging, Disorientation, and the Emotional Carryover of Travel

BJ arrived at Shoreline in mid-January with what he later described as a mix of exhaustion and anticipation. At 35, he was recently divorced and ran a media production company from California. He had originally planned to kitesurf in Vietnam, but changed course due to bad weather. According to Eli, his first messages were hesitant, mostly practical questions and small concerns. But once he landed in Boracay, he slipped quickly into the Shoreline rhythm. "I plan my time to have something to look forward to," he told me. "And when I feel part of a culture, I allow extra time for the option to stay." He would end up extending his visit by five weeks, a sign, perhaps, of something he hadn't realized he was searching for (Field notes, January-February 2024).

In the early days, I noted how BJ moved with ease, joining kite sessions, lounging with the younger guests, and taking space for himself to work. He was present without being loud, emotionally engaged without needing to be in the center. I remember one afternoon, with the wind blowing through the bamboo slats up in the treehouse, and how BJ was telling me that he liked being surrounded by "people who were figuring things out." "Being here helped me rebuild," he said. "After everything with my divorce, I just needed this. I had to get away from the States." There was no dramatic confession, no talk of healing, but I could feel something recalibrating in the way he carried himself. Still, his version of change wasn't expressed in the same way others described it. There were no grand revelations, but over the course of multiple conversations, and later through long voice messages sent from home, he kept returning to two ideas: emotional charge and

attachment. “It’s not like surfing,” he told me. “In kitesurfing, you can be next to your crew the whole time. There’s camaraderie, not competition.” Shoreline gave him access to that, not just on the water but in the daily routines that blurred the line between social space and emotional support, breakfasts in the shared kitchen, movie nights, the way people lay with legs over each other without needing to explain anything. BJ said it gave him a taste of something he hadn’t felt in years, not freedom in the sense of escape, but the ability to be emotionally present without pressure. I wrote in my field notes that he seemed relaxed but not checked out, like someone who was still processing grief, but doing it inside a setting that gave him permission to be quiet and playful at the same time (Field notes, January-February 2024).

Still, that ease didn’t fully carry over. “It’s hard, it’s hard to be back”, that’s how BJ put it when he returned to California in early spring, as the tone of our exchanges started to shift. BJ and I stayed in touch after Shoreline, and I received several voice messages over the course of his first couple of months of being at home. With an initial message coming while he sat in his truck parked in the California mountains. His voice was thoughtful, restless. “Everything looks the same,” he said, “but I have changed so much. And even though I love this place, it just feels boring. That sucks to say, but it does.” The disorientation wasn’t extreme, but it was persistent. He tried to take a short trip to an Airbnb in the mountains with a close friend, but the spark didn’t return. “It felt good,” he supposed, “but not the same. The adrenaline of Shoreline and Bali, it faded so fast.” Even the friend he was with, someone he’d known for over a decade, didn’t bring out the same version of himself. “It’s like... everything’s the same, but I’m not. And when everything around you hasn’t changed, you almost forget that you did. Like the whole six months didn’t happen” (WhatsApp messages, February-March 2024).

This mismatch between internal change and external sameness kept coming up. “When I was traveling, it was constant, people, places, emotions, adrenaline,” he said. “Now, I make a tenth of the connections I made in Boracay or Bali.” His voice didn’t carry bitterness, just quiet confusion, like someone trying to name something slippery. “I changed inside,” he said. “But now I’m back in a world that didn’t.” At one point, he described the feeling in starker language: “It’s like recovering from six months of cocaine,” he said, half-laughing. “But cocaine isn’t good, right? You can’t constantly be stimulated” (WhatsApp messages, February-March 2024). It was a casual metaphor, but it stuck with me. What he was pointing to wasn’t just overstimulation; it was the

absence of emotional reciprocity. Shoreline had offered a setup that was socially constructed but emotionally real: physical closeness, constant invitation, the ease of group meals, and daily movement. Once that arrangement dissolved, what remained was an emotional vacancy that was difficult to replace.

Earlier in our time together, BJ and I had spoken about curated belonging, even if we didn't use that phrase. He described Shoreline as a place where "you walk in and people just accept you. There's flirting, there's openness, everyone shares. You can just be." (Field notes, January 2024). Later, when that atmosphere was no longer there, he felt like he had to fight against resetting himself back to how things were before. "You almost have to fight not to delete those months from your body," he said. "Like, your system wants to reset to before." In my analysis, I describe this as "emotional recalibration," where certain tourism spaces leave lasting impressions that influence routine daily life, not due to their explicit content, but because of how they are affectively experienced (WhatsApp messages, February-March 2024). This concept draws on Zhou and Wang's (2024) broader affect theory in tourism studies, which highlights how emotions and atmosphere shape experiences in ways we don't always notice (p. 5). BJ's experience also aligns with Simoni's (2019) description of how tourism encounters are shaped through emotional tone and informal communication. In this sense, wellness at Shoreline was not a fixed trait, but a socially produced feeling that emerged through consistency, relational openness, and emotional alignment. The emotional shift for BJ wasn't about kitesurfing or sun; it was tone, touch, and attention. Shoreline didn't necessarily advertise itself as a wellness space, but the informal rituals it created through breakfasts, kite chats, group messages, physical contact became emotional anchors.

When I asked BJ if he thought his time at Shoreline changed his life direction, he paused. "Yes, but I don't want to be that guy chasing highs. That's not the goal. I want something different now, a new structure. Maybe six months abroad, six months back here. Some kind of balance," he said. "So that I have the 15-year-old that's happy I'm doing so much, but also the 50-year-old that's happy I'm still working" (WhatsApp messages, February-March 2024). That quote held weight, it wasn't about travel as self-discovery; it was about life design, trying to build something that integrated the best parts of what he'd just lived. "I think I'm trying to make my younger self proud," he said again later, along with other messages listing off memories of dirt biking through

Southeast Asia and surfing in Bali, things he said his teenage self would have found “legendary”. Suggesting that personal growth, in BJ’s case, wasn’t about discovering something new, but about aligning with something he had once wanted. This kind of retrospective desire, of wanting to become the version of yourself you once imagined, came up repeatedly in my conversations with Shoreline guests, even if not always named outright.

Place attachment literature in tourism often points to emotional bonding, sensory routines, and social interaction as influential to how people come to value particular locations (Dwyer et al., 2019, p. 645). BJ’s experience supports this, but also adds a temporal dimension. It wasn’t just about the place; it was about how that place shaped how he wanted to feel moving forward. He mentioned he occasionally stayed in touch with Claire, Leo, and Nina, but there was no ongoing group chat, no nightly FaceTimes, no organized digital follow-up like some of the others had. “I’m an extrovert, I usually don’t mind being alone, but this feels different. Lonelier”. While Valente-Mosqueda et al. (2025) do not directly address post-travel effects, their focus on socially embedded wellness experiences (p. 6) shows how emotional intensity during wellness tourism is often co-produced through coordinated group settings. Resulting in these emotionally charged routines being difficult to replicate or sustain once the individual returns home.

BJ’s story doesn’t challenge my argument; it adds complexity. The communication environment at Shoreline helped produce something powerful for him: belonging, ease, and reflection. But that sense of structure didn’t follow him home. His voice messages weren’t just updates; they were a search for continuity, a way to stay close to a version of himself that he didn’t want to lose. I now return to Irina, whose time at Shoreline created a strong emotional shift. Unlike BJ, her experience didn’t drift into absence. It continued through shared group calls, active contact, and an emotional network that stayed intact long after the beach disappeared from view.

8.3.2 Holding on Through Connection

While BJ’s return was marked by emotional distance and disorientation, Irina’s departure from Shoreline unfolded differently. What shaped her experience was not just the group itself, but how that group remained emotionally present through messages, video calls, and ongoing check-ins. This section traces how sustained communication helped her preserve a sense of wellness and belonging after returning home.

