

# BUSINESS PLAN

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An insight into an eco-cultural  
tourism startup

Bigger than Us

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# Business Plan

An insight into an eco-cultural tourism startup

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# Executive Summary

The main reason why this company exists started with a vision to change how tourists travel to different countries and how they interact with the locals and the environment around them. This vision led to the mission of providing eco-cultural tourism tours and activities to build more human & nature connections, inspire self-discovery and encourage responsible tourism. There are several goals the startup wants to achieve during its different stages which are as follows:

- ❖ To increase website traffic by growing the business's social media following and building brand recognition within three months.
- ❖ To increase business profits by driving sales, increasing the number of service providers on the platform, and expanding to new markets within one year.

The startup has no physical location as it is mainly a platform but it is operating and founded in the Netherlands. At the moment the startup is being operated only by the business owner itself but will eventually have a co-founder or some team members that consider the purpose of the startup as important as the business owner. The business owner has worked with different tourists as customers in the hospitality sector which makes her a suitable candidate to build a business related to the travel and tourism industry.

In addition, the problem that this business plan deals with is that tourists want to plan their holidays on their own and participate in authentic local experiences but they are struggling to find reliable and relevant information, affordable prices, local service providers, and meaningful experiences while also considering their negative environmental impacts. Considering this problem, the startup can solve this issue by developing an ecotourism platform that offers already existing eco-cultural tourism tours and activities created by sustainable local service providers in a specific country making the overview of the customer's trip more efficient, saver, and convenient. Also, the platform provides the opportunity for tourists to arrange online consultations before planning a trip in order to receive relevant recommendations and guidance when booking their holidays on their own. The startup chooses an aggregator business model as its main revenue model because it aligns with the problem and solutions and it involves selling the services of partners in this case service providers under one's brand and at the same time providing convenience to customers. In order to differentiate from its competitors. The startup will focus on eco-cultural tours that involve small groups of travellers, customized tours, sustainable tours, small/medium local service providers, and self-guided or solo tours in Costa Rica. The country of Costa Rica has been chosen as the country is considered one of the top ecotourism destinations in the world.

Next, the global ecotourism market is expected to grow more in 2027 which represents a great opportunity for this business idea. Taking this into account the main customers of the startup are young and senior ecotourists who are pleasure-seeking nature lovers that live in North America, are well travelled, and are well-educated. Also, they are willing to spend more money to participate in sustainable activities and to have authentic and immersive local experiences. Social media platforms will be mostly used to inform and inspire customers and to communicate and promote the platform to the right users. Social media platforms that will be used are Instagram and YouTube and the message provided on these platforms will be based on the main motivations that this specific target group has when visiting an ecotourism country which are self-discovery, novelty, and relaxation.

Lastly, the startup has several expenses related to the creation of the platform and the preparation of setting up a business as a self-employed in the Netherlands such as advertising, salary, business insurance, and website hosting. However, money also flows into the company from sales commissions, affiliate marketing, and sales from travel consultancy.

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# 1 Business Overview

In this introductory chapter, different areas of the company will be discussed such as how the business idea started, which business model will be used, the description of the company but also its legal structure.

## 1.1 Company Description

Nowadays, travellers are seeking to avoid mass tourism and choose off-the-beaten paths. In addition, 80 percent of travellers express a desire to learn more about the local culture when travelling and 76 percent of travellers would like to feel connected to nature again (Avantio, 2023). This means that 61 percent of global travellers are now much more interested in learning and taking part in ecotourism. Ecotourism is a growing market so building a startup involving this type of tourism could be profitable in many ways.

The official name of the startup is “Bigger than Us” and the industry in which the startup will operate is the travel and tourism industry. Bigger than Us is an online platform created to offer already existing eco-cultural tourism tours and activities in Costa Rica. Bigger than Us will create a connection between service providers in Costa Rica and tourists around the world interested in taking part in eco-cultural tourism activities. The idea of the online platform is to make the process of searching and booking for ecotourism activities and tours more efficient, convenient, safe, and less time-consuming. Bigger than Us will be providing these already existing eco-cultural tours and activities in Costa Rica as the country is considered one of the top ecotourism destinations in the world. The area in Costa Rica in which the startup will operate by providing these already existing eco-cultural tours and activities are Monteverde and La Fortuna. The reason for this is that these two locations are common areas that tourist visit when going to Costa Rica to participate in land ecotourism activities (Solano, 2022). As mentioned before the startup consists of an online platform which means there are no physical headquarters. Also, the author of the business plan holds two different positions in the startup the first one being the business owner or founder and the second one being the chief executive officer of the startup, and no other employees are employed yet at the company.

