



Ayahuasca Journeys in Retreat Centers: Understanding Tourists Experiences and Implications

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Abstract

Ayahuasca tourism is growing rapidly, attracting many people in numerous retreat centers in South America. This qualitative study aimed to identify the key factors influencing tourists' perceptions of ayahuasca experiences in these retreats, and their impact on their satisfaction. A qualitative approach was used to gain an in-depth understanding of their perspectives, and the software Leximancer was used to analyze 21 interviews of tourists who attended ayahuasca ceremonies in South America.

Overall, the context in which ayahuasca is consumed is important for participants' satisfaction. Ceremonial practices surrounding ayahuasca, taking place in a retreat with an experienced shaman have a positive impact. Furthermore, participants show interest in indigenous culture and practices, their satisfaction stem from the authenticity of the experience. Tourists' experiences at retreats are also influenced by various factors related to the risk of consumption, including the psychological risks, the need for their consent to participate in ceremonies, the information provided about the substance and its risks, and the understanding of the legal frameworks around it. The participants also noted several measures that contributed to their overall satisfaction, such as experienced shamans, integration sessions, and screening procedures. Finally, participants appear to appreciate centers that integrate eco- friendly practices and emphasize the need to preserve the environment.

This study provides valuable insights for ayahuasca tourism, promoting safe and sustainable practices that prioritize participant well-being, respect the indigenous culture, and manage risks. By informing retreat centers, operators, and policymakers, this research can support a positive, ethical, and responsible ayahuasca tourism.

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Resumo

O turismo da Ayahuasca está em rápido crescimento e atrai um elevado número de turistas para os Centros de Retiro na América do Sul. Este estudo qualitativo teve como objetivo identificar os principais fatores que influenciam a percepção dos turistas sobre as experiências e satisfação do turismo da Ayahuasca nesses Retiros.

Este estudo utiliza uma metodologia qualitativa para compreender e aprofundar a perspectiva dos turistas, foi utilizado o software Leximancer para analisar 21 entrevistas a turistas que participaram em cerimônias da Ayahuasca na América do Sul. No geral, o ambiente em que a Ayahuasca é consumida é importante para a satisfação dos turistas. Práticas cerimoniais, que ocorrem num Retiro com um Xamã experiente, têm um impacto positivo nos turistas. Além disso, a satisfação destes turistas é proveniente da autenticidade da experiência. Essas experiências nos retiros também são influenciadas por vários fatores relacionados ao risco de consumo. Os participantes acatam várias recomendações que contribuem para a satisfação deste tipo de turismo, tais como as sessões de integração ou e procedimentos de triagem médica. Os turistas também apreciam práticas ecológicas e enfatizam a necessidade de preservar o meio ambiente.

Este estudo permite recolher informação relevante para o turismo da Ayahuasca, promovendo práticas seguras e sustentáveis que valorizam o bem-estar dos participantes, respeitam a cultura indígena e mitigam os riscos. Os resultados desta investigação são relevantes para os Centros de Retiro, operadores e Legisladores, esta investigação pode apoiar um turismo da Ayahuasca benéfico, ético e responsável.

Título: Viagens de Ayahuasca em Centros de Retiro: Compreendendo as experiências turísticas e suas implicações

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Palavras-chave: Ayahuasca-Turismo, Centros de retiro, Perspectivas, Experiências, Impulsionadores, análise qualitativa

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1.Introduction

The indigenous communities of the Amazon basin have utilized ayahuasca, a potent psychedelic beverage, for religious, therapeutic, and cultural purposes for a long time (Shanon, 2002; Naranjo,1986). The beverage is made from the chacruna plant and Ayahuasca vine, which contain the powerful psychedelic DMT (dimethyltryptamine) (Rodríguez et al., 2022).

Over the last four decades, ayahuasca has gained popularity outside the Amazon basin due to its spiritual, therapeutic, and religious properties. This surge in popularity has increased ayahuasca tourism, with retreats and ceremonies being offered in various South American nations that attract thousands of visitors annually (Mantere, 2011).

However, this rise in demand raises ethical questions about cultural appropriation or disrespect for indigenous communities who have been practicing this ritual for ages (Labate, 2010).

Additionally, it is crucial to recognize that there are environmental issues associated with growing Ayahuasca demand, like overharvesting of plants leading to deforestation and pollution, which could adversely affect the environment if managed unsustainably (Gurvicus, n.d.).

The absence of regulation and safety standards surrounding ayahuasca tourism (Bauer, 2018) poses significant safety hazards to individuals consuming it. Many retreats operate without regulations or guidelines, putting visitors at risk of death (Bauer, 2018). Moreover, the legal status of ayahuasca varies from country to country, and is still debated in many jurisdictions. Even though it is prohibited worldwide under the 1971 United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances (CPS), some countries tolerate its usage for religious purposes (Labate, 2012).

Finally, it is essential to note that physical and mental health could be negatively impacted by ayahuasca use, especially among sensitive populations such as adolescents or those with pre-existing mental health conditions (Barbosa et al., 2012; Da Silveira, 2005).

Research gap:

Ayahuasca retreat centers have become increasingly popular as a unique form of tourism. However, there is a noticeable lack of literature exploring tourists' perspectives on their experiences at these centers. While some studies have delved into various aspects of ayahuasca tourism, including key ethical considerations that should be taken into account, such as the need for informed consent (Ray, 2016), the existence of physical and psychological risks in using Ayahuasca (Wolff, 2020; Dos Santos, 2013), the need for prevention measures to mitigate them

(Johnson et al., 2008; Dos Santos, 2013), the complex aspect of the legality of Ayahuasca across the countries (I²IT International Institute of Information Technology, 2022; Loizaga-Velder & Verres 2014), the importance of cultural respect (Labate, 2016; Aldred, 2000), and the urgent need for environmental consideration to both limit the environmental pollution that this kind of tourism can have (CBD, 2004) (Callicott, 2016), and the threat to the sustainability of the Ayahuasca vine (Dam, 2018; Kilham, 2018), there are still significant gaps in the research that need to be addressed.

One area where research is lacking is in understanding participants' perceptions of safety measures and their impact on the overall experience. It's important to explore how safety measures contribute to participants' satisfaction and well-being to develop guidelines and best practices for retreat centers.

Another research gap involves indigenous cultural practices that are an integral part of ayahuasca ceremonies. There's a need for further exploration into tourists' perspectives on engaging with these traditions to gain insight into the authenticity of their experiences and the role of cultural heritage in shaping their perspectives.

Additionally, limited research has been conducted on the importance of the ceremonial aspect and the role of the shamans in shaping tourists' experiences at retreat centers. Investigating participants' views on structured rituals, ceremonial aspects, and shamanic practices involved can provide valuable insights for retreat center management.

Lastly, there's a significant gap concerning participants' view on eco-friendly practices of the retreat centers. Understanding them can inform sustainable tourism development within this field.

In conclusion, while existing literature has provided valuable insights into various aspects of ayahuasca tourism, significant gaps remain. Addressing them will help promote safety and authenticity while fostering sustainable practices within this industry.

To address this gap, this study aims, firstly to address the following research question:

What are the key drivers shaping tourists' perspectives on their ayahuasca experiences at retreat centers?

And the following research objective:

1. Investigate the key factors that shape tourists' perspectives on their ayahuasca experiences at retreat centers and understand how these factors influence tourists' perspectives.

By delving into the multifaceted aspects of Ayahuasca tourism, with a specific focus on responsible engagement with indigenous cultures, safe and informed practices, and the promotion of sustainable practices, this thesis aims to contribute to the ongoing debates surrounding this topic. The research will employ a qualitative approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews to gather data directly from tourists who have engaged in Ayahuasca ceremonies. Through this study, a deeper understanding of the complexities and nuances of Ayahuasca tourism will be attained, offering valuable insights for fostering responsible and sustainable engagement within the industry.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Exploring the Rise of Ayahuasca Tourism

The popularity of Ayahuasca tourism has been on the rise in recent years, with retreat centers popping up in various countries over the last decade (Kamin,2021) and increasingly attracting American and foreign travelers to this kind of tourism (DeRios, 1994).

More and more new shamans offer their services due to the promise of steady income (Fotiou, E., 2020). The local ceremonies typically cost at least a few hundred dollars per person (Tupper, K. W., 2017).

According to Dobkin de Rios (1994), This trend reflects the post-modern phenomenon of consumerism, where individuals seek to fill a sense of emptiness by consuming experiences, including drug-induced states. However, even though there is considerable use of Ayahuasca for recreational purposes only (deRios, 1994), other studies indicate other reasons, such as achieving mental well-being and enhancing their ability to solve personal problems (Cardenas & Gomez, 2004) or other purposes such as personal development, an increase of self-awareness, and enhancing creativity (Kjellgren et al., 2009).

As knowledge and experience of Ayahuasca's use in the Amazon have grown, Ayahuasca has become increasingly popular in Europe and North America; however, its use is suppressed due to legal challenges in many countries (Labate et al., 2018).

According to Tupper (2009), the growth of ecotourism and cultural tourism has created a niche market for Ayahuasca experiences in South America that offer visitors an opportunity to learn about indigenous cultures and engage in spiritual practices. We now assist in the international opening of a diverse range of retreat centers offering Ayahuasca ceremonies with varying levels of regulation (Labate & Feeney, 2012). However, regulating Ayahuasca tourism presents various implications and challenges both domestically and internationally (Labate & Feeney, 2012).

In conclusion, Ayahuasca tourism has surged in recent times, with more retreats opening and offering their services. While some individuals may view Ayahuasca as a recreational drug, others seek its potential for personal growth. The regulation of Ayahuasca remains a complex issue that requires careful consideration as the practice becomes more popular.

2.1.2 Tourists' Perspectives on Ayahuasca

When it comes to tourists' perspectives on Ayahuasca, personal motivations for the trip vary greatly. According to research by Kavenská and Simonová (2015), some are seeking spiritual growth and personal development, while others hope to alleviate mental health issues. Additionally, many express an interest in psychedelic medicine and therapy. Holman's (2010) classification system includes three types of Ayahuasca tourists based on their motivations. The first type is primarily interested in the Ayahuasca experience itself for health and spiritual growth reasons. The second type is looking for pleasure and enjoyment from the experience as part of a broader travel goal, such as ecotourism or adventure tourism. Finally, the third type ended up doing Ayahuasca in a casual and spontaneous way, seeking hedonism.