Irina returned to Dubai in late February after two months at Shoreline. At first, she tried to slip back into her routines, her apartment, her job, her usual life. But within a week, she messaged me: “I don’t want to see anyone. I don’t want to go anywhere. I just feel lonely.” It wasn’t the first time I’d heard something like this, but coming from her, it carried a different load. She wasn’t someone who usually described herself that way. Earlier, she had told me: “I feel younger. I even look younger. When I see photos of myself, I think, ‘Wow, I feel good, I look good, I was good.’” That shift didn’t vanish when she left, but it didn’t follow her back automatically, either. “I’m used to being by myself,” she told me in a voice message, “but this was something else. After two months with people constantly around, it’s like I forgot how to be alone” (WhatsApp messages, March-December 2024).

Irina wasn’t the only one who struggled with returning. She mentioned that Claire had just arrived in London and had sent her a message describing the exact same feeling. “Her first words were, ‘I feel so alone.’” The shared feeling wasn’t just about missing the beach, or the weather, or even the kitesurfing. It was about missing each other. It was about the small things: movie nights, shared dinners, smoke breaks on the balcony, last-minute beach runs before sunset. Now, suddenly, the habits that had shaped their everyday world were gone. In their place was a kind of quiet that felt empty.

Although Irina felt alone, and often cried for the first few weeks back in Dubai, her experience also shows what happens when that quiet is interrupted, and when communication continues. Unlike other guests, she didn’t have to face that space alone for too long. Gradually after returning home, she continued her close contact with a small group from Shoreline, Claire, Aria, Leo, Nina, and Rafi that helped her bridge the time after Shoreline “We talk every day, FaceTime, group calls, and voice messages. Sometimes several times.” This digital continuation of the group across time zones, countries, and work schedules seemed to stretch the emotional warmth of Shoreline far beyond its physical borders. I noticed how often she used the word “we” when speaking about them. “We’re still close.” “We’re always checking in on each other.” “We’re kind of like a family, but not in a cheesy way.” What she described wasn’t just nostalgic group chat banter, it was something more intentional, a continuation, a decision even. “We make sure we’re all okay,” she told me. “It’s a bit like therapy sometimes” (WhatsApp messages, March-December 2024).

I kept in touch with Irina after Shoreline, not just as a researcher, but as someone who had shared the experience. Our voice messages were often half reflection, half check-in as well. At times, I wasn't sure where the fieldwork ended and our friendship began, but our conversations helped me see how Shoreline could stay alive after departure, not as a memory, but through continued connection. What stood out to me was how often Irina described the group's digital contact, not just messages, but regular FaceTime calls as something that held her, and them together. This sense of continuity required ongoing emotional labor, daily calls, frequent availability, and a shared commitment to keep the group alive, complicating the idea that wellness was simply "achieved".

This carryover, sustained by constant and emotionally meaningful communication, reflects how host-community practices in producing curated belonging, not just during the stay, but as well in the afterlife of the experience. It supports my research question by showing how emotional investment shaped by host-guest interaction and communal rituals extends beyond the tourist site itself. Irina didn't just leave Shoreline with memories; she left with a living network that anchored her during what she described as an emotionally disorienting return from her experience. "When I came back, I kind of just wanted to go back," she admitted. "Not to the beach, necessarily, but to that feeling, that closeness." Her daily calls with Claire and the others didn't fully replace what she felt at Shoreline, but they softened the absence. She said it herself, half-laughing: "This kind of community is a remedy for loneliness" (WhatsApp messages, March-December 2024), Which aligns closely with Garcês et al. (2018), who point out that wellness in tourism is often co-produced through positive relationships, shared emotional experience, and sustained interaction (p. 43).

The continuation of group connection also reshaped how she understood personal growth and wellness. "It's not just about having a massage or doing yoga," she told me. "It's about waking up and having someone who asks, 'How did you sleep?'" (WhatsApp messages, March-December 2024). For her, well-being wasn't a solitary achievement. It was relational, shaped by interaction and shared routines. This reflects what Hartwell (2016) describes as eudaimonic tourism, experiences interpreted as meaningful through shared affect, rather than by means of individual relaxation alone (pp. 2-3). Irina didn't describe her change as self-discovery, but as mutual care, woven into conversations, routines, and low-stakes intimacy. Still, not every guest was able to carry Shoreline forward in this way. Irina's continued connection relied in part on her position in the group, her comfort with digital communication, and her emotional fluency. Others, especially

those who felt more peripheral during their stay, may not have had the same access to these ongoing emotional supports.

Interestingly, Irina also shared that she'd begun reading about theories of community in her free time. She even sent me excerpts from Scott Peck's *The Different Drum* and McMillan and Chavis's work on "sense of community," referencing phrases of "shared emotional connection" and "integration and fulfillment of needs." "That's us," she said. "All four points fit us." There was something quietly striking about the way she turned to social theory, not to explain what had happened, but maybe to keep it alive, to name it, to prove that what she'd felt was real and still mattered. By mid-summer, she and Claire were together again, first in Paris, then in Israel. They reunited with Leo, Rafi, and others from Shoreline. She sent me a picture of them all at Leo's birthday celebration with everyone looking good, relaxed, and close. "We're still together," she frequently told me. "Not physically all the time, but in spirit. We never stopped being a group" (WhatsApp messages, March-December 2024).

Irina's experience reveals how post-trip well-being can be supported through ongoing, emotionally meaningful connection, but it also brings into view those who didn't leave Shoreline with a group to message or call. Not everyone had the same emotional footing, and not everyone felt included. "I think the people who stayed close are the ones who were already open. The ones who could give and receive," Irina voice messaged me. Then, after a pause, she added, "The others, I don't know. I think maybe they're alone now" (WhatsApp messages, March-December 2024). In the next section, I turn to these quieter endings, stories that do not align with experiences of ease, belonging, or sustained personal growth. Through the experiences of Lukas and Isabel, I explore how curated belonging can exclude just as powerfully as it includes, and how the emotional expectations of a place like Shoreline may become difficult to carry, or even painful, when things begin to fall apart.

8.4 The Other Side of Belonging

Not all guests at Shoreline found the emotional connection they were promised or hoping for. While earlier sections focused on how communication supported wellness and identity-making, this final section considers its flipside, and how those same practices could misfire, exclude, or quietly push people to the margins. For some, the curated openness of Shoreline felt less like a shared space and more like a closed circle. Using instances from Lukas, who arrived with high

expectations shaped by pre-arrival communication but struggled to connect in person, and Isabel, whose presence remained quiet and largely unacknowledged, it becomes clear that curated belonging is not guaranteed. These stories show that communication can function both as an invitation and a subtle gate, shaping who is embraced, who is ignored, and who decides to leave.

8.4.1 Promises Unkept, Messages Missed

In Chapter 1, I introduced Lukas's arrival and the slow unraveling of his expectations at Shoreline. What began as a highly personalized and encouraging pre-arrival exchange marked by voice messages, emotional openness, and creative collaboration, gave way to a quiet, accumulating sense of disconnection. In the weeks that followed, the gap widened and the silences became more pronounced. The tone shifted from possibility to distance, and eventually to resignation. Returning to Lukas's story here shows how communication when it fades, becomes inconsistent, or is selectively withdrawn can heighten emotional vulnerability in spaces where connection is promised or promoted. His case offers a counterpoint to earlier examples by showing how the same emotionally charged tone that invites guests into Shoreline can also create the conditions for emotional fallout when that care is not sustained.