The mission or purpose of Bigger than Us is to provide eco-cultural tourism tours and activities to build more human & nature connections, inspire self-discovery & gratitude and encourage responsible tourism.

The vision of the startup is to be the leading ecotourism platform in the world where customers can book eco-cultural tours, sustainable accommodations, and wellness activities and encourage heritage conservation & preservation.

The main short- and long-term business goals are to increase website traffic by growing the business's social media following and building brand recognition within three months. Also, to increase business profits by driving sales, increasing the number of service providers on the platform, and expanding to new markets within one year.

The short-and long-term business objectives are to become and stay profitable by maintaining cash flow, increasing customer conversions, retention, and loyalty, and developing a marketing strategy within three months. Also, to increase environmental awareness by creating partnerships and planning for growth within one year.

The official launch date of the startup is not known yet. However, it is estimated that the startup will start operating in August 2023.

### 1.1.1 Company Background

The business owner or founder of this startup is a bachelor Tourism Management student who studied in the Netherlands. However, she was born and raised on a Caribbean Island called Aruba. Aruba is known to be a tourist island which means that a certain percentage of the economy is related to the tourism and travel industry. She is a passionate traveller, content creator, and master scuba diver. In addition, she also worked in the Department of Culture at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation in Aruba which is also known as the UNESCO National Commission Aruba. There have not been any previous businesses or business ideas started by the young entrepreneur which could represent inexperience in this area. However, the young entrepreneur has expertise in the travel and tourism industry as she has worked before with customers in this case tourists from all over the world. The young entrepreneur values freedom, responsibility, and gratitude and wants to apply this to the business idea by making responsible travelling, nature, and cultural heritage conservation and preservation the core idea of the business.

The idea came when the young professional decided to travel to Costa Rica and Morocco for a holiday. She noticed that travellers were more aware of sustainable and responsible tourism and were choosing more authentic cultural tours and activities. Connecting with nature and people by having these immersive experiences was more important than years before as people were booking more and more of these activities and the offer was increasing as well. An example of this is when a local from Morocco decided to join her on a tour to the Sahara Desert to experience this one-of-a-kind activity in his own country. The idea was based on encouraging travellers to travel more responsibly but also to give tourists the opportunity to disconnect from their day-to-day life and connect more with nature and cultures around the world. Ultimately the business idea became to create an online platform where eco and cultural tourism activities and tours in a specific destination are offered to customers by service providers such as local tour operators in order to make the process more efficient, safe, less time-consuming, and create awareness. Taking this information into consideration working in the travel and tourism industry by building a business was something to be expected.

### 1.1.2 Business Model

Before creating a business plan, one must first determine the type of business model that suits the business idea. However, it is common for businesses to have multiple business models in order to engage in a more profitable revenue stream. There are several types of business models such as e-commerce, freemium, multi-sided platforms, subscription, and others (Strategyzer AG, n.d.). Considering that the project is a startup the focus will lay on one business model at the moment. Business-to-Consumer or also abbreviated as B2C is known as the exchange of goods or services over the Internet between individual customers and online marketplaces (BigCommerce, n.d.). Different types of Business-to-Consumer business models exist of which online intermediaries are part. Online intermediaries do not own products or services but act as the link between buyers and sellers by providing a platform for the buyers and sellers to trade (BigCommerce, n.d.). To be more specific the business model that the business will focus on is an aggregator business model. According to Pereira (2023), an aggregator business model is known to be a networking e-commerce business model where an aggregator or middleman brings together in one place information and data about a particular service offered by different competing providers in the same industry. The aggregator makes the providers its partners and sells their services under its brand by creating a single domain in which he or she offers uniform quality and price services and at the same time provides convenience to customers.