Timothy May's (2015) study found that participants were driven by hedonistic motivations of curiosity and experimentation.

A study by Lily Ainsworth (2014) found that tourists going to Ayahuasca retreat centers have high expectations for transformative experiences - be they psychological, ecological, medical, or spiritual. These expectations are the result of the marketing through the retreat's websites, creating hope among readers who aspire for their own.

Regarding the experience with Ayahuasca, Kjellgren et al., (2009) found that visitors who take part in Ayahuasca rituals typically view the activity as safe and beneficial. Many claim to have had life-changing, deep experiences that are frequently attributed to the psychedelic properties of the plant, also referred to as "the vine of the soul." However, a study by Loizaga-Velder and Verres (2014) found that while most participants reported positive effects on their well-being, such as an increase in self-awareness and a feeling of spiritual connection, about 20% of participants experienced adverse effects, such as anxiety, paranoia, and confusion. According to the author, certain factors can influence whether an individual has a positive or negative experience with Ayahuasca. These include presenting problems and any other mental health issues they may have, the appropriateness of the treatment, how long it lasts, the qualities of the therapist and staff involved in administering it, how well they transition to outpatient care after use, and whether culturally specific considerations are taken into account during treatment. In addition to these findings, Barbosa et al.' study (2019) published in *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* found that around 9% of participants reported distressing reactions along with preoccupation as a reaction to the ceremony, 7-14 days later.

While Ayahuasca can be a powerful tool for personal growth and healing for some individuals, based on these studies' findings still poses risks requiring careful consideration before use

despite measures like medical screening preparation integration emphasized by Loizaga-Velder and Verres (2014).

2.1.3 Sustainability and ecological factors

There are concerns about the ecological impact of Ayahuasca consumption, as Labate and Feeney (2012) discussed. The author writes that CONAD (o Conselho Nacional de Políticas Sobre Drogas) in Brazil recommends that Ayahuasca groups plant and harvest their necessary plants to avoid using wild plants and ensure ecological sustainability. Moreover, Dam (2018) and Kilham (2018) have highlighted the growing concern for wild Ayahuasca vine populations due to increasing demand for the brew within Peru and internationally.

Kilham (2018) suggests that cultivation could be a solution to this problem, offering both sustainability advantages and economic benefits for individuals and communities. Suárez Álvarez (2020) further argues that sustainable harvesting practices, such as reforestation and agroforestry, should be implemented by Ayahuasca users and shamans to protect the plant's habitat.

Labate (2014) also emphasizes the need for Brazilian Ayahuasca religions to consider agroforestry management or reforestation due to increasing national and global harvest pressure. Labate argues that although environmental regulation exists, prior to 1998, Ayahuasca extraction was uncontrolled until an accord was reached between the Ayahuasca religions and IBAMA (Instituto Brasileiro do Meio Ambiente e dos Recursos Naturais Renováveis). This accord requires a management plan for *Banisteriopsis caapi* and *Psychotria viridis*. The author further writes that recently, IBAMA has increased policing efforts due to concerns from some groups collecting Ayahuasca solely for commercial purposes.

Overall, sustainable practices are necessary for preserving the future of Ayahuasca use while balancing economic opportunities.

The issue of sustainability surrounding Ayahuasca is complex, as discussed by Callicott (2016), the issue of sustainability surrounding Ayahuasca is a multifaceted one that requires attention to both ecological and social factors. The author highlighted a discrepancy between the spiritual beliefs held by Amazonian communities and their material practices. She argues that the environmental impact of Ayahuasca production and consumption resulted in unsustainable practices that can harm the environment. However, according to her writing, there are indications that the evolving patterns and growing diversity in the use of Ayahuasca can lead to positive effects at the cultural, intercultural, and socio-environmental levels, as she

exemplified with Alianza Arkana, the activist branch of a large Western-run Ayahuasca retreat center, working in projects concerned with eco-social justice, intercultural education, permaculture, and eco-sanitation. Therefore, adopting a holistic approach that considers both ecological and social factors is crucial to addressing the sustainability of Ayahuasca production and consumption.

On another note, the impacts of tourism on biodiversity are well-known and include a range of threats posed by hotels, lodges, and guesthouses. According to the CBD (Secretariat of the Convention of Biological Diversity) (2004), these threats include habitat destruction, resource extraction during initial development, and ongoing habitat degradation due to facility operations. These impacts may be compounded by over-extraction of water resources, plants, or wildlife, as well as pollution of water, soil, air, and land (CBD, 2004). Additionally, the influx of visitors can have direct impacts on local natural areas, and there may be an increased spread of invasive species, fire, and pathogens (CBD, 2004). The tourism sector's sourcing decisions, importation of labor, and other factors may also have indirect effects on the environment (CBD, 2004). According to (Brackowski et al., 2019), the environmental impact of Ayahuasca tourism remains underexamined, although a recent publication points to the potential relationship between jaguar poaching and Ayahuasca tourism.

To improve the sustainability of hotels, lodges, and guesthouses, different frameworks and training programs exist, like the ones from NEPCon or the one from Milder et al. (2016); the latter showed that a voluntary sustainability standard and training program could serve both to recognize existing good actors and to drive incremental improvement in enterprises that were previously less sustainable.

In conclusion, to safeguard the environment and ensure Ayahuasca remains available, it is crucial to adopt a sustainable approach to its use and conservation. The CONAD's resolution in Brazil presents a practical framework that promotes sustainable practices and guarantees the safety and sustainability of Ayahuasca usage. Additionally, frameworks like those provided by the CBD (2014) and NEPCon offer valuable guidance on how to mitigate retreats' impact on their environment.

2.2 Ethical and safety considerations in Ayahuasca Tourism

In the context of ayahuasca tourism, various ethical considerations have been identified in the literature. As the practice gains popularity, questions have risen about the potential cultural appropriation and exploitation of the indigenous people, the potential safety hazard of

Ayahuasca consumption by tourists, the importance of the informed consent of participants before partaking in such practices, and the potential legal and regulatory related to it.

2.2.1 Cultural Appropriation and Exploitation

Cultural appropriation refers to the taking over of creative or artistic forms, themes, or practices by one cultural group from another. It often involves Western appropriations of non-Western or non-white forms and carries connotations of exploitation and dominance (Oxford Reference, nd.). Moreover, Wallis and Malm (1984) write that cultural exploitation typically involves the appropriation of elements of a subordinated culture by a dominant culture that treats it as a resource to be mined and shipped home for consumption. This can be seen in Western musicians' use of indigenous folk music without financial compensation (Wallis & Malm, 1984).

In the context of Ayahuasca tourism, both cultural appropriation and exploitation can occur when non-indigenous individuals commodify or commercialize Ayahuasca ceremonies without involving or compensating the indigenous communities that developed this practice.

According to Jesse Hudson (2011), the Ayahuasca tourism industry is facing concerns regarding cultural appropriation and exploitation. This is particularly problematic when non-indigenous individuals lack a thorough understanding of the cultural significance of Ayahuasca ceremonies. The situation worsens when these ceremonies are commodified and commercialized by non-indigenous people, which can be disrespectful to indigenous cultures.

A study conducted by Prayag et al. (2016) found that Shamans from the Iquitos region are worried about how Ayahuasca is being used beyond their home region as they believe it could undermine their power and indigenous knowledge if it becomes too globalized or commercialized. While the article reports that they do not necessarily think these practices from non-indigenous people are fake, they believe they could harm tourists' welfare while weakening cultural traditions' identity within their community.

Homan (2011) argues that many lodges in Peru's Ayahuasca tourism industry attempt to portray authenticity using indigenous language and aesthetics, such as names in Kechwa. However, this practice is problematic, as it can lead to the fetishization of Native American spirituality and the potential dissolution of indigenous identity (Homan, 2011; Aldred, 2000).

According to Peluso (2014) and Langdon and de Rose (2012), the popularity of Ayahuasca retreats has resulted in the discourse and performance of hyper-traditionalism in shamanic tourism. This involves standardizing certain elements, such as the circular ceremonial space

called a maloca and ethnobotanical garden (Freedman, 2014). Furthermore, Canessa (2012) notes that there is a performative aspect of shamanic tourism where individuals perform indigeneity to appear more authentic. Hay (2020) suggests that the adoption of indigenous cultural practices by outsiders can be considered offensive to indigenous communities who have faced persecution in the past., including the burning of their healing plants and criminalization of their ceremonies. The author notes that the sudden interest in their traditional practices can be seen as exploitative rather than respectful and empowering.

Fotiou's argument (2016) is that globalization has resulted in erasing indigenous shamanism due to Ayahuasca shamanism's worldwide spread. Cultural appropriation and intellectual property rights are issues that need to be addressed in the context of Ayahuasca tourism. Fotiou highlights Ayahuasca centers' need for collaboration with indigenous communities to prioritize their involvement with tourism programs/practices development.

All these studies point towards respecting indigenous cultures' traditions while benefitting from them through sustainable means, involving collaboration with local communities instead of exploitation by outsiders for economic gain.

Governments also have an essential role to play in preserving indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage. Tupper (2009) suggests that governments should collaborate with indigenous communities to safeguard their traditional knowledge and practices while ensuring that the commercialization and globalization of Ayahuasca respect their cultural heritage and rights. Similarly, Kasih et al.'s study (2021) indicates that commercial actors exploiting underprivileged Indigenous communities for economic gain put at risk the protection of traditional knowledge (TK) and traditional cultural expression (TCE), including those in Indonesia. The author recommends significant legal reforms in local legislation to better safeguard their rights according to international laws.

On the other hand, according to Fotiou (2020), despite potential negative impacts on indigenous people, the commercialization and globalization of Ayahuasca may incentivize jungle preservation. Also, as noted by the author, previously disinterested young people are now drawn to becoming shamans due to the prospect of a stable income (Fotiou, 2020). Moreover, research has demonstrated that this trend has elevated the importance of shamanism for indigenous identities and cultural survival (Bernstein, 2008; Davidov, 2010), and even strengthened ethnic identity in some cases (de la Maza, 2018; Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009).