One of the more understated yet meaningful disappointments Lukas experienced was around the role he believed he might play at Shoreline. Before arriving, Lukas was told he would have the opportunity to teach kitesurfing if a need arose, if instructors got busy, or someone got sick. This detail wasn't contractual, but he felt it was part of the agreement. "It made me feel wanted," he told me. "Like I wouldn't just be another guest, but someone who could contribute something." (Interview, January 25, 2024). But when he arrived, there was no mention of teaching. Eli and Rafi appeared preoccupied, and the possibility of being a kite instructor faded without explanation. Weeks later, this situation resurfaced under awkward circumstances. My university professor, a fellow German speaker like Lukas, visited the beach, and the two of them quickly bonded. After they spoke extensively about music, kitesurfing, and Lukas's reasons for being there, my professor expressed interest in taking kite lessons and asked if Lukas could be his instructor. Rafi initially approved the idea, but when my professor returned the next day, Eli overrode Rafi's decision. I was standing nearby on the sand as it happened. Lukas didn't argue, he just looked down for a moment, then turned to me and said quietly, "It's okay. Eli didn't think I was ready." The tone was

heavy, and I remember not knowing what to say. It was a small promise that had once made him feel wanted, now quietly withdrawn. At the time, I wasn't sure how much to intervene, I knew how bad Lukas wanted to teach my professor, he had stayed up late planning his approach, but as a researcher I was supposed to observe, exposing the blurred lines between being inside and outside (Field notes, January 2024).

Unfortunately, the breakdowns continued, many of them playing out through communication, or the absence of it. On January 26, the night after our long interview, I messaged Lukas to thank him for the conversation and asked if I could share the song he had performed for me (on video), in the Shoreline WhatsApp thread, a gentle, acoustic piece about finding the coast and returning to oneself. He paused. "No, sorry," he wrote back. "I don't know... I don't feel right now that I would want to share it with them... it's because of the Tomer situation..." Lukas had clashed with Tomer, one of the more dominant figures in the group, after playing his guitar near the sleeping quarters on several occasions. "Tomer said I was too loud," Lukas told me, "but he's the one who sleeps until 1 or 2 p.m. Then he talks behind my back." What had been a small misunderstanding escalated into something more personal. "Now he doesn't speak to me at all," Lukas wrote. "I tried to talk to him in a constructive way this morning, but nothing. He just talks to other people about me." Lukas's messages were longer than usual that day, full of fragmented thoughts, trailing punctuation, and quiet frustration. It didn't feel like he was looking for someone to take his side, only for someone to listen. His voice in those exchanges was hesitant, searching, it felt different from the confident tone I'd heard in earlier voice messages (WhatsApp messages, January 26, 2024).

Lukas's sense of isolation was not just social; it was also communicative. "Not getting invited to dinners, being left off of the text messages, Michael and I included," he said. "The inner circle was doing things on their own" (Interview, January 25, 2024). From what I saw during those weeks was that informal side groups had started forming, some planning in person, others communicating through private threads. Meals were arranged without them. Plans were discussed openly, but not with everyone. These forms of exclusion were rarely named outright, as they were communicated through silence, omissions, or half-heard plans which were subtle signals that still carried emotional weight. The absence of a message became its own kind of message. Lukas spoke about this pattern with a kind of quiet fatigue: "The activities didn't give me the feeling of being part of

the community, they kind of made me feel more separate.” He didn’t dramatize these exclusions, instead, he reflected on them through the lens of mismatch. “I’m not a kitesurfer first,” he told me. “I’m a musician first, and a kitesurfer second. Here... people are kitesurfers first” (Interview, January 24, 2024). This was his way of naming the disconnection without sounding bitter. This reflection aligns with what Neville and Reicher (2011) describe as the social importance of perceived similarity, showing that individuals are more likely to feel belonging in groups where they see themselves reflected in shared priorities and identities (pp. 383-388). His attempt to bring something different, creativity, conversation, a more emotional register seemed not just unrecognized, but subtly unwelcome. Lukas mentioned how he appreciated our deeper conversations, and how they were different from the groups, especially when I invited my professor to join us at the beach. “Real talk,” he said. “Not just small talk. That’s rare here” (Interview and field notes, January-February 2024).

Eventually, Lukas flew his girlfriend in from Germany and they left Shoreline together three weeks earlier than planned. “It just wasn’t happening,” he said. There was no dramatic goodbye, no confrontation. Just a quiet departure. It was a choice shaped not by conflict alone, but by cumulative disconnection. In the end, Lukas didn’t leave out of frustration. He left out of absence.

Lukas’s story shows that curated belonging doesn’t fall apart in a single moment. It unravels through small, unreciprocated exchanges, the messages not returned, the plan not extended, the silence after emotional openness. The same communication that once felt inviting, open, warm and affirming became fragile when it was no longer mirrored. In a place where belonging is built through tone and daily interaction, silence becomes its own message. As Salazar and Graburn (2014) remind us, tourism imaginaries are powerful but unstable, especially when experience fails to match expectation (p. 17). Dwyer et al. (2019) highlight that when tourists’ functional or identity-based needs are not met, place attachment can weaken. This opens space for emotional friction or disconnection, even if not explicitly characterized as a letdown (pp. 646-647). Lukas’s experience shows that curated belonging is not simply a question of access, but of emotional maintenance. It requires follow-through, responsiveness, and space for difference. When those are missing, communication no longer invites, it withdraws. What remains is not just disappointment, but a quiet reminder of who is no longer being seen.

8.4.2 Unavailable in All the Right Ways

While Lukas's experience revealed how emotional exclusion could emerge from interpersonal conflict and misalignment with group tone, Isabel's story followed a quieter trajectory, one shaped by personal discipline, emotional timing, and the unintended social consequences of health-focused and romantic commitments. Her experience shows how curated belonging at Shoreline may be more limited than it first appears, especially to those whose priorities do not align with the group's dominant mode of interaction. Isabel's story challenges the idea that curated belonging is simply about personality or effort. Instead, it reveals how subtle social codes around availability, emotional openness, and lifestyle can define who gets absorbed into the group and who remains on the outside.

Isabel, a 30-year-old Filipina from Manila, arrived at Shoreline with high hopes. She had been planning the trip for over a year as a personal milestone, a reward to herself after pursuing solo travel, free diving, and periods of reflection away from her large extended family she was living with. She arrived in Boracay with her close friend Joy, who had arrived 2 weeks earlier and already begun integrating into the group. Isabel described her early communication with Eli and Rafi as "excellent," noting how quick and personal their responses were. "It made me feel confident and excited about my stay," she said. The messaging had set up the experience as one of belonging, support, and shared excitement.

Isabel was the person who introduced me to Shoreline. We had exchanged messages before I arrived, and she was eager to help me get settled. However, the day after she brought me to the treehouse, she returned to Manila to celebrate her mother's birthday. Because of this, I didn't see her much in the house myself limiting my ability to observe her day-to-day interactions directly, but it also mirrored the kind of absence she later described, quiet, unnoticed, and difficult to narrate until after the fact. My understanding of her experience comes primarily from our pre-arrival exchanges and a detailed interview conducted after her stay on February 29, 2024. Isabel's early departure itself felt like a quiet punctuation, an exit that matched what she later described as a disjointed and emotionally distant stay. "Initially they were so excited I was there," she recalled. "Eli was excited, Leo was excited... but I'm not sure what changed." That change, though subtle, soon became impossible to ignore. Isabel, who had committed to a month-long full-body cleanse

and was abstaining from alcohol, quickly found herself out of sync with the house's dominant social energy. "My number one priority was being strict in my diet," she explained. "I wasn't in a state to meet new people... that wasn't my priority." She described waking early, working full-time remotely, preparing all her meals herself, and kitesurfing on the weekends. "I didn't even explore Boracay," she admitted. "Just one island-hopping trip. The rest of the time I was working, eating right, sleeping, and kiting" (Interview, February 29, 2024).

Isabel didn't express regret for these priorities. In fact, she was proud of following through with her goals, but the emotional cost of not being absorbed into the group was still apparent. "I didn't connect with anyone," she said. "People already had their thing." Her housing choice also set her apart since she was staying in a private residence rather than the main house. That separation, paired with her absence from nightly dinners and social outings, placed her on the margins from the beginning (Interview, February 29, 2024).