### 1.1.3 Business Structure

According to Stowers (2023), a business legal structure or also known as a business entity is a government classification that regulates different aspects of a business and its activities such as raising capital, amount of taxes that needs to be paid, and the business's obligations. The choice on the type of legal structure that needs to be chosen is based on the business's needs, goals, and its features. The most common types of business legal structures are sole proprietorship, partnership, limited liability company, and corporation (Corporate Finance Institute, 2023).

The business legal structure chosen for this startup is a sole proprietorship. The reason for this is that it involves only one individual who is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the business. Also, it is the simplest to set up and there are no requirements to participate in shareholders meetings or voting (Corporate Finance Institute, 2023). Another advantage of choosing this business structure is that it is inexpensive to start as there are minimal fees expected to be paid when registering in the chamber of commerce, the only costs involving this business structure are related to business taxes and operating license fees and business owners might be eligible for tax deductions (Corporate Finance Institute, 2023). However, a disadvantage of this business structure is that the business is not a separate legal entity from its owner which means that the owner is responsible for all the debts, liabilities, and obligations of the business.

### 1.1.4 Business Case

The common issue that this startup is facing and is trying to solve can be summarized in a customer problem statement which is as follows:

One believes that young and senior pleasure-seeking nature lovers or ecotourists have trouble with planning and arranging their holidays on their own when they try to find reliable information about traveling to a country, reliable reviews of tourist experiences, affordable prices related to flights, accommodation or tours, immersive & local experiences in a country, and consider their environmental impacts when travelling. The goal is to have a good, authentic, personalized, and safe experience. Based on qualitative research such as questionnaires these challenges and struggles have been identified among tourists while traveling. These tourists currently solve this by using travel agents, browsing all over the web, or booking travel packages. The disadvantage of this is that it is time-consuming, expensive, not safe, and does not provide personalization.

Next, the value that the startup offer is related to its customers and their partners. The first value related to its partners is to improve the accessibility or visibility of the products and services that service providers are offering to potential customers. The second value is to reduce costs concerning marketing activities.

Continuously, concerning the values for the customers the startup will provide customization, reducing tourists risk involving safety and affordable prices. Also, providing convenience and assisting tourists when planning their holidays by themselves based on immersive experiences. In conclusion, the general value of the products and services offered to customers is connected to easy access to information, affordability, personalization, time-saving, flexibility, and safety assurances.

For more insight or more in-depth information about the issue the startup is trying to solve please have a look at Appendix I. In this appendix not only the issue is visible but also a clear overview of the solution, the target group the solution is focusing on, which pains and gains the products and services are related to, how revenue will be made and its costs, and other relevant information related to the business model and value proposition can be seen.

## 2 The Market

In this chapter, the most important information regarding market research will be discussed such as who the customers are, where they come from, and what are their buying behaviours and needs. Also, how big the ecotourism market is, who are the main competitors and other information as well.

### 2.1 Trends & Developments

#### ***Internal trends or developments:***

In the ecotourism market, a key trend that is gaining popularity is strategic partnerships and collaborations. Key players operating in the ecotourism market are focusing on increasing strategic partnerships and collaborations to enhance their market position (The Business Research Company, 2023).

An example of this or also known as a best practice is the Australia-based adventure travel company Intrepid Travel which partnered with Trip.com Group in order to popularize green trips by offering sustainable travel (The Business Research Company, 2023). This trend or development is relevant to the project because it gives an overview of a best practice on how the platform could also create a better impact by collaborating and choosing strategic partnerships to increase the platform's visibility, enhance its market position and influence more stakeholders to raise awareness.

#### ***External trends or developments:***

According to The Business Research Company (2023), in 2022 the global ecotourism market size grew from \$189.88 billion to \$200.8 billion in 2023 which is a rate of 5.8 percent. However, in 2027 the ecotourism market size is expected to grow to \$331.62 billion which is a rate of 13.4 percent. This trend or development is relevant to the project because it shows a clear overview of how the ecotourism market size is over the years but also it shows that the platform will be relevant in the ecotourism market that has and will have a rise in demand for these types or products or services.