Ross (2012) highlights Brazil as a successful example of how recognition of Ayahuasca as a cultural heritage can evolve from a fight for religious rights to one for human rights and cultural heritage recognition. This shift in focus has led to legal protection for Ayahuasca-related

practices, increased awareness about them, and greater respect for associated traditions and cultures (Ross, 2012). Other countries could benefit from following Brazil's lead in recognizing traditional uses of Ayahuasca as a cultural heritage (Ross, 2012).

In conclusion, to effectively tackle the issues surrounding Ayahuasca tourism, Ayahuasca centers, indigenous communities, tourists, and the government must collaborate. By joining forces and advocating for a sustainable and ethical approach toward Ayahuasca tourism, we can safeguard this valuable practice for future generations.

2.2.2 Informed consent

Parth Shah (2022) defines informed consent as the process where a healthcare professional provides a patient with relevant information about the potential risks, benefits, and alternatives associated with a medical procedure or intervention. The author writes that the patient must make an independent and voluntary decision about whether to undergo the procedure.

In the context of Ayahuasca use, informed consent is critical due to potential impacts on physical and psychiatric well-being. Raven Renee Ray (2016) stresses that informed consent in Ayahuasca retreat centers should include education and preparation for seekers' safety, both physically and psychologically. She further writes that the seeker must understand potential risks, such as fatal combinations of certain substances and health conditions that may exacerbate adverse effects. However, to the author, many treatment websites tend to prioritize informing about the benefits of Ayahuasca use while giving less attention to possible risks (Ray, 2016).

Johnson et al. (2008) emphasize that informed consent is also essential for human research involving psychoactive drugs like hallucinogens. He argues that the consent form should include plain language descriptions of the potential experiences, effects, toxicity profile, experimental status of the experience, mood disorders that could arise, and lasting psychiatric illnesses such as psychoses or visual perceptual abnormalities ("flashbacks," HPPD). Also, to him, as describing the subjective effects of hallucinogens may be difficult; additional time may be necessary to discuss them with volunteers thoroughly.

Similarly, The International Center for Ethnobotanical Education Research & Service (2014) highlights the necessity of informed consent and thorough preparation before using Ayahuasca. It states that organizers should provide applicants with information sheets and medical forms while conducting interviews to ensure volunteers are fully prepared and aware of drinking

Ayahuasca's implications. Further, they should also evaluate personal processes and available resources before accepting participants into their program (ICEERD, 2014)

2.2.3 Safety considerations

While some advocates of Ayahuasca argue that it can be used safely (Dos Santos, 2013), there are actually a number of potential dangers associated with its use. Although Ayahuasca has low addiction potential and tolerance (Fábregas et al., 2010), a study conducted by Kavenská and Simonová (2015) found that almost all participants reported experiencing unpleasant and sometimes harmful physical reactions such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and inability to vomit. Additionally, the taste of Ayahuasca was reportedly found to be unpleasant, which can make the experience even worse, according to the author.

Psychologically speaking, Ayahuasca has the potential to cause intense pressure on the psyche, which can lead to a range of adverse outcomes, including full-blown episodes of depression or even induce psychotic episodes, as highlighted in a study by Johnson et al. (2008). They also highlight the need to closely examine safety protocols for special populations with mental disorders.

Moreover, Dos Santos et al. (2017) advise individuals with a personal or family history of any psychotic illness, or nonpsychotic mania to avoid hallucinogen intake as its use can trigger psychological issues. The articles from Wolff (2020) and Dos Santos (2013) agree on the importance of exercising caution, especially for those with a history of mental health issues. Dos Santos (2013) argues that it should never be taken without supervision. Therefore, while some may argue for its safety in controlled environments, we must be aware of the associated risks before engaging in such activities.

Moreover, there are several contraindications associated with Ayahuasca that could prove fatal. According to Ray (2016), the main ingredient in the brew, the *Banisteriopsis caapi*, contains MAOIs that can interact dangerously with other substances and health conditions. The use of Ayahuasca can lead to serotonin syndrome, which can be deadly when combined with certain drugs such as antidepressants (Gable, 2007; Dos Santos et al., 2017) and some foods containing tyramine. The authors note that these risks increase in individuals with a genetically weakened metabolic pathway or who take drugs blocking the metabolic pathway to remove serotonin from their system.

In conclusion, while Ayahuasca may be safely used with proper care, it is not free from risks ranging from physical reactions to fatal outcomes. Individuals need to comprehend these risks

and take necessary precautions for their safety while using this substance. Therefore, avoiding certain drugs, including prescription medication and specific foods, is crucial when taking Ayahuasca.

2.2.4 Legal and regulatory considerations

The legality of Ayahuasca is a complicated matter that varies from country to country, according to an article by the "I²IT International Institute of Information Technology (2022). The latter poses that while some countries allow it for spiritual or religious purposes, others consider it as dangerous as heroin and prohibit its use.

It also points out that DMT, a psychoactive substance found in Ayahuasca, is classified as a controlled substance in List I of the 1971 United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances. In the United States, both Ayahuasca and DMT are considered to have no recognized medical value and a high potential for abuse despite their potential health benefits and significance in religious practices (I²IT International Institute of Information Technology, 2022). Due to their psychedelic properties, many countries have banned Ayahuasca's sale, possession, transport, and cultivation (I²IT International Institute of Information Technology, 2022).

However, in indigenous and religious contexts in Amazonian countries such as Brazil, Peru, and Ecuador, the use of Ayahuasca is legal (Trichter, 2010; Loizaga-Velder & Verres, 2014). Brazil has allowed its religious use since 1986 but does not permit therapeutic use. Ecuador and Colombia tolerate therapeutic uses of Ayahuasca politically, while other Latin American countries such as Argentina, Mexico, and Chile remain unclear on their stance regarding therapeutic uses (Loizaga-Velder & Verres, 2014).

The legal status of Ayahuasca in Western countries is intricate. In the United States, for example, DMT, being classified as a Schedule I substance, is illegal for administration and consumption except for two Ayahuasca churches - Centro Espírita Beneficente União do Vegetal (UDV) and Santo Daime - that have been affirmed by the US Supreme Court to have the right to use it. Despite this affirmation, there remains a conflict with the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), which prohibits the government from substantially burdening a person's exercise of religion even if it arises from a generally applicable law (House Bill 1308, 1993), as noted by Viridi (2021). As such, many Ayahuasca churches find themselves in a legal grey area (Viridi, 2021).

According to Palomo (2020), Spain does not consider Ayahuasca illegal, with no public health crime convictions related to its use or sale despite its involvement in 26 court cases since 2007, as reported by Spain's judiciary watchdog, the CGPJ. Alberto Varela, a retreat center owner, also mentioned during an interview cited in the same report, comments that while everything they handle is legal at his retreat center, they still take extreme precautions since authorities are always on their watch for any wrong move.

In countries where the legal status is ambiguous, taking precautions is crucial for legal protection, according to Kaasik, H., and K. Kreegipuu (2020). They write that neo-shamanic ceremonies conducted by non-indigenous individuals are frequently not explicitly advertised as Ayahuasca ceremonies but instead referred to as "circles" or "retreats" by organizers. The drink is often called "the medicine" or other indirect terms (Kaasik & Kreegipuu, 2020). Organizers also encourage participants to avoid directly asking about Ayahuasca and its constituents via email, social media, or phone and instead use indirect expressions (Kaasik & Kreegipuu, 2020). The unclear legal status of Ayahuasca has implications for issues such as informed consent, safety, and liability. There are no standards or protocols for safely conducting Ayahuasca ceremonies or ethical guidelines for how ceremony leaders should work with participants (Trichter, 2010). This lack of regulation makes it difficult to maintain standards and regulations of Ayahuasca ceremonies and ceremony leaders' conduct. Moreover, there is currently no protocol on how Ayahuasca ceremonies could be integrated as a beneficial part of psychotherapy, counseling, or spiritual development (Trichter, 2010).

On the other hand, according to Sinclair (2018), the legality of Ayahuasca use in countries such as Peru has led to unregulated and unregistered Ayahuasca centers and suppliers in the Iquitos region. The absence of regulatory norms for the commercialization and accreditation of people offering Ayahuasca ceremonies is concerning, given that anyone can set up an Ayahuasca center without proper training or qualifications (Sinclair, 2018). While experience is necessary to administer Ayahuasca effectively, self-proclaimed shamans in the region may not have the necessary knowledge and experience to do so safely (Sinclair, 2018).

In conclusion, the unclear legal status of Ayahuasca remains a contentious issue. Some countries allow its use while others prohibit it, but there is generally a lack of clarity around its regulation. As a result, ethical guidelines for ceremony leaders working with participants are lacking because there are no standards or protocols for safely conducting Ayahuasca ceremonies (Trichter, 2010; Bullis, 2008; I²IT International Institute of Information Technology, 2022).

2.3 The role of the center in ensuring positive experiences for tourists

When it comes to the use of Ayahuasca, it is crucial to consider ethics and ensure that participants have complete information about the composition of the brew. As Ralph Metzner (2005) pointed out, Ayahuasca can be made from different plants depending on various factors such as location and the shaman preparing it. Failure to provide this information can lead to potential adverse effects for participants (Metzner, 2005). Kavenská and Simonová (2015) documented cases where individuals suffered adverse effects or even death due to being served potentially toxic plants or experiencing complications with other diseases.

Bauer (2018) observes that there is a lack of transparency regarding the suitability, preparation methods, and medical safeguards associated with Ayahuasca use. This can result in other substances being added to provoke stronger sensations, such as tobacco or Angel's trumpet; however, these additives may pose additional risks and contraindications, and participants may not be aware of their composition or effects (Bauer, 2018). The author further notes that control over Ayahuasca consumption varies widely depending on location, from highly regulated to uncontrolled settings. Fulfilling informed consent requirements while ensuring participant safety requires providing clear information about composition-associated risks and contraindications so participants can make informed decisions about whether they want to consume Ayahuasca.

In an article by Fotiou (2020), the author discusses how, due to the popularity of the brew and its revenue potential, many practitioners who offer it are not adequately trained, and in many deaths caused by Ayahuasca consumption, negligence was likely involved.