The turning point came one night after a communal dinner, when Isabel shared in conversation that she was engaged. Up to that point, Leo had been enthusiastic about teaching her, but soon after, things began to shift. "Leo was super nice and ready to teach," she said, "but then he changed teachers on me and avoided me once he found out I was in a relationship" (Interview, February 29, 2024). She was reassigned to different instructors and started to feel "tossed around." Her interpretation wasn't immediately cynical, but the accumulation of small moments made her question what was happening. "That was the night I felt the vibe start to change," she said. "What happened? I thought I had an instructor. Why am I suddenly trying to get people's attention?" She spoke calmly but clearly about the gendered tension she also felt in the group energy. "Maybe it was guy attention, maybe male ego, I don't know," she said, recalling how she asked to be paired with a woman instructor to avoid discomfort after Leo bailed on her. Isabel's comment pointed to a nuance in the group's interactional norms, where gender and availability seemed subtly entangled, even when no one spoke about it directly. Eventually, she was matched with Selin, which she described as a relief "she was great, that totally worked out" but the damage to her sense of belonging had already been done. Her identity as someone in a committed relationship seemed to close a door that had previously been open (Interview, February 29, 2024).

Isabel's involvement suggests that curated belonging at Shoreline was not only shaped by energy and attitude, but also by perceived availability. Belonging, in this case, was less about social skills or personality and more about emotional timing, when and how one is expected to show up, share, and linger. Her engagement, paired with her health priorities and structured lifestyle, quietly positioned her outside the group's preferred emotional tone. Unlike Joy, who leaned into group activities, extended her stay, and became a core part of the house, Isabel left early and did not return. "There was nothing that drew me to come back," she said. "The group reminded me of my early 20s, but that's not me anymore" (Interview, February 29, 2024).

Her reflections on openness were particularly telling. "To me, being genuine is giving someone enough attention to actually listen," she said. "And if someone's not listening, they're not really being welcoming, but I also wasn't opening up to them. I didn't give them a chance by not listening to them either." Her self-awareness wasn't interpreted as failure, but as recognition, the experience had not aligned with where she was emotionally or socially. That said, Isabel never viewed her experience as hostile or even negative, just incompatible. She appreciated the instructors, loved the water, and described Boracay's landscape as beautiful, but too party-driven for her taste. When I asked whether there was any part of Shoreline that tempted her to return, she said without hesitation: "No. I didn't feel a strong enough connection to even think twice" (Interview, February 29, 2024).

Isabel's experience complicates the idea that belonging at Shoreline was simply a matter of personality, openness, or effort. Instead, her case shows how emotional connection was shaped by lifestyle, social positioning, and perceived availability. Even without conflict, disconnection could take shape quietly through mismatched priorities, absence from important routines, or the subtle withdrawal of attention. Her story also reveals how the ideals of openness and growth at Shoreline were shaped by unspoken social expectations. These expectations favored certain kinds of participation, such as group dinners, shared spontaneity, emotional expressiveness, and a degree of romantic or social availability. Guests who couldn't or didn't align with these expectations, even temporarily, often found themselves drifting to the edges. Isabel didn't describe this as failure, but as misalignment. Her decision not to return was not dramatic, it was simply a quiet acknowledgment that the version of connection available at Shoreline no longer fit where she was in her life.

In what follows, I turn briefly to a series of other observations and participant accounts, moments where emotional pressure, miscommunication, or silence disrupted the expectations of openness and wellness. These fragments, while smaller than Lukas or Isabel's stories, offer additional insight into how curated belonging required ongoing emotional labor, and how its limits were often felt in understated, accumulative ways.

8.4.3 Social Pressure, Emotional Labor, and the Limits of Belonging

While exclusion at Shoreline could be quiet and subtle, as Isabel's and Lukas's stories show, those who felt included weren't necessarily always at ease. For many guests and instructors, being part of the group came with its own kind of pressure, to stay emotionally available, socially responsive, and in tune with the tone that had been curated around them.

Joy on the surface was one of the most integrated guests during my fieldwork. Bubbly, welcoming, and always present, she seemed to thrive in the social flow, but in private, she often described a low-grade anxiety about being left out. "Sometimes I could see the messages," she told me, "and I just knew if I didn't show up, I'd be forgotten" (Interview, January 23, 2024). Missing a dinner or beach outing felt like a threat to her belonging. To stay visible, she spent more money than she planned, pushed through exhaustion, and constantly monitored the group chat. In moments like these, I began to notice that group participation at Shoreline often involved emotional performance, not insincere, but effortful and strategic.

Irina's version of this pressure was less noticeable. As one of the older guests, she was often seen as a stabilizing figure, someone others turned to for advice, presence, and emotional balance, but that position came with weight. "I've never drunk this much booze in my life," she said with a dry laugh. "More in the first month here than in the last two years." She wasn't chasing fun; she was keeping pace. "They needed me to be on," she explained, "even when I was tired." As I observed Irina repeatedly stepping into a steadying role for others, I also began to feel the micro-pressure of this same tone, debating whether to skip group dinners or post something less enthusiastic in the WhatsApp thread. These weren't explicit rules, but subtle indicators that shaped how wellness was performed. These pressures weren't only limited to guests, Aria, one of the main kite instructors, had been at Shoreline long enough to sense when things were shifting. "Right now, I feel the end

is near,” he said during our interview days before his departure (Interview, February 10, 2024). “Not because something happened. Just... too much together. Too much for too long.” He described the fatigue of always being “on,” especially with guests who stayed just a week but expected the full experience. “They want it all,” he said. “And we’re part of the all.” Instructors weren’t just teaching; they were emotionally front lining the curated vibe (Interview, January 26, 2024; Field notes January-February 2024).

Even Eli, who saw Shoreline as a project of passion and personal vision, admitted the cost of keeping things in motion. He spoke to me about needing to leave Boracay for a couple of days every few weeks to clear his head. At one dinner, he mentioned his health issues. “My cholesterol’s messed,” he said, half-joking after a recent blood test. “Too much food, too many nights out” (Field notes, January 2024). But beneath the humor was a quieter truth about the toll of hosting, not just the physical, but emotional. As the gatekeeper of Shoreline’s tone, Eli carried the responsibility of setting the atmosphere, choosing the guests, and maintaining an environment where personal change could unfold. In doing so, he also held the power to withdraw it, quietly steering the group without overt rules. His decision to override Rafi’s approval for Lukas to teach kitesurfing was one of many small acts that revealed how control at Shoreline often operated behind the scenes.

Eli’s handling of money reflected a similar form of quiet control. “It’s not strategy, it’s cowardness,” he told me, when I asked why guests weren’t billed upfront. “I hate to be in the position that I’m asking for money” (Interview, February 13, 2024). He preferred to settle kite and accommodation payments at the end of someone’s stay, and described the emotional discomfort of bargaining as something that drained him. “If somebody’s going to start bargaining with me... I don’t have the energy to deal with that.” This reluctance created an atmosphere where money was present but rarely discussed, reinforcing the feeling that Shoreline was more about emotional connection than financial transaction. But it also placed the weight of negotiation and boundary-setting entirely on Eli. One guest (who I met) ended up paying only 30% of her full bill after disputing the price. Rather than imposing clear terms, Eli absorbed it, protecting the tone of ease while managing the financial uncertainty alone.

These above experiences reveal a pattern, which is wellness and personal change were rarely passive outcomes at Shoreline. They required emotional labor and constant social calibration, not only from instructors and long-term guests but from anyone hoping to stay in sync with the tone. This work showed up in small, recurring acts, replying to chat threads with enthusiasm, joining group meals even when tired, managing how much care to give. Even for those who seemed most comfortable in the space, the cost of staying emotionally aligned often came in the form of fatigue, anxiety, or unspoken financial strain. At Shoreline, this labor was both distributed and concentrated, guests like Irina took on the emotional balance of others, while instructors like Aria shouldered the expectations of constant openness. Hartwell (2016) reminds us that well-being is not simply a personal feeling; it is shaped through the emotional and social conditions that surround it (pp. 2-3). Shoreline worked to create those conditions, but sustaining them required more than intention.