Providing travellers with sustainable options when they are not specifically on the lookout could have a positive effect on their ability to make more sustainable choices as 34 percent of travellers would be encouraged to make more sustainable travel choices if travel platforms offered a sustainable filter option. Also, 36 percent of travellers would be encouraged to make more sustainable travel choices if travel platforms would use a clear label so that travellers can easily identify when something is regarded as sustainable (Booking.com, 2022). This trend or development is relevant to the project's issue because it indicates how eco-cultural tourism tours and activities should be shown to customers using the platform but also what could encourage customers to book responsible eco-cultural tourism tours and activities when in the platform.

According to Booking.com (2023), 50 percent of global travellers think that investing in a vacation is a top priority. In addition, investing in a vacation remains a top priority for 56 percent of millennials aged between 27 to 42, 51 percent of Generation Z age range between 11 to 26, 48 percent of Generation X age range of 43 to 58, 40 percent of baby boomers age range of 59 to 68, and 32 percent of the silent generation which is travellers of 76+ of age. This trend or development is relevant to the project because it gives an idea of which kind of travellers should be of interest to the platform and its services. The influence of all of these trends and developments on the project is that clear demand, trends, and developments in the ecotourism market can be seen. This means that there is potential in the ecotourism market to offer eco-cultural tourism activities and tours as customers, services, and stakeholders are aiming for this type of tourism and what it involves.



## 2.2 Market Analysis

The market analysis is based on the travel and tourism industry focusing on ecotourism in Costa Rica. Understanding who the customers are, what they want, and how to offer the products and services to them is of major importance and it involves different factors such as volume, value, potential customer segments, buying patterns, competition, and others (Freedman, 2023).

Firstly, the global online travel market was 475 billion us dollars in 2022 and is expected to grow by 15 percent in the next eight years. Travellers are now eager to explore new destinations and experiences and use digital services such as online platforms for information, flexibility, and safety assurances (App Economy Insights, 2023). The ecotourism market is expected to reach almost 300 billion us dollars in 2026 which means an increase of 12.7 percent. This market consists of sales of ecotourism services by entities such as partnerships, sole traders, and organisations that focus on responsible travel to natural places in which the conservation of the environment, supporting the well-being of local people, and education are of major importance (Business Wire, 2022).

Iceland, Kenya, Nepal, Australia, and other destinations are among the most popular ecotourism locations in the World. However, countries like Costa Rica and the Galapagos Islands have become ecotourism hotspots (Straits Research, 2022). The reason for choosing Costa Rica as the country for the project is that the country of Costa Rica makes up 5 percent of the world's biodiversity involving 29 natural parks, 19 wildlife refuges, 8 biological reserves, and over 25 percent of the island is protected (Invest SEA, 2023). Tourists have been drawn to some of these third-world countries to take part in wildlife tourism, birdwatching, and coral reefs visitation and to visit untouched natural areas such as Costa Rica's forests (Straits Research, 2022).

According to the Instituto Costarricense de Turismo (2022), the total number of tourist arrivals in Costa Rica in 2022 was 2.349.537 compared to 2019 which had approximately 3.139.008 tourist arrivals from around the world being the year with the highest number of tourist arrivals in the country. One of the reasons why the ecotourism market grew was the growing availability of eco-friendly tourist accommodations around the world. Also, North America was the largest region interested in the ecotourism market.

### 2.2.1 Source Market

Tourism is Costa Rica's main source of income and it receives over 1.7 million tourists per year. According to the Costa Rica Embassy (n.d.), the majority of these tourists come from the United States of America and Canada. It is known that almost 80 percent of all visitors coming to the country come to do any type of eco-tourism-related activities. However, the United States was by far the leading country based on origin for inbound tourism in Costa Rica. The number of tourists arrivals by air, land, and sea coming from the United States to Costa Rica was 870.000 tourists in 2021 and 1.290.000 tourists in 2022. In addition, Canada was the second on the list with approximately 50.000 tourist arrivals in Costa Rica in 2021 and 184.000 tourists in 2022 (Instituto Costarricense de Turismo, 2022). This means that the current source market of Costa Rica is the United States and followed by Canada but also Spain, Mexico, Germany, France, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom were part of the list.