In Evgenia Fotiou's (2010) article, concerns were raised about the potential risks of Ayahuasca use for individuals with pre-existing health conditions. It was noted that screening for these conditions is often lacking, which could lead to negative interactions with medications and other dangerous reactions. While some centers may conduct informal questioning before ceremonies, this may not be sufficient to ensure participant safety (Fotiou, 2010). Moreover, safety protocols for Ayahuasca retreats are not standardized across the industry in Peru, as per Sinclair (2018). The author argues that while some centers require medical histories from participants, others do not. Despite informal regulation by the community on Ayahuasca tourism, irresponsible practices still occur (Sinclair, 2018). Therefore, it is imperative for retreat centers to prioritize the well-being of participants by implementing thorough screening processes when it comes to pre-existing health conditions and medication use.

On another note than the safety measures, other studies highlight the need to address some tourists' sources of negative experiences. Kavenská and Simonová's (2015) study identified some associated with Ayahuasca use, including concerns about inexperienced shamans, loss of control, sexual misconduct, language barriers, exposure to dangerous situations like assault or conflict with indigenous people or wild animals, and unsanitary conditions. Due to the lucrative nature of this industry, many new shamans offer their services after only a brief period of apprenticeship resulting in inadequate knowledge and experience to provide adequate services, as per Davidov (2010). To mitigate these risks and ensure a positive experience for participants, retreat centers should prioritize considerations such as proper shaman selection and controlled sessions. Accurate information and trustworthy expedition organizers are also essential factors in promoting participant safety.

Loizaga-Velder and Verres' (2014) article also highlighted various factors that can impact the success of ayahuasca-assisted addiction treatment. These include the quality of the plant concoction used in ceremonies, the psychological readiness of participants, adequate containment and guidance during experiences, as well as effective integration strategies such as journaling or contemplative practices. The study also indicated that traditional Ayahuasca ceremonies could be therapeutically effective for individuals from both Western cultural backgrounds and indigenous participants; however, the cultural background should be considered during the integration phases.

Overall, these findings suggest that retreat centers play a crucial role in promoting safe and positive experiences through various considerations regarding the safety and supervision of the ceremonies or sessions.

Other studies point out the importance of the setting to tourists. The study conducted by Alexandre Augusto de Deus Pontual et al. (2022) revealed that the environment plays a crucial role in moderating one's experience with Ayahuasca. To the authors, improving the quality of the setting, which includes decor, infrastructure, comfort, and instructions, can reduce the likelihood of having a challenging experience while positively contributing to mystical experiences. These findings should be considered when designing rituals and social settings for Ayahuasca ceremonies.

In conclusion, retreat centers play a crucial role in providing positive experiences for Ayahuasca users. The multifaceted nature of this responsibility cannot be overstated. Safety is of utmost importance and can be achieved by providing complete information about the composition of the brew, screening for pre-existing health conditions, and ensuring proper shaman selection and controlled sessions. However, other factors such as the quality of the

setting, psychological readiness, and effective integration strategies also play a significant role in the positive experience of participants. For this reason, retreat centers must prioritize participant well-being by considering various considerations to promote safe and positive experiences.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Approach

This study employed a qualitative approach, using semi-structured interviews to gather data from tourists who have participated in Ayahuasca ceremonies. Qualitative research is well-suited for exploring complex and sensitive topics (Creswell, 2013), such as the Ayahuasca tourism. Semi-structured interviews allow for a deeper understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008) and have several advantages such as being more flexible in arranging the interview and allowing the interviewer to better understand the participant without the social pressure to conform to any group opinions (Malhotra et al., 2017).

3.2 Target Population

The target population for this study was tourists who participated in Ayahuasca ceremonies. Inclusion criteria for participants were: 1) aged 18 years or older, 2) have participated in at least one Ayahuasca ceremony. Participants in this study were recruited from a variety of backgrounds and nationalities, with the aim of capturing the diverse experiences and perspectives of Ayahuasca tourists.

A total of 21 participants were recruited for this study, which is considered an adequate sample size to achieve data saturation for cross-cultural meta-themes (Hagaman & Wutich, 2016). Qualitative studies generally prioritize in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives rather than focusing on statistical representativeness. The final sample consisted of 10 males and 11 females, with ages ranging from 21 to 56 years. The participants represented various nationalities, including but not limited to Brazil, France, Spain, and Argentina.

By incorporating a diverse range of participants, this study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and perspectives of Ayahuasca tourists, allowing for rich and nuanced insights into the phenomenon.

3.3 Data Collection:

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling, with the aim of recruiting a diverse group of tourists who have participated in Ayahuasca ceremonies in South America such as Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, and Brazil. The interviews were conducted with a total of 21

participants. Interviews lasted approximately 10 minutes and were conducted in person, via telephone, or via video call. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

3.4 Data Analysis and Tool:

The data from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. This involved identifying patterns and themes in the data and grouping them into categories that reflected the research objectives (Clarke, V., & Braun, V., 2012). The use of qualitative data analysis software such as Leximancer was used, allowing themes to emerge from the data rather than being imposed on the data (Sotiriadou et al., 2014). Leximancer analyses produced a word cooccurrence matrix from which concepts could be identified. Leximancer then grouped the concepts into themes based on how often they appeared in blocks of text (Smith, 2003). The end results are visually informative heat maps that represent color-coded themes and brightness indicating theme prominence (Angus et al., 2013). When closely mapped together, concepts signify strong semantic relationships (Smith & Humphreys, 2006). This methodology allows Leximancer to make predictions about system behaviors based on fragmented evidence found within documents (Watson et al., 2005).

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were addressed throughout the research process, including getting voluntary participation, obtaining informed consent from participants, ensuring participant confidentiality, and keeping the physical, social, psychological and all other types of harm to an absolute minimum.

and maintaining ethical standards in the presentation and dissemination of findings (Bhandari, 2021).

4. Results

The qualitative results facilitate the determination of the key drivers who influence tourists' experience in ayahuasca retreat centers. This led to the identification of the main themes and concepts.

When it comes to comprehending tourists' viewpoints on ayahuasca experiences, using the qualitative research method alongside Leximancer is a suitable approach. This approach offers a thorough and contextual comprehension of the subject matter. By utilizing Leximancer's emergent analysis, patterns, and themes can be directly extracted from the data (Sotiriadou et al., 2014), ensuring objectivity. The flexibility of the qualitative research method allows for comprehensive insights into the key drivers influencing these perspectives (Northeastern University., n.d.). This method offers a deep, rich, and reliable understanding of the subject matter.

The overall results for the interviews of tourists who participated in an ayahuasca retreat reveal six themes in the concept map generated by Leximancer (see Fig. 1). This map includes concepts shown as small gray dots that are grouped into themes indicated by the larger colored spheres (Wu et al., 2014). The dominant themes in terms of connectivity and importance are "Ayahuasca" (109 hits), "Indigenous" (50 hits), "Risks" (37 hits), "Participating" (28 hits), "Safety" (17 hits), and "Environment" (9 hits), which together represent Ayahuasca tourists' factors of their experiences.

Figure 1: Leximancer analysis of interviews

Source: Leximancer outputs

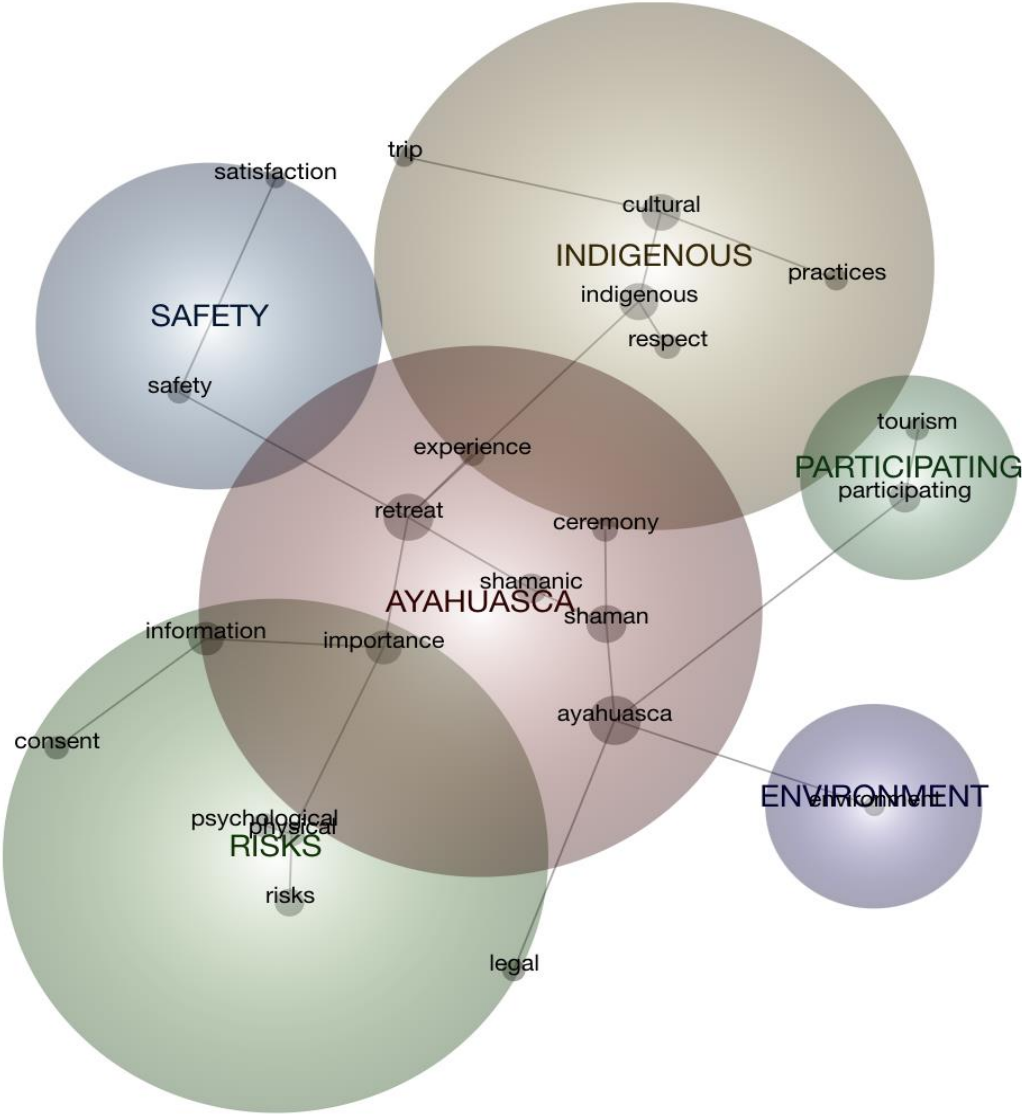


Table 1: Lists the 23 most frequently used words in the interviews.