As Neville and Reicher (2011) propose, group belonging is often reinforced not by role diversity, but by perceived similarity, expressed in shared values, emotional tone, and mutual recognition of what it means to belong (p. 383). At Shoreline, these implicit similarities shaped not only who felt included, but also how belonging was quietly maintained through responsiveness and emotional availability. Suggesting that curated belonging was not only selective, but also self-reinforcing, perhaps rewarding those who conformed and tiring those who struggled to keep up.

These stories do not only reveal the limits of curated belonging. They show that maintaining this kind of belonging is itself a form of work, careful, emotional, and quietly demanding. In a space presented around lightness, freedom, and ease, this labor remains largely unspoken. Yet it shapes how wellness is produced and how emotional change is sustained (or slowly worn down). As emotional well-being becomes a more visible goal in tourism, especially in wellness-oriented spaces, the emotional labor that sustains it deserves closer ethnographic attention. These quiet aspects of care, conformity, and soft control are not peripheral, they are principal in how guests experience inclusion, and to what happens when that inclusion falters. With these tensions in view, I now turn to a broader discussion of what Chapter 2 reveals about the role of communication in curating belonging within transient tourism spaces.

8.5 Discussion: Shared Tone, Uneven Belonging

This chapter has looked at how on-site communication at Shoreline shaped connection and well-being while also producing pressure, fatigue, and subtle exclusion. Through shared dinners, WhatsApp threads, beach chats, and interviews, I came to understand that communication at Shoreline was more than a logistical tool. It became a way of sensing who belonged, how people held space for one another, and what kinds of emotions were welcomed or quietly pushed aside. Unlike pre-arrival exchanges, which were built around anticipation and imaginative projection, on-site communication happened in real time. It had a tone, a pace, and an unspoken expectation for presence. Guests were expected to “read the room,” to sense when to engage or withdraw, and to respond in a way that matched the group’s social energy. This wasn’t often verbalized, but it was widely felt. Many guests used language like “just feeling it” or “the vibe.” (Field notes January-February 2024). But what happens when someone doesn’t feel it? Or when their internal state doesn’t align with the surrounding tone?

These questions became increasingly noteworthy during my fieldwork. For Joy, the desire to remain visible and connected came with its own cost. She described scanning group chats, budgeting anxiously, and pushing through exhaustion to stay involved. Irina, often seen as a grounding presence in the group, spoke of drinking more than usual, not out of preference, but because others seemed to expect her steady participation. Both were cared for and socially embedded, but their inclusion came with weight. This led me to ask, what is the emotional labor of being included? What are the conditions of belonging in a place like this, and who decides them? While overt exclusion was rare, subtle cues, unanswered messages, or plans made outside the main channels signaled whether someone was in sync with the group’s communicative patterns. As Simoni (2020) points out, tourism spaces are often shaped by informal emotional norms (p. 15). At Shoreline, these norms weren’t named, but they were enacted again and again through everyday gestures.

Lukas’s experience made these patterns visible. His pre-arrival exchange had been warm and affirming, but the tone on-site shifted. His music went unacknowledged and his social signs weren’t reciprocated. Slowly, he was left off chats, plans, and conversations. What began as promise became silence. His case illustrates how the same communicative style that draws

someone in can also amplify the sting of exclusion when it fades. Isabel's story provided a quieter counterpoint highlighting how wellness spaces can reward certain performances of openness and flexibility, while gently sidelining those who don't match the prevailing tone. She didn't seek out group intimacy in the same way due to her detox, work schedule, and her relationship status placing her slightly outside the curated experience. Interestingly, the results were similar, even when she made efforts to participate, her presence was met with mild indifference. She wasn't pushed out, she simply wasn't pulled in.

Similarly, these dynamics weren't limited to guests. Instructors and hosts also carried emotional responsibility. Aria spoke openly about the strain of always being "on," especially for guests expecting intensity over short stays. Eli, whose presence shaped the tone of the house, admitted needing regular breaks to recover. These weren't regarded as complaints, but as part of the work involved in sustaining the emotional atmosphere Shoreline had come to promise.

Furthermore, the pressure extended beyond emotion. Financial expectations, while rarely discussed, also shaped who could remain visible and included. Shoreline was priced affordably on paper, shared rooms at the residence cost around 14 euros per night, but many guests spent far more than that on kitesurfing, social outings, and dinners. Money was not exactly taboo, but it was rarely addressed directly. Eli, for example, openly disliked discussing payments and preferred to settle costs at the end of a guest's stay. "It's not strategy," he told me. "It's cowardness. I hate to be in the position that I'm asking for money" (Interview, February 13, 2024). This practice seemed to have helped maintain the house's easygoing tone, but it also placed emotional strain on him, and sometimes led to uncertainty about who was paying and how much. Guests like Joy quietly described spending more than they planned just to stay socially present. The unspoken financial pressures became part of the emotional labor of belonging. This silence around money functioned as a soft filter for those who could keep pace stayed longer, joined more, and felt more at ease, while others stretched their limits or opted out. In this way, curated belonging was not only emotional, but also materially sustained.

In relation to my research question, this chapter has shown how ongoing communication at Shoreline extends and enforces the emotional expectations first introduced before arrival. It reveals that wellness and belonging are not just felt spontaneously but are continually produced,

reinforced, and at times fractured through everyday exchanges. Through both inclusion and withdrawal, guests come to interpret their experience as meaningful or confusing based on how they are positioned in the group's communicative dynamics. This chapter demonstrates that host-guest communication is not just facilitative, it is formative. It actively shapes the emotional reality of this transient community life.

As I moved between conversations, group dinners, and one-on-one interviews, I began to reflect more deeply on my own participation. I noticed how certain alignments such as who I sat with, who I spent time interviewing shifted how others saw me. Being “in” was not just about what you did, but how you were read, how you responded, and whether you reinforced the emotional flow that the space had come to rely on. This made me realize that communication in these tourism spaces is not neutral, it shapes how people feel, how they relate to one another, and what kinds of personal growth they imagine are available to them.

Interestingly, that structure doesn't necessarily dissolve after departure with Irina's experience bringing this into sharp focus. After two months at Shoreline, she returned home but continued to maintain daily contact with a group of guests and instructors. In a follow-up conversation, she described how FaceTime calls, photos, and small check-ins helped her extend the emotional texture of the experience. “It still feels like I'm there, sometimes,” she told me. In her case, ongoing communication did not just reflect her past experience, it helped sustain it, reinforcing the sense of well-being she had developed on site. BJ, on the other hand, offered a contrasting story. After months of travel including two months at Shoreline, he returned to California feeling disoriented. In a voice message, he said, “Everything's the same, but I'm not.” He described the post-trip period as flat, emotionally muted, and difficult to move through. Unlike Irina, BJ had little contact with the group after leaving. “It's like the six months didn't happen,” he added (WhatsApp messages, March 2024). Without continued interaction, the emotional high of his time at Shoreline felt detached from his everyday life. His reflections suggest that well-being and personal growth, while deeply felt during the stay, may not always endure without a social or communicative framework to support them. These two cases show how host-guest communication can have an afterlife, one that either helps guests integrate their experience or leaves them struggling to do so. They also challenge the idea of personal growth as something self-contained. The emotional environment of

Shoreline didn't vanish at checkout, in some cases, it lingered in subtle ways. In others, its absence became newly visible.

These stories return us to the idea that curated belonging is not just a process of selection, but it's an infrastructure. At Shoreline, inclusion was curated through tone, repetition, response, and timing, but so was exclusion. This chapter argued that communication does more than shape how guests participate, it builds the emotional structure through which belonging and personal change become possible, and when that structure weakens or dissolves, so too does the sense of progress that the space was designed to encourage. As the thesis now turns to its conclusion, I return to the research question with these tensions in mind.