Tourists most often used the words “ayahuasca”, “retreat”, « cultural », « indigenous », and « shaman » when referring to their experiences in the retreat.

Source : Leximancer Outputs.

Keywords	Count	Relevance percentage
Ayahuasca	60	100
Retreat	56	93
Cultural	35	58
Indigenous	33	55
Shaman	32	53
Information	30	50
Importance	26	43
Participating	26	43
Risks	18	30
Shamanic	17	28
Safety	13	22
Ceremony	12	20
Consent	12	20
Legal	12	20
Respect	11	18
Experience	10	17
Tourism	10	17
Physical	9	15
Psychological	9	15
Practices	9	15
Environment	9	15
Trip	8	13
Satisfaction	6	10

Note : When using Leximancer, the « Count » metric refers to how many times a specific term or concept appears in the analyzed text or texts. It simply represents the raw frequency of a particular word or phrase.

On the other hand, the « Relevance percentage » represents the proportion of text segments linked with a specific concept, as compared to the frequency of the most prevalent concept in the examined text. In simple terms, it reflects how often a concept appears in relation to the most common one, which is always assigned a relevance score of 100% (Leximancer., n.d.).

Table 2: Demographic table of participants

Tourist ID	Gender	Age	Nationality
Tourist 1	Female	24	France
Tourist 2	Female	32	Italy
Tourist 3	Man	28	Italy
Tourist 4	Man	26	Spain
Tourist 5	Female	24	Spain
Tourist 6	Female	32	Argentina
Tourist 7	Man	28	Belgium
Tourist 8	Man	31	France
Tourist 9	Man	27	Argentina
Tourist 10	Female	28	Germany
Tourist 11	Man	56	Holland
Tourist 12	Man	24	Germany
Tourist 13	Female	34	Spain
Tourist 14	Man	21	Belgium
Tourist 15	Female	34	Brazil
Tourist 16	Man	31	Switzerland
Tourist 17	Female	34	Turkey
Tourist 18	Female	29	Israel
Tourist 19	Female	36	Portugal
Tourist 20	Female	29	Brazil
Tourist 21	Man	33	Luxemburg

5. Discussion

The research question focused on understanding the key drivers that shape tourists' perspectives on their ayahuasca experiences at retreat centers, and understanding how these factors influence tourists' perspectives. To achieve these objectives, the research was refined to focus on significant concepts and themes found in the interviews (Crofts & Bisman, 2010).

This selection was based on the frequency of their occurrence and a thorough evaluation of the meaning associated with these identified concepts. Any words or concepts that lacked meaningful content (e.g., "Yes," "No") or were overly generic were excluded from further analysis.

The concept map in Fig. 1 above addressed the different factors influencing the tourists' perceptions of their experience in an ayahuasca retreat center.

This section discusses the findings related to these factors. It explores how these factors shape tourists' perspectives on their ayahuasca experiences and contributes to safer tourism practices, the well-being of participants, the preservation of indigenous cultures, risk management, and sustainable approaches to nature. By understanding these factors, stakeholders in the ayahuasca tourism industry can enhance the overall experience for participants while promoting responsible and sustainable practices.

-« Ayahuasca »

The dominant theme is "ayahuasca," which included concepts such as "retreat," "ceremony," "shaman," "shamanic practices," and "ayahuasca" itself. It highlights the importance of context, particularly in relation to where ayahuasca is consumed.

All tourists interviewed had experienced ayahuasca at a retreat center. These places offer a unique opportunity for tourists to engage with ayahuasca and are, therefore, an essential element of their experience (Ruffell, n.d.). The role of ceremony also emerged as a crucial aspect of these experiences. Each participant referred to the moment using ayahuasca as a « ceremony », emphasizing the importance of structured rituals and ceremonial contexts in which it is consumed. This aligns with previous research that highlights the ceremonial nature of ayahuasca use (Ruffell et al., 2021; Trichter et al., 2011).

Furthermore, participants placed great emphasis on the shaman's role. They mostly expected the shaman to be an experienced guide who would facilitate ceremonies and provide support throughout the process.

One interviewee stated that they *required a center with traditional, experienced, and trained shamans* (interview 13), while another stated that *trustworthy shamanic guides were my most important consideration when choosing a retreat center* (interview 1). Participants' positive perspectives on their experiences were largely attributed to the expertise and ability of shamans to navigate complexities during ceremonies. Literature confirms this importance since lack thereof can lead to unsafe situations (Sinclair, 2018) and negatively affect tourists' trust in them, and result in a source of negative experience (Kavenská & Simonová, 2015).

The "shamanic practices" theme also emerged as participants discussed integrating indigenous cultural traditions into their ayahuasca experience. Ancient rituals, chants, and healing practices were considered integral to the authenticity and spiritual depth of the ceremonies. Participants noted that shamans performed ancient indigenous practices such as « *soplada* » *on their back skin, chanting icaros and blowing smoke while protecting them from malicious spirits* (interview 20) (interview 13) (interview 21). These cultural elements shaped participants' perspectives and fostered a deeper connection to the ayahuasca journey. It aligns with previous studies, discussing the importance of such practices in the participants' experience. Partaking in shamanic activities, such as singing, relaxation, and meditation can lead to beneficial changes for individuals (Prayag et al., 2016). These practices offer a pathway to personal growth, self-discovery, and better interpersonal connections (Prayag et al., 2016). Shamans play a vital role in the ayahuasca experience; their presence is fundamental for a transformative journey (Prayag et al., 2016).

Overall, the ceremonial practices surrounding ayahuasca, taking place in a retreat with an experienced shaman, play a significant role in shaping participants' perspectives.

-« Indigenous » and « Participating »

The theme of « Indigenous » was found to be associated with concepts such as "experience," "respect," "indigenous," "cultural practices," and « trip », integrals to the overall experience. And the theme of « Participating » is associated with the concept « participating » and « tourism ». Throughout their ayahuasca journeys, participants showed interest and respect in indigenous culture and practices, highlighting the importance of engaging with these traditions and respecting their heritage. One participant emphasized that their satisfaction stemmed from the authenticity of the experience *The authenticity of the experience was the main source of my satisfaction*. (Interviewee 13), while another noted that both the ayahuasca and cultural aspects positively impacted their journey *Their authenticity really positively impacted my experience*;

I was there for both the ayahuasca and the culture around it, and I wasn't disappointed. (Interviewee 21).

The connection between « participating », “indigenous,” “experience,” and “cultural” showcases how closely intertwined these elements are with the ayahuasca journey. Participants recognized that they were enriched by immersing themselves in ancient wisdom embedded in indigenous culture. This aligns with existing literature, which stresses the importance of recognizing and participating in indigenous ceremonies to bring legitimacy and authenticity to the ritual.

Anthropologist Fotiou has highlighted how involvement from indigenous individuals enhances the authenticity of the experience in Western ayahuasca usage, while the revered status of shaman further amplifies traditional rituals' perceived power (Hay, 2020). Ultimately, acknowledging indigenous knowledge fosters a sense of authenticity that enriches participants' perspectives on their ayahuasca journey. However, oftentimes, Western tourists' motivations for using ayahuasca are rooted in unrealistic or idealized views of shamanism. Davidov (2010) found that many Western tourists are motivated by the desire to participate in an authentic ayahuasca experience, but most tourists have little to no knowledge about the aspects that comprise such an experience, making tourists' experience heavily influenced by the shaman's framing of that experience (Davidov, 2010; Fotiou, 2016)

The presented elements highlight a common trend among many ayahuasca-seeking tourists who often hold romanticized expectations of their experiences. However, they face challenges in determining the authenticity of these encounters, making them vulnerable to manipulations. This emphasizes the importance of recognizing the significance of engaging with indigenous cultures and participating in authentic ceremonies to ensure a more meaningful and legitimate ayahuasca experience.

-« Risks »

Tourists' perspectives on their ayahuasca experiences at retreat centers are influenced by a variety of risk-related factors, as suggested by the emergence of concepts such as “consent,” “information,” “importance,” “psychological”, “risks”, and “legal.”

One participant commended the retreat center, saying *Yes, the fact that they addressed the risk, the informed content and the cultural appropriation issue, certainly brought me satisfaction* (Interview 12), Another participant echoed this sentiment, stating, *their approach to safety really impressed me overall.* (Interviewee 4)

Informed consent and access to comprehensive information regarding the potential risks associated with ayahuasca use were identified as significant factors in interviews conducted for this study. Participants stressed the importance of making informed choices about participation and choosing a retreat center that provided adequate information. One participant expressed *I definitely understood the importance of informed consent before the trip, I wanted to be fully aware of any potential risks or side effects* (interview 12). This highlights the need for proper education of tourists to enable them to make informed decisions about their involvement in ayahuasca ceremonies.

The literature supports the notion that informed consent and access to comprehensive information are critical in the context of ayahuasca use (ICEERD, n.d.; Johnson, 2008; Ray, 2016).

Psychological considerations also emerged as an essential aspect of the concept of risks. Participants recognized that consuming ayahuasca can be dangerous, and this was generally a source of concern for them. Participants stated *Safety was always a major concern for me before my first trip, and I made sure to look up at the risks, as well as contraindications* (Interview 14), *safety was a major concern for me. I was aware of the risks associated with Ayahuasca* (Interview 18). This indicates their awareness of the risks associated with ayahuasca use. While academic literature supports the psychological risks associated with the use of ayahuasca (Johnson & Richards, 2008), there appears to be a gap in existing literature regarding participant awareness and perceptions of these risks.

The legal dimension of ayahuasca use was also found to be relevant, with participants expressing a need for clear information about the legal frameworks and regulations, especially in the other countries where they could be traveling. One participant commented on the ways the retreat center could have done better on the support provided regarding the legal status of using ayahuasca *One way they could have improved is by providing more information on the legal situation in other countries* (interview 4), another one commented *I don't really know how it works, but maybe by somehow proving to us more clearly that they are legal or not breaking any law. Maybe showing a permit or something* (interview 10). This highlights the importance of addressing legal considerations when shaping tourists' perspectives on ayahuasca experiences.

The literature confirms the significance of legal frameworks surrounding ayahuasca use. For instance, the "PIT International Institute of Information Technology (n.d.). discuss the challenges and risks associated with the legal status of ayahuasca. While Trichter (2010) calls for clear regulations to ensure participant safety and protect the integrity of the practice.

In summary, tourists' perspectives on Ayahuasca experiences at retreat centers are influenced by factors related to the potential risk of consuming Ayahuasca. These include the need for their consent to participate in ceremonies, the information provided by the center about the substance and its risks, and the understanding of legal considerations. Psychological risks are also an important factor, and participants are generally aware of and concerned about them. Existing literature supports the significance of addressing these factors.

-« Safety »

Safety and satisfaction are linked concepts in the context of ayahuasca. The tourists' experiences and satisfaction were closely tied to the safety measures implemented during these events. One participant praised the retreat center, stating that *The way they dealt with my safety increased my satisfaction greatly, yes* (Interview 15). Another participant shared this sentiment, highlighting how *impressed they were with the center's approach to safety overall* (Interview 4).

The participants noted several measures that contributed to their overall satisfaction with the experience. These measures align with previous studies that emphasize specific aspects such as experienced shamans (Kavenská & Simonová, 2015), integration sessions (Loizaga-Velder & Verres, 2015), and screening procedures (Fotiou, 2010). Additionally, transparency regarding the suitability, preparation methods, and medical safeguards associated with ayahuasca use has been emphasized in literature as essential for a positive experience (Bauer, 2018).

-« Environment »

The concept of the environment appeared as important in participants' experiences. They appreciate centers that integrate eco-friendly practices and emphasize the need to preserve the environment. As one interviewee stated, *The emphasis from the retreat to minimize any negative impact on the environment led me to a deep appreciation for nature and a newfound commitment to sustainable living* (interview 5). Additionally, another participant appreciated the *shaman's emphasis on sustainability and respect for nature* (interview 9).

The integration of sustainable practices and respect for nature not only contributes to participants' overall satisfaction but also fosters a sense of interconnectedness and harmony

with the natural world. As one participant reflected, *The experience was a slap in the face; it was perfect. I will return home with a different approach to nature* (interview 6).

These findings align with academic studies that emphasize responsible sourcing, cultivation, and ecological practices as crucial factors for ensuring the long-term viability of the ayahuasca vine (Callicott, 2016), as well as studies discussing the growing tourists' interest in authentic and sustainable holiday experiences (Rosen, 2015)

6. Conclusion

6.1 Main conclusion

To summarize, this study has explored the various themes that emerged from analyzing data on tourists' experiences with ayahuasca at retreat centers. The discussion section has highlighted several significant concepts that influence tourists' experiences, such as safety, indigenous practices, risks, ayahuasca itself, and the environment.

From the analysis, it was found that the context in which ayahuasca is consumed played a crucial role in shaping participants' experiences at retreat centers. The ceremonies around ayahuasca, the presence of an experienced shaman, and shamanic practices like singing, chants, and dances were integral to the authenticity and spiritual depth of ceremonies.

Additionally, engaging with indigenous cultural practices surrounding ayahuasca enriched the authenticity of the journey for participants. Acknowledging indigenous knowledge fosters a sense of authenticity while enhancing the perceived power and legitimacy of the shaman.

Participants also expressed their awareness of risks associated with ayahuasca use and stressed informed decision-making. Psychological risks along with legal considerations were among the risk-related factors discussed.

Safety measures during ceremonies were important to participants. Measures such as informed consent, comprehensive pre-ceremony information, medical staff, experienced shamans, integration sessions and screening procedures received high praise from participants.

Lastly, eco-friendly practices and sustainability emerged as significant aspects of participants' experiences at retreat centers fostering a deep appreciation for nature while promoting responsible sourcing and ecological practices for long-term viability.

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into factors that shape tourists' perspectives on their ayahuasca experiences at retreat centers contributing towards safer tourism practices while ensuring the well-being of participants while sustaining indigenous cultures, managing risks, and promoting sustainable approaches to nature.

6.2 Theoretical Contribution :

This research study on ayahuasca experiences at retreat centers makes several theoretical contributions to the field of tourism research, adding to the existing literature and knowledge on the subject. Through the exploration of themes that emerged from the data analysis, this

study provides a deeper understanding of the factors that shape tourists' perspectives on their ayahuasca journeys, thereby expanding our knowledge in several key areas.

Firstly, this study contributes to the development of a conceptual framework that encompasses key factors influencing tourists' experiences with ayahuasca. The identified concepts, such as safety, indigenous practices, risks, ayahuasca, and environment, provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of ayahuasca tourism. While there is limited research explicitly focusing on a conceptual framework for ayahuasca tourism, previous studies on transformative tourism experiences like the one from Pung. & Chiappa (2020) that provides a broader understanding of the factors that shape meaningful and impactful tourism encounters. This study, thereby expands our understanding of the specific factors at play within this particular domain.

Secondly, this study highlights the significance of safety measures and risk management strategies in ensuring positive and secure ayahuasca experiences. It emphasizes the importance of informed consent, comprehensive pre-ceremony information, integration sessions, experienced shamans, and legal frameworks as contributors to safety. It also highlighted the tourists' perceptions of the risks around ayahuasca use, completing recent studies on tourism risk perception (Cui., et al., 2016).

Thirdly, this study recognizes and emphasizes the importance of integrating indigenous cultural practices into ayahuasca experiences. It highlights the essential role of participating in indigenous ceremonies for authenticity and enriching participants' perspectives, leading to positive and transformative experiences.

In conclusion, the findings of this study contribute to tourism research by providing a deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of ayahuasca tourism, highlighting safety and risk management strategies, and emphasizing the importance of integrating indigenous cultural practices and the role played by ceremony and experienced shamans in shaping transformative tourist experiences. By adding to the existing literature, this research expands our knowledge and paves the way for further exploration and understanding of ayahuasca tourism as a unique and significant tourism phenomenon.

6.3 Practical Contribution:

This study has both theoretical and practical implications for stakeholders involved in ayahuasca tourism. The practical contributions of the study are significant and include the following:

1. Management of Retreat Centers: The findings of the study provide valuable insights for retreat center managers regarding critical factors that influence tourists' experiences. These insights emphasize the need to prioritize safety measures, ensure the presence of experienced shamans, and integrate indigenous cultural practices to create a positive and authentic environment for participants. Moreover, implementing eco-friendly practices and sustainable approaches can contribute to enhancing tourists' appreciation for nature while ensuring long-term viability.

2. Tourists and Participants: Individuals considering or engaging in ayahuasca experiences can benefit from this study's valuable information. Participants can make informed decisions by prioritizing safety and seeking retreat centers with experienced trustworthy shamans while respecting indigenous cultural practices throughout their journey. The findings also raise awareness about potential psychological risks associated with ayahuasca use, highlighting the need for proper preparation and support throughout the experience.

3. Policy and Regulation: Clear legal frameworks are crucial in ensuring participant safety, promoting responsible tourism practices, addressing potential risks, and respecting indigenous cultures concerning ayahuasca use as revealed in this research study. Policymakers may draw upon these findings to develop guidelines that safeguard participants' well-being while contributing to growth in ayahuasca tourism.

Overall, this research provides valuable insights into ayahuasca tourism for scholars, retreat center managers, tourists/participants as well as policymakers alike. The theoretical contributions advance our understanding by offering a comprehensive conceptual framework encompassing key factors influencing tourists' perspectives on their experiences which will serve as a basis for future research on this topic.

6.4 Limitations

Although this study provides valuable insights into the perspectives of tourists who have had ayahuasca experiences at retreat centers, it is important to recognize its limitations. These

limitations present opportunities for future research and underscore the boundaries of the current study.

Secondly, this study relied on self-reported data collected through interviews. Although interviews allowed for an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, perceptions, and beliefs, there is potential for biases or social desirability effects. Participants may have provided responses they believed were expected or socially acceptable which could have influenced the findings. Combining interviews with other research methods such as observations or surveys could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the ayahuasca experience.

Another limitation is that this study primarily focused on tourists' perspectives and experiences which may not fully capture the complexity of the ayahuasca tourism phenomenon. It would be beneficial to include other stakeholders' viewpoints such as those from retreat center staff, indigenous communities, or local authorities to gain a more holistic understanding of ayahuasca tourism's dynamics and impacts.

6.5 Future research

As we delve deeper into tourists' perspectives on their ayahuasca experiences at retreat centers, this study has highlighted crucial factors that warrant further exploration. To expand our understanding of this unique tourism phenomenon, the following areas require attention:

1. **Participant Preparation and Integration:** Although safety measures and informed decision-making were emphasized in this study, future research could examine the specific components of effective participant preparation and integration processes. Investigating the role of pre-ceremony education, post-ceremony integration sessions, and ongoing support for participants would contribute to enhancing the overall ayahuasca experience while ensuring participants' well-being.
2. **Comparative Studies:** While this study focused on tourists' experiences at retreat centers in a specific context, conducting comparative studies across different geographical locations, cultural contexts, and types of retreat centers would provide a broader understanding of the factors that shape tourists' perspectives. Comparisons between traditional indigenous settings and more commercialized retreat centers can highlight differences in setting that impact tourist experiences.

3. Stakeholder Perspectives: To understand ayahuasca tourism comprehensively, it is vital to include other stakeholders' viewpoints involved in it besides tourists. Future research could explore the perspectives of retreat center staff, shamans, indigenous communities, local authorities as well as regulatory bodies; thereby providing insights into dynamics and interactions between stakeholders involved.