9 Conclusion

9.1 Curated Belonging: A Social and Emotional Structure

I arrived at Shoreline as the season was already underway. The group was in motion, dinners were being planned, shared rooms had settled into their own patterns, and most people had already found their place. I didn't arrive with a fixed concept, just a set of questions about wellness, about emotional connection, and about what made some guests feel like they belonged so quickly while others quietly drifted away. What I hadn't expected was how significant communication would become, not just as a method of coordination, but as the mechanism through which belonging was made possible or quietly denied. For my thesis I asked how host communication and interaction, both before and during a guest's stay, shapes experiences of wellness, personal growth, and inclusion in a short-term tourism space. Through interviews, WhatsApp exchanges, and shared moments around meals and kitesurfing sessions, I began to notice that emotional alignment was being constructed in ways that were not explicit, but no less powerful. It was something more deliberate, something that revealed itself not in formal rules, but in the tone of a voice message, the timing of a response, the way someone's presence was acknowledged or not. Over time, I began to see this process as a soft but deliberate preparation for group life, what I've now called curated belonging.

Curated belonging is not a fixed outcome. It is a socially structured process through which people come to feel "seen," "loved," and "changed." At Shoreline, this process was shaped by multiple layers, beginning with guest selection, carefully crafted continuous pre-arrival messaging and engagement that built a sense of connection and shared identity. Leading into consistent on-site host communication, affective tone, shared meals, silences, gestures of care, and subtle corrections. Therefore, expanding Simoni's (2019) concept of the touristic borderzone, not just as an improvised space of local-tourist interaction, but as a digitally extended and emotionally curated environment. At Shoreline, the borderzone included not only on-site encounters, but also pre-arrival WhatsApp exchanges, Instagram exposure, and the interpretive tone of host communication.

In this thesis I have shown how the success of immersive tourism experiences depends on the coordinated operation of multiple dimensions. As Zhou and Wang (2024) propose, in order to enhance visitors' emotional experience, tourism destinations should focus on "creating the scene's atmosphere, innovating tourism performances, and optimizing host-guest interaction" (p. 14). At Shoreline, these elements were evident in the carefully designed physical spaces, lively communal events, and sustained communication from hosts that shaped an emotional environment supporting wellness and self-development. By strengthening these aspects, Shoreline delivered emotional value that influenced visitors' behavioral intentions, including their willingness to engage deeply, return, or recommend the place. While the hosts played the principal role in setting this tone, guests also participated, mirroring, adapting, or withdrawing in response. Some guests were drawn in easily, and others found themselves bouncing off invisible boundaries. What they described as connection or exclusion was rarely about one specific behavior but more so about emotional energy, a vibe, perceived compatibility, and how closely they fit the social atmosphere that had already been shaped by those who came before them.

This thesis has traced how curated belonging is enacted not only by being present, but by repeated acts of recognition and connection. The guests I met often described their experiences in deeply personal ways of clarity, change, emotional ease, including stories which were also shaped by the group's responses to them. Suggesting wellness and development weren't simply individual achievements. In this sense, Shoreline didn't just host tourists, it hosted emotional possibility. Throughout this thesis I have tried to show that curated belonging is not a grand theory, but a grounded analytic which helps me describe how belonging is both offered and withheld through communication. At Shoreline, inclusion was rarely discussed alongside exclusion. People weren't explicitly told they didn't fit. Instead, messages went unanswered, invitations were not extended and attention quietly shifted elsewhere. The absence of responses became a method of separation with some guests often blaming themselves when they felt excluded. However, what was happening was structural, it was a selective system of emotional invitation shaped by host labor, group tone, and quiet filtering.

Taken together, these tendencies reveal how inclusion and exclusion were not random, but consistently shaped through communication. Building on this, my research contributes to the anthropology of tourism by showing how wellness, personal growth, and belonging are not only

imagined but actively constructed through communication using attention, tone, timing, and consistency. It also contributes to the anthropology of place by showing how emotional attachment is not always rooted in physical space, instead, it can form around people, tone, and shared scripts, even in transient settings. Tourism scholars such as Simoni, Salazar, and Hartwell helped me contextualize these processes. As Simoni (2019) suggests, tourism spaces are shaped by ambiguous and emotionally charged encounters that reveal how people imagine relationships and perform aspects of their identity (pp. 110-113). At Shoreline, these encounters began long before anyone arrived, with guests describing their initial impressions from Instagram stories and/or pre-arrival chats with the hosts as warm, welcoming and energetic. Salazar and Graburn (2014) define tourism imaginaries as “socially transmitted representational assemblages that interact with people’s personal imaginings and that are used as meaning-making and world-shaping devices” (p. 1). This helps explain how Shorelines early tone functioned in shaping guests, as guests weren’t just preparing for a trip; they were being encouraged to imagine themselves as already part of something, reinforcing a shared sense of identity before arrival. This kind of anticipation carried emotional weight. Waterman (1993) work on eudaimonic well-being asserts that lasting wellness experiences come from “emotional meaning, reflection, and psychological engagement,” not just pleasure (as cited in Hartwell, 2016. p. 1). At Shoreline, guests like Irina, Claire, and BJ arrived already hoping for self-understanding or change, with their stories echoing what Valente-Mosqueda et al. (2025) summarizes Adams et al’s (1997) model of wellness as encompassing “physical, spiritual, intellectual, psychological, social and emotional, occupational, and environmental dimensions (p. 2). Yet this personal shift was not experienced in isolation. It was socially structured, made possible through tone, timing, and a collective willingness to interpret the experience as meaningful.

What counted as meaningful, however, wasn’t the same for everyone. As I showed through the cases of Lukas, Joy, and Isabel, curated belonging also involved pressure, misalignment, and quiet exclusion. Emotional tone operated as a kind of informal set of expectations, those who could read it and respond to it were welcomed, and those who couldn’t often felt the difference personally, even if no one said anything. Garcês et al. (2018) write that wellness and personal growth in tourism are “not isolated achievements but are shaped by the surrounding social environment” (p. 42). This was especially evident at Shoreline, where the environment was not only social, but

emotionally coded. Neville and Reicher (2011) found that participants described feeling connected when they could recognize themselves in the group, and when that recognition was returned (pp. 383, 392). At Shoreline, similarity didn't depend on nationality or background, but on shared emotional style, energy, a love of kitesurfing, a casual attitude toward money, and a social vibe that felt easy and expressive.

Guests who had watched and interacted with Shoreline's social media stories and had direct messages beforehand often arrived already tuned in to the tone and culture. This early pre-arrival connection is the beginning of what I call the *imaginary cycle*, where future guests begin by watching Shoreline's daily Instagram stories and posts, imagining themselves into the experience not just as participants, but as certain types of people, emotionally open, socially attuned, relaxed, expressive, and already part of the group. These stories don't simply advertise a destination; they model the tone. While this thesis does not work directly with media anthropology or platform studies, it treats Instagram as a communicative tool embedded in Shoreline's emotional design. Its relevance lies not in content analysis, but in how the platform is used to create tone, shape initial emotional alignment, and reinforce imagined participation. Through repeated exposure (especially because all pre-arrival communication happens via Instagram direct messages) guests are subtly conditioned by the platform itself. Each message exchanged between future guests and the hosts increases Shoreline's visibility through the Instagram algorithm, pushing its stories and posts to the top of the guest's feed. Even when not actively looking for updates, guests are repeatedly confronted with the visual and emotional culture. Over time, this exposure does more than build excitement, as it also has the potential to shape identity. In this light, messaging (and communication) becomes a form of emotional onboarding, where guests begin not just to expect a certain experience, but to align with it, to mirror the mood, behaviors, and energy they have already been absorbing in digital form. Seamon's (2023) view of place as a "noncontingent, always present, lived entwinement" between person and world (p. 1) helps explain why guests began to feel attached before arrival. The Instagram interface became more than a promotional tool as it functioned as a portal into an already unfolding spatial and emotional world, one in which presence was pre-scripted, and belonging could be anticipated. Once on site, guests often step into those imagined roles with ease. They adapt to the tone they anticipated, reflect the group energy they have been watching, and integrate quickly into the social environment. Furthermore, the imaginary

cycle does not end there, as guests become part of the visible life of Shoreline, appearing in stories, tagged in posts, recognized in reels, they physically becoming the new figures that future guests will watch and imagine into. This shift from imagining participation to becoming the imagined creates a second layer of affirmation. It is one thing to feel included in a moment, but it is another to be seen as part of the group identity others aspire to join.

I believe this cycle, especially the pre-arrival component also supports the formation of a shared identity. As guests mirror the same behaviors, aesthetic tone, and emotional openness, they begin to see reflections of themselves in others, and be seen in return. This mutual recognition strengthens emotional bonds possibly having social connections feel easier, faster, and more meaningful when they feel they are already aligned. This explains why many guests reported an immediate sense of belonging, and why their experiences of personal growth or clarity were not only individual, but deeply social. That said, becoming the imagined is not a requirement for connection or emotional success. For many guests, it may not matter whether they appear in a story or are recognized by future followers. What mattered most is that they step into the roles they imagined, live the tone they absorbed, and feel themselves aligned with the community they had already pictured and was projected by Shoreline. This act of living the imagination, of emotionally preparing through repeated exposure, then finding that experience confirmed on-site, is a large part of how curated belonging takes shape. The imaginary cycle, in this sense, is not defined by digital visibility alone, but also describes the quieter process of shaping expectations, mirroring shared tone, and entering a social world that feels already familiar. Even without becoming the figure others imagine, guests can experience strong connection, shared identity, and the emotional ease that supports personal growth. This emotional alignment shaped not only interpersonal interactions but also the sense of place.

Dwyer, Chen, and Lee (2019) argue that emotional bonds with tourism destinations are “deeply connected to how both residents and tourists relate to the place” through social interaction (p. 645). Guests often described Shoreline as a “safe place” or a “happy place,” but what made it feel that way was the regularity of the emotional tone, the shared routines, and the layered storytelling that made individuals change seem possible. Even the physical layout reinforced this, having the residence on the top of a hill looking over the island, the second-floor treehouse and its seclusive

and exclusive feeling, and the separation from Boracay's mass-tourist beaches helped position Shoreline as distinct and earned.

While the model of curated belonging, including guest selection, consistent host-led pre-arrival messaging, and on-site communication, can be applied in wellness tourism settings globally, the experience at Shoreline was also shaped by more specific elements. Kitesurfing being one of Shoreline's three business pillars of their holistic triangle (People, Place and Activity) functioned not only as the activity, but as a form of emotional achievement. Guests often described a boost in confidence and clarity after progressing in this physically demanding sport. That sense of personal growth was also amplified through kitesurfing as a "shared meaningful experience", a bond available only to those physically able and willing to take part. In addition, the relaxed, expressive culture of kitesurfing and surf tourism helped reinforce an atmosphere where emotional openness felt socially acceptable, even expected. In general, it is my belief that curated belonging as a communication and sense of belonging strategy can be applied more broadly not only in wellness tourism but many other forms of onboarding in varying industries, especially where social interaction is encouraged or expected. However, the particular mix of extreme sports, exotic environmental settings, and tone at Shoreline made this form of emotional integration especially effective.

That said, curated belonging was not neutral. As discussed in my empirical Chapter 2, money played a quiet but structuring role with pricing being rarely discussed openly, and stays were often extended informally. This silence around cost helped preserve the illusion of effortlessness, but it also made access conditional. Guests who could afford to stay longer such as Irina or BJ were more likely to become part of the social core. Those with tighter budgets, like Joy, sometimes felt pressure to overextend just to stay present. As Valente-Mosqueda et al. (2025) describe, wellness tourism models often point out, psychological, and social benefits, while the financial conditions that make these experiences accessible are rarely addressed directly (p. 4). At Shoreline, the silence around money wasn't accidental, It was part of the aesthetic, but that silence also contributed to uneven participation.

Despite the exclusions, many guests described having experiences of real connection and change. They remembered being welcomed by name, included in late-night talks, or understood without

explanation. These moments were not imagined, they were lived, but also strategically shaped. I believe curated belonging gives us language for this, as it allows us to speak about how belonging is not simply found, but facilitated. Therefore personal growth and wellbeing do not have to be spontaneous to be meaningful. As Hartwell (2016) reminds us, “eudaimonic tourism may also open pathways to self-discovery” even when it involves joy, social bonding, or structured activity (p. 10). At Shoreline, that “structured activity and social bonding “ was built through pre-arrival and on-site acts of communication and planning.

Together, these directions suggest that curated belonging is not only a concept but also an analytical term, and a call for attention: attention to timing, tone, silence and subtle design of social life. Attention to how inclusion is extended, how ease is sustained, and how group alignment is socially and emotionally shaped. If this thesis has shown anything, it is that personal growth in wellness tourism is not an accident of place or personality, but is built deliberately, socially, and sometimes unequally.

9.2 Practical Application: Emotional Onboarding Beyond Tourism

While my research is grounded in tourism and wellness, its implications extend beyond these fields by showing how the concept of curated belonging holds value in other transitional settings where emotional alignment, group integration, and identity formation matter. One such scenario is university life, where students often enroll months before beginning their first semester, experience that waiting period as uncertain, disconnected, or even isolating. As the Danish Evaluation Institute (2017) notes, “around 30% of students who embark on higher education drop out without finishing, and the majority of those who drop out do so as early as during their first year” (p. 1). The study found that students’ “initial experiences seem very often to be important in determining whether they achieve a good start to their studies,” yet relatively few interventions focus on the emotional and social dimensions of this transition (p. 1). It concluded that “a strong social aspect during study start is linked to a lower dropout rate,” with perceived quality of early social connection predicting individual-level retention outcomes (p. 2).

Currently, university admissions processes already act as a form of guest selection, filtering applicants based on grades, personal statements, and perceived fit. These filters quietly shape similarity across life phase, ambition, and cultural background; however, as this thesis has argued,

selection alone does not create a community. Without emotional preparation and tone-setting, these similarities remain passive. Kehm et al. (2019) show that early dropout often results from lack of social integration rather than lack of capability (pp. 150-152). This reinforces the idea that students need not only formal selection but also meaningful emotional onboarding to feel aligned with institutional life. Curated belonging highlights that belonging requires structure, including early contact, emotional communication, and repeated exposure to the tone of the group or culture one is about to join.

To apply this, institutions would need to rethink how communication is handled during the pre-arrival phase in order to actively and affectively influence students' imaginations. Universities typically rely on email for formal communication, which rarely supports emotional alignment or peer familiarity. A shift toward, or at least an addition to, platforms like Instagram could allow messaging and cultural visibility to shape early expectations and shared imaginaries. For those without Instagram, institutions could frame it as a communication tool required for transition, similar to how apps like Moodle or Outlook are mandated for course management. Still, relying on digital platforms requires awareness that not all students access or interpret these channels in the same way. While not all information would be suitable for Instagram, the platform could be used for emotionally attuned updates, peer visibility, and real-time tone-setting. Algorithmic reinforcement would then strengthen the imaginary cycle described earlier, where digital interaction shapes visibility, which in turn shapes imagined identity. As digital platforms already shape student expectations long before arrival, a curated social media presence could serve as an emotional anchor, helping students begin to imagine themselves as part of the university community. This kind of engagement has the potential to reduce early disconnection, which research shows is a strong predictor of first-year dropouts (Kehm et al., 2019, p. 156; Opazo et al., 2021, p. 3). If students begin interacting with departments or administration teams through Instagram direct messages, it will trigger the platform's algorithm to prioritize the university's stories and posts on their feeds. Students would then receive daily exposure to curated portrayals of student life, peer culture, and institutional tone. Over time, this may shape not only what they expect, but how they imagine themselves fitting into the social and emotional world of the campus. This mirrors what the Danish study (Kehm et al., 2019) describes as the "social aspect" of study start, the subjective feeling that there is a basis for connection, familiarity, and emotional safety

(p. 4). Curated belonging could thus serve as a deliberate intervention to shape this emotional tone, reducing the uncertainty and emotional risk that often accompany university transitions. In this way, Instagram becomes more than a marketing tool, functioning purposefully as a subtle form of real life integration.