By addressing these areas of research, we can further advance our understanding of ayahuasca tourism, improve participant experiences, and ensure the sustainable and responsible development of this practice. Ultimately, these efforts can foster a deeper and more educated comprehension of ayahuasca tourism's effects on diverse stakeholders.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Guideline for structured interviews

Main questions	Reference	Use of the question	Follow up question 1	Follow up question 2	Use of the follow up questions
A-Awareness of Ethical and Safety Considerations before the trip					
1) Can you describe your awareness of ethical considerations, such as cultural appropriation, before participating into a retreat ?	Fotiou, E. (2014). The Globalization of Ayahuasca Shamanism and the Erasure of Indigenous Shamanism. <i>Anthropology of Consciousness</i> , 25(2), 152-169. doi:10.1111/anoc.12056	To identify the extent to which tourists are aware of ethical considerations related to Ayahuasca tourism.			
2) Can you describe your awareness of ethical considerations, such as the environmental impact that centers could have on the environment, or the	Callicott, C. (2016). Introduction to the Special Issue: Ayahuasca, Plant-Based Spirituality, and the Future of Amazonia. <i>Anthropology of</i>	To identify the extent to which tourists are aware of ethical considerations related to the environmental impact of Ayahuasca tourism.			

Main questions	Reference	Use of the question	Follow up question 1	Follow up question 2	Use of the follow up questions
threat to the sustainability of the plant, before participating into a retreat ?	Consciousness, 27(2), 113–120. DOI: 10.1111/anoc.12059.				
3) Can your describe your awareness of ethical considerations, such the importance of informed consent (Providing clear and accurate information about the risks, benefits, and potential side effects; requiring the participants s to sign a consent form indicating that they have received and understood the information; respecting autonomy to participate in the ceremony, or to withdraw at any time without penalty or	Ray, R. R. (2016). Ayahuasca Treatment Center Safety for the Western Seeker. Anthropology of Consciousness, 27(2), 121-150. https://doi.org/10.1111/anoc.12060	To identify the extent to which tourists are aware of ethical considerations related to importance of the informed consent in the context of Ayahuasca use			

Main questions	Reference	Use of the question	Follow up question 1	Follow up question 2	Use of the follow up questions
judgment), before participating into a retreat ?					
4) Can your describe your awareness of ethical considerations, such as the potential physical or psychological risks, or the importance of screening for contraindications, before participating into a retreat ?	Loizaga-Velder, A., & Verres, R. (2014). Therapeutic Effects of Ritual Ayahuasca Use in the Treatment of Substance Dependence—Qualitative Results. <i>Journal of Psychoactive Drugs</i> , 46(1), 63.	To identify the extent to which tourists are aware of ethical considerations related to safety considerations, such as potential physical or psychological risks, or the importance of screening for contraindications			
5) Can your describe your awareness of ethical considerations, such as the potential illegality of the use of Ayahuasca in the country or retreat	Trichter, S. (2010). Ayahuasca beyond the Amazon: The benefits and risks of a spreading tradition. In Ayahuasca religions: A comprehensive	To identify the extent to which tourists are aware of ethical considerations related to the legality considerations, such as the potential illegality of the use of			

Main questions	Reference	Use of the question	Follow up question 1	Follow up question 2	Use of the follow up questions
center you were, before participating into a retreat ?	bibliography and critical essays (pp. 1-16). Praeger.	Ayahuasca in the country or retreat center you the tourist were			
6) If any, which of these consideration were particularly important to you for deciding the retreat center you would go to ?	<p>Fotiou, E. (2010). From Medicine Men to Day Trippers: Shamanic Tourism in Iquitos, Peru. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison).</p> <p>ICEERS. (2014). Ayahuasca Good Practice Guide: Health, Safety & Ethics. Retrieved from https://iceers.org/Documents/ICEERS_site/Safety&Ethics/Ayahuasca-Good_Practice_Guide_ICEERS2014.pdf</p>	To understand the factors that tourists prioritize when making decisions about which retreat center to visit, and to identify the key drivers of tourist behavior in the Ayahuasca tourism industry.			

Main questions	Reference	Use of the question	Follow up question 1	Follow up question 2	Use of the follow up questions
	<p>Labate, B. C., & Feeney, K. (2012). Ayahuasca and the process of regulation in Brazil and internationally: implications and challenges. <i>The International journal on drug policy</i>, 23(2), 154–161. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2011.06.006</p> <p>Hudson, J. (2011). <i>Ayahuasca and globalization</i>. University of Colorado, Boulder Spring.</p>				
B- Role of Retreat Centers and Shamanic Guides:					

Main questions	Reference	Use of the question	Follow up question 1	Follow up question 2	Use of the follow up questions
7) How did the retreat center and shamanic guide address cultural appropriation and demonstrate respect for indigenous traditions?	Hay, M. (2020). The Colonization of the Ayahuasca Experience. JSTOR Daily. https://daily.jstor.org/the-colonization-of-the-ayahuasca-experience/	To understand the measures taken by retreat centers and shamanic guides to promote cultural sensitivity and respect for indigenous traditions in the context of Ayahuasca tourism, and to identify best practices for promoting ethical and sustainable tourism in the industry.	8) Did you think it was enough ?	9) how could they have done better ?	These questions aim to gather feedback on the participants' perceptions of the retreat center and shamanic guide's efforts to demonstrate respect for indigenous traditions and not appropriate their culture. The answers can be used to assess the effectiveness of the safety measures taken by the center and guide and to identify areas for improvement.
10) What specific measures did the retreat center and shamanic guide take to provide information and support related to potential physical or psychological risks,	Bauer IL. Ayahuasca: A risk for travellers? Travel Med Infect Dis. 2018 Jan-Feb;21:74-76. doi: 10.1016/j.tmaid.2018.01.002	To understand the measures taken by retreat centers and shamanic guides to provide information and support related to potential physical or psychological risks, contraindications, or	11) Did you think it was enough ?	12) How could they have done better ?	These questions aim to gather feedback on the participants' perceptions of the retreat center and shamanic guide's efforts to provide information and support related to

Main questions	Reference	Use of the question	Follow up question 1	Follow up question 2	Use of the follow up questions
contraindications, or precautions that participants needed to be aware of before and during the Ayahuasca ceremonies?		precautions that participants needed to be aware of before and during the Ayahuasca ceremonies, and to identify best practices.			physical or psychological risks or contraindications. The answers can be used to assess the effectiveness of the measures taken by the center and guide and to identify areas for improvement.
13) Can you describe how the retreat center and shamanic guide emphasized the importance of informed consent in the context of Ayahuasca usage?	Ray, R. R. (2016). Ayahuasca Treatment Center Safety for the Western Seeker. <i>Anthropology of Consciousness</i> , 27(2), 121-150. https://doi.org/10.1111/anoc.12060 Johnson, M. W., Richards, W. A., & Griffiths, R. R. (2008). Human hallucinogen research: Guidelines for safety. <i>Journal of</i>	To understand the measures taken by retreat centers and shamanic guides to emphasize the importance of informed consent in the context of Ayahuasca usage, and to identify best practices.	14) Did you think it was enough ?	15) How could they have done better ?	These questions aim to gather feedback on the participants' perceptions of the retreat center and shamanic guide's efforts to emphasized the importance of informed consent in the context of Ayahuasca usage The answers can be used to assess the effectiveness of the measures taken by the center and guide and to identify areas for improvement.

Main questions	Reference	Use of the question	Follow up question 1	Follow up question 2	Use of the follow up questions
	Psychopharmacology, 22(6), 603. https://doi.org/10.1177/0269881108093587				
16) Can you describe the measures taken by the retreat center and shamanic guide to inform participants about the legal status of Ayahuasca usage?	Trichter, S. (2010). Ayahuasca beyond the Amazon: The benefits and risks of a spreading tradition. In Ayahuasca religions: A comprehensive bibliography and critical essays (pp. 1-16). Praeger.	To understand the measures taken by retreat centers and shamanic guides to inform participants about the legal status of Ayahuasca usage, and to identify best practices.	17) Did you think it was enough ?	18) How could they have done better ?	These questions aim to gather feedback on the participants' perceptions of the retreat center and shamanic guide's efforts to inform participants about the legal status of Ayahuasca usage. The answers can be used to assess the effectiveness of the measures taken by the center and guide and to identify areas for improvement.

Main questions	Reference	Use of the question	Follow up question 1	Follow up question 2	Use of the follow up questions
19) Can you describe how the retreat center and shamanic guide addressed issues related to the sustainability of Ayahuasca and the potential harm to the environment?	<p>Suárez Álvarez, C. (2020). We Are Harvesting the Ayahuasca Vine at an Alarming Rate. Kahpi. https://kahpi.net/harvesting-ayahuasca-exploitation/</p> <p>CBD [Secretariat of the Convention of Biological Diversity]. (2004). Guidelines on biodiversity and tourism development. Montreal: CBD.</p> <p>Callicott, C. (2016). Introduction to the Special Issue: Ayahuasca, Plant-Based Spirituality, and the Future of Amazonia. Anthropology of Consciousness,</p>	To understand the measures taken by retreat centers and shamanic guides to address issues related to the sustainability of Ayahuasca and the potential harm to the environment, and to identify best practices.	20) Did you think it was enough ?	21) How could they have done better ?	These questions aim to gather feedback on the participants' perceptions of the retreat center and shamanic guide's efforts to address issues related to the sustainability of Ayahuasca and the potential harm to the environment. The answers can be used to assess the effectiveness of the measures taken by the center and guide and to identify areas for improvement.