Of course, not all students will appear in content or become visible figures in the university's curated image, but that is not the point. Like at Shoreline, the emotional impact does not depend on being seen, it comes from recognizing the tone, seeing yourself in others, and stepping into a space that already feels familiar. The act of living the imagination, of aligning with a shared identity shaped through digital tone and repeated exposure is often enough to support connection and confidence. If this emotional tone continues on-site through residence life, peer mentorship, and consistent interpersonal messaging, students may arrive not as strangers but as prepared participants in a community that already feels partially known. In this way, both *curated belonging* and the *imaginary cycle* offer more than a model of tourism. They suggest a potential approach for emotional onboarding and alignment adaptable to larger institutions as well. When communication is designed with care, even large, complex spaces can begin to feel coherent and inclusive.

9.3 Further Outlook

This research project opened more than I could fully capture. My fieldwork at Shoreline began mid-season, after the emotional tone, group relations, and daily routines had already been established. I did not observe how those dynamics initially formed, nor how they shifted toward the season's end. A future study might follow the full kitesurfing season, with long-term observation offering a clearer picture of how curated belonging takes shape, unravels, or settles over time. Following a full season would also allow for closer attention to the emotional labor required at different phases: the early efforts to set tone and inclusion, the moments where cohesion is tested or affirmed mid-season, and the later stages when emotional intensity gives way to withdrawal, fatigue, or quiet resolution. It would allow for a closer look at how communication operates across each of these phases, not only through logistics, but through tone, timing, and the emotional messages in everyday interaction. This longer study could also shed light on how long-term guests gradually assume informal leadership roles, acting as tone-setters, emotional anchors, or subtle gatekeepers. At the same time, the arrival of short-term guests often bring contrast. Their

arrivals had the potential to shift the atmosphere in unpredictable ways. Some brought bursts of energy that reset the group, while others hesitated, uncertain of how to integrate. Studying how communication shapes these arrivals could show how temporary presence either reinforces or disrupts belonging.

Beyond Shoreline, the concept of curated belonging could be applied to a range of intentional tourism environments. Wellness retreats, ski lodges, co-living workspaces, and yoga retreats may all rely on some form of emotional curation, through tone-setting, host communication, and informal filtering of who fits. In each case communication becomes the medium through which belonging is structured. A comparative ethnographic approach could reveal how these communication practices differ depending on activity, cultural setting, or economic model. In one setting, emotional openness might be encouraged through ritualized welcome ceremonies. In another, it might be managed through digital aesthetics or selective replies. Future research might ask when emotional curation supports genuine inclusion, and when it becomes a subtle form of exclusion.

Curated belonging is also shaped by structural factors that often remain unspoken. One of these is money. At Shoreline, prices were rarely discussed directly, and this silence contributed to the tone of ease and spontaneity. But at the same time, silence around it made it harder for some guests to know whether they could fully participate. Those with high incomes or flexible work schedules extended their stays without hesitation. Others, like Joy, quietly stretched their budgets in order to remain part of the group. Financial filtering in wellness tourism is rarely overt, but it clearly influences who stays, who leads, and who fades out. Alongside this sits the emotional labor of the hosts, having their roles extending far beyond logistics. They were the ones shaping the atmosphere, anticipating needs, regulating emotion, and smoothing tension. This labor, often described as “just part of the vibe,” shaped the way belonging was maintained, but it came with a cost. Eli and Aria both spoke about needing to withdraw, rest, or create space for themselves in order to keep the group experience. By exploring these two dimensions (emotional labor and financial ambiguity) as forms of communication, future research could offer a more honest account of the subtle processes that sustain selective forms of community life. It should continue to trace how emotional inclusion and exclusion are not simply social outcomes, but are actively shaped through everyday acts of communication.

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Zusammenfassung

Diese Masterarbeit untersucht, wie Kommunikationspraktiken an einer Kitesurfschule mit dazugehörigem Gästehaus auf den Philippinen die Erfahrungen von Touristen in Bezug auf Wohlbefinden, Zugehörigkeit und persönliche Entwicklung beeinflussen. Basierend auf ethnografischer Feldforschung durchgeführt bei Greenyard auf der Insel Boracay zeige ich, wie die Gastgeber*innen sowohl die Kommunikation vor der Ankunft als auch jene vor Ort nutzen, um nicht nur logistische Abläufe zu koordinieren, sondern um Gäste gezielt einzuladen, auszuwählen und emotional vorzubereiten. Durch Beobachtung der Teilnehmer, Interviews, WhatsApp-Nachrichten und Feldnotizen argumentiere ich, dass Kommunikation bei Greenyard als weiches Strukturprinzip wirkt, über das emotionale Erwartungen aufgebaut und soziale Zugehörigkeit gesteuert werden. Angelehnt an Salazar und Gruburns (2014) Theorie der „Tourism Imaginaries“ zeige ich, wie Gäste häufig bereits mit der Vorstellung anreisen, Teil der Gruppe zu sein – geprägt durch kuratierte visuelle Inhalte und personalisierte Nachrichten. Um diesen Prozess zu beschreiben, stelle ich das Konzept des „*imaginary cycle*“ vor: Potenzielle Gäste konsumieren Greenyards Geschichten online, werden durch direkte Kommunikation emotional vorbereitet und werden dann selbst Teil dieser Geschichten für künftige Betrachter*innen – wodurch ein ständiger Kreislauf der imaginären Integration entsteht. Ich konzentriere mich auf drei Phasen, in denen soziale Zugehörigkeit hergestellt wird: Gästerauswahl, Kommunikation vor der Ankunft und Interaktion vor Ort. Erstens zeige ich, wie der Erstkontakt mit den Gastgeber*innen als Filtermechanismus fungiert, bei dem Gäste nach emotionaler Eignung, Reaktionsbereitschaft und Lebensstil ausgewählt werden. Zweitens erzeugt die Kommunikation vor der Ankunft emotionale Bereitschaft und eine Gruppenidentität. Drittens wird durch Moderation des Gruppenchats, Tonfall, Körpersprache, gemeinsame Mahlzeiten, Ausflüge und informelle Gespräche diese imaginäre Verbindung entweder gestärkt oder gestört. Diese Prozesse unterstützen nicht nur Inklusion, sondern führen auch stillschweigend zu Exklusion, wenn die emotionale oder soziale Anpassung nicht ausreicht. Um diese vielschichtigen Prozesse zu beschreiben, führe ich zudem das Konzept „*curated belonging*“ ein welches beschreibt, wie Aufnahme und Ausschluss nicht zufällig entstehen, sondern subtil über die Kommunikation aufgebaut werden. Dazu gehören nicht nur die Erwartungen vor der Ankunft, sondern auch der alltägliche Umgangston, emotionales Filtern und informelle Hierarchien, die die Gästelerfahrung prägen. „*curated belonging*“ umfasst

sowohl digitale als auch persönliche Interaktionen und zeigt, wie emotionale Ausrichtung lange vor der Ankunft angestoßen und vor Ort kontinuierlich angepasst wird. Diese Arbeit leistet einen Beitrag zur anthropologischen Diskussion über Tourismus, Wohlbefinden und selektive Inklusion, indem sie zeigt, dass emotionale Verbundenheit nicht einfach entdeckt, sondern durch kommunikative und soziale Praktiken gezielt hergestellt wird.