Main questions	Reference	Use of the question	Follow up question 1	Follow up question 2	Use of the follow up questions
	27(2), 113–120. DOI: 10.1111/anoc.12059.				
22) Has the way the retreat center dealt with one or more of these ethical issue, impacted your overall satisfaction in a positive or negative way?	This question has an exploratory purpose	To gain insights into how the retreat center is perceived by its participants in terms of ethical standards and how those perceptions relate to their overall satisfaction. This information can be valuable for the retreat center to improve its ethical practices and enhance the satisfaction of its participants.			
C-Demographics					

Main questions	Reference	Use of the question	Follow up question 1	Follow up question 2	Use of the follow up questions
What is your gender?		Help establish baseline which can be useful in comparing my results to other studies, can be useful in understanding participants' background and help interpreting the results, can help detect potential biases.			
What is your age?		Help establish baseline which can be useful in comparing my results to other studies, can be useful in understanding participants' background and help interpreting the results, can help detect potential biases.			
What is your nationality?		Help establish baseline which can be useful in comparing			

Main questions	Reference	Use of the question	Follow up question 1	Follow up question 2	Use of the follow up questions
		<p>my results to other studies, can be useful in understanding participants' background and help interpreting the results, can help detect potential biases.</p>			

Appendix 2: Consent form for interview

Ayahuasca Journeys in Retreat Centers: Understanding Tourist Experiences and Implications

Master thesis by Matthis Pernet, submitted in partial fulfilment of requirements for the MSc in Management with Specialization in Marketing

Dear participant,

Thank you for sharing your valuable time and insights with me. In the following you can find a short overview of the research purpose as well as some guidelines for your participation.

Research purpose:

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand various aspects of ayahuasca tourism and address the gaps in existing research. We are particularly interested in your perspectives on factors that influenced your ayahuasca experiences. Understanding these themes is vital for creating environments prioritizing safety, authenticity, positive experiences, and participant satisfaction. Addressing these will contribute to the safe development of ethical and meaningful ayahuasca practices. Your participation and honest responses are greatly appreciated.

Guidelines:

- I confirm that I am over 18 years old.
- I can withdraw during the interview at any point and do not have to answer all questions.
- The purpose was explained to me.
- I had the opportunity to clarify any doubts or questions.
- I confirm that I am aware and fine with my interview getting recorded.
- I understand that all information is confidential.
- I acknowledge that my real identity will be anonymous, and I will be assigned a number that can be referred to.

I..... voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

If you have any further question, you can contact me anytime under the following email:

matthispernet@outlook.fr

Appendix 3: Interview Transcript Example

Interviewer: Hello ! Thank you for answering my questions. As I explained, the purpose of this study is to explore and understand various aspects of ayahuasca tourism and address the gaps in existing research. We are particularly interested in your perspectives on factors that influenced your ayahuasca experiences. Understanding these themes is vital for creating environments prioritizing safety, authenticity, positive experiences, and participant satisfaction. Addressing these will contribute to the safe development of ethical and meaningful ayahuasca practices. Your participation and honest responses are greatly appreciated.

Respondent: Ok, let's start then.

Interviewer: Can you describe your awareness of ethical considerations, such as cultural appropriation, before participating into a retreat ?

Respondent: Of course, I was aware of ethical considerations before. I understand the importance of respecting other cultures and traditions. As a Brazilian, I think it's my duty to inform myself about the cultures of my country. Ayahuasca has been used for centuries in here and I was aware that it is a sacred plant that should be approached with respect. Cultural appropriation is a serious issue, and it was important for me to be mindful of it.

Interviewer: Can you describe your awareness of ethical considerations, such as the environmental impact that centers could have on the environment, or the threat to the sustainability of the plant, before participating into a retreat ?

Respondent: I was aware of the potential sustainability problem of the vine and the prices that grow a lot for it. I did many retreats in my life, and this subject started to worry me when some indigenous people from Misahualli told me that because of the demand surge, it was getting more and more expensive for them to get ayahuasca and that they couldn't afford that increase in price.

Interviewer: What about the impact that the retreat itself can have on the environment ?

Respondent: On that regard, I didn't really think about it, but I can easily imagine that a retreat in the middle of the nature can pollute. I think it depends on the size of the retreat, if it's just the place of the authentic shaman in his village, I think we can't say anything. But the mega retreats with spa, pool, and everything, it's another story.

Interviewer: Would it be a deal breaker for you if the retreat wasn't really caring of the environment ?

Respondent: To some extent, it could be. I wouldn't go to the big and luxurious ones. It would be too expensive anyway. But I wouldn't go either to the ones without a minimum of amenities, and I think it necessarily mean that there's more energy consumption, or that it took more pollution to build and maintain.

Interviewer: Can your describe your awareness of ethical considerations, such the importance of informed consent (Providing clear and accurate information about the risks, benefits, and potential side effects; requiring the participants s to sign a consent form indicating that they have received and understood the information; respecting autonomy to participate in the ceremony, or to withdraw at any time without penalty or judgment), before participating into a retreat ?

Respondent: I was well aware, informed consent is essential when it comes to any form of treatment, in my opinion, and I really see ayahuasca as a medicine. Before participating in the ceremonies, I was provided with clear and accurate information about the benefits and potential side effects of taking Ayahuasca. Although I didn't sign anything, we talked about it.

Interviewer: Can your describe your awareness of ethical considerations, such as the potential physical or psychological risks, or the importance of screening for contraindications, before participating into a retreat ?

Respondent: Safety considerations are always a top priority for me. I'm very stressed by nature, and I was particularly concerned about ayahuasca because it was the first drug I used in my life, if you take out the alcohol from the list. But in every retreat, before participating in the ceremonies, I was informed of the potential physical and psychological risks, and the

center always does its best to mitigate them. They always had trained medical staff and conducted thorough screening for contraindications. I always felt confident that I was in good hands.

Interviewer: Can you describe your awareness of ethical considerations, such as the potential illegality of the use of ayahuasca in the country or retreat center you were, before participating in a retreat ?

Respondent: I was aware of the legality considerations of ayahuasca usage in Ecuador. That's where I did my last retreat.

Interviewer: If any, which of these considerations were particularly important to you for deciding the retreat center you would go to ?

Respondent: All of these considerations were important to me. Safety was my top priority, followed closely by environmental considerations because I was touched by the despair of the woman in Misahualli.

Interviewer: How did the retreat center and shamanic guide address cultural appropriation and demonstrate respect for indigenous traditions?

Respondent: I've been on a lot of retreats over the years, and I have to say that this last one was one of the most respectful and culturally sensitive ones I've ever been in. The owner was indigenous and was incredibly knowledgeable and experienced and had clearly done a lot of work to ensure that the retreat was grounded in respect for indigenous traditions. They brought in a lot of guest speakers and elders from local indigenous communities around, and made sure that we had opportunities to connect with them and learn from them directly. Overall, it was a really powerful experience. I also liked all the activities we did during the stay during which we could really connect and learn from the indigenous. I really learned a lot about their culture.

Interviewer: Did you feel like it was enough ?

Respondent: Yes, I felt that the center and guide did a good job of addressing cultural appropriation and demonstrating respect for indigenous traditions.

Interviewer: How could they have done better?

Respondent: I don't think of any way they could have done better. Maybe by being directly in the village, but it would be a different experience. It may sound too exigent, but I like my comfort.

Interviewer: What specific measures did the retreat center and shamanic guide take to provide information and support related to potential physical or psychological risks, contraindications, or precautions that participants needed to be aware of before and during the Ayahuasca ceremonies?

Respondent: Before the retreat, they provided participants with a detailed questionnaire to assess their medical history and any contraindications to Ayahuasca use. It covered a range of medical conditions such as heart problems, psychiatric disorders, and medications that could interact with Ayahuasca. During the retreat, they also held an information session to explain the potential physical and psychological effects and told us how to navigate it. They covered topics such as what to expect during the ceremony, how to prepare mentally and physically, how to communicate with the shamanic guide during the ceremony, and what to do if any adverse effects were experienced. They also made sure that participants had access to medical support during and after the ceremony. There was a qualified medical professional on site, and we were instructed to seek medical attention immediately if we experienced any serious adverse effects.

Interviewer: Did you feel like it was enough ?

Respondent: Yes, I felt that the center and guide did an excellent job.

Interviewer: How could they have done better?

Respondent: I think to make it even better, there could be even more assistants to the shaman in case of problems, but that would be probably useless 99% of the time. But just in case, we never know.

Interviewer: Can you describe how the retreat center and shamanic guide emphasized the importance of informed consent in the context of Ayahuasca usage?

Respondent: We talked about it only, we didn't sign anything; But they gave us information on the risks and benefits of taking Ayahuasca and they asked us if we were sure to want to engage with the medicine before starting the ceremony.

Interviewer: Did you feel like it was enough ?

Respondent: Yes

Interviewer: How could they have done better?

Respondent: I can't think of any way.

Interviewer: Can you describe the measures taken by the retreat center and shamanic guide to inform participants about the legal status of Ayahuasca usage?

Respondent: They told us that they were officially registered business. They explained that Ayahuasca was legal for religious and spiritual purposes.

Interviewer: Did you feel like it was enough ?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: How could they have done better?

Respondent: I think they could have done better by providing more detailed information about how it works to be a shaman in Ecuador, to know if it's a serious apprenticeship or not. And especially for the gringos who may travel to other countries with different laws regarding ayahuasca use, it would have been good to share more about the laws of other countries. Also,

even if it might not be very nice to others, they could tell us which lodges or shamans don't operate legally in order for us not to take risks.

Interviewer: Can you describe how the retreat center and shamanic guide addressed issues related to the sustainability of Ayahuasca and the potential harm to the environment?

Respondent: The retreat was very mindful of the sustainability of Ayahuasca and the potential harm to the environment that all these lodges opening in the forests could have. They emphasized their sustainable practices, such as not harvesting the plant from the wild anymore, properly disposing of waste for example. Also, they were contributing to replanting ayahuasca vine trees with a local association.

Interviewer: Did you feel like it was enough ?

Respondent: Yes, I think so.

Interviewer: How could they have done better?

Respondent: It would have been better to not source the vine from the wild from the beginning, but it was impossible to imagine such a boom in ayahuasca tourism, so I guess the owner is doing his best now.

Interviewer: Has the way the retreat center dealt with one or more of these ethical issue, impacted your overall satisfaction in a positive or negative way?

Respondent: The way they dealt with the sustainability of the ayahuasca and my safety increased my satisfaction greatly, yes

Interviewer: What is your gender?

Respondent: Female

Interviewer: What is your age?

Respondent: 34 years old.

Interviewer: What is your nationality?

Respondent: I am from Brazil

Interviewer: Thank you very much for your participation in this interview.