### 2.2.2 Target Market

There are different groups of travellers and these can be divided into solo travellers and group travellers. These two groups can also be divided into different age groups such as Generation X, Generation Y, Generation Z, and others. Considering the different age groups and types of travellers one can divide their buying behaviour

into two groups through travel agents or direct bookings (Business Wire, 2022). Tailor-made tours have increased the demand for tour operators and agencies and travel agencies are projected to generate 43.36.288 million us dollars in 2030 (Straits Research, 2022). However, the direct booking market is growing as some travellers prefer direct booking in order to save money, use travel blogs, and read reviews to choose activities involving other tourist experiences. Also, service providers prefer to have direct contact with customers resulting in a market that will generate 81.072.000 million us dollars in 2030.

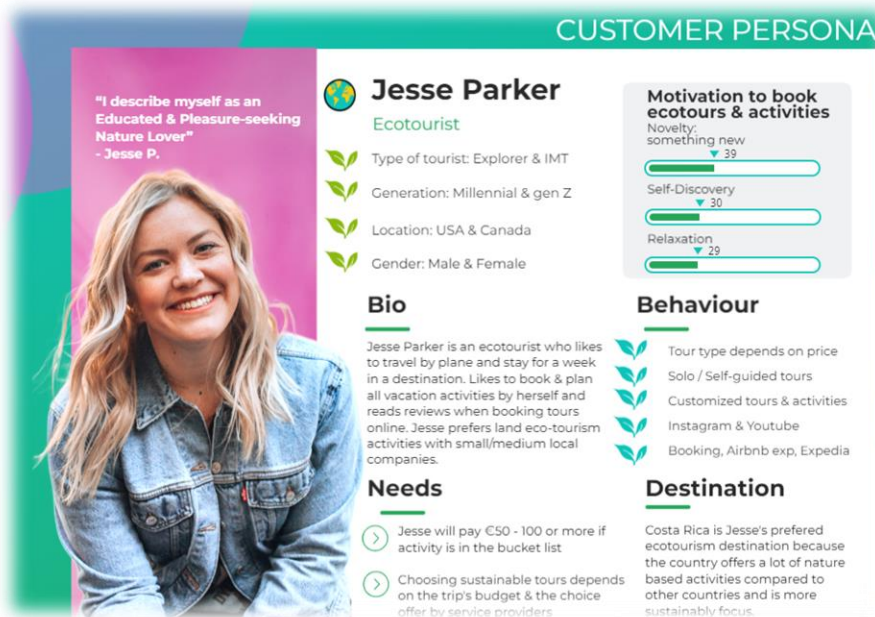
In 2021 the market revenue of group travellers was at 1.19.993 million us dollars which mean that group travellers are the largest shareholder in the global market growth. Group travel is regarded as cheaper than solo travel because meals, transportation, activities, and lodging are shared. Also, it is considered more accessible and safer than solo travel (Straits Research, 2022). However, being in control of the whole trip schedule, acquiring new experiences, interacting with other tourists and locals, and self-discovery and empowerment are popular motivations for solo travelling. Customized, private and solitary vacations have boosted solo ecotourism resulting in a rise in the solo travel market. According to Straits Research (2022), the group traveller is projected to generate 3.96.416 million us dollars in 2030 compared to solo travel which is projected to generate 1.13.814 million us dollars in 2030. In 2021 Generation Y was the highest market shareholder and is expected to generate millions of us dollars in 2030 as well. This generation seeks culture and entertainment and is young people who want to visit third-world countries and prefer short stays in countries rich in history (Straits Research, 2022). In addition, generation X is more into adventure vacations, exploring cultures, traveling and relaxation is a popular travel motive. Generation Z is more budget-conscious and seeks to engage with others while travelling.

Compared to marine ecotourism land ecotourism accounted for around 70 percent of the revenue share in this market in 2021. This growth is based on the new sustainable demand of tourists and the fact that land ecotourism activities are easier to do and are more economical compared to marine activities (Grand View Research, 2022). Social media has taken the role of a virtual travel agency and nowadays travellers are increasingly choosing travel services and products based on recommendations from other travellers who have previously visited the country. These travellers refer to opinions and reviews found on different types of social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook. Reviews and opinions shared by other travellers on social media platforms provide greater transparency regarding the products and services being provided to them allowing users to make more educated selections (Straits Research, 2022).

## 2.2.3 Customer Segmentation

There are different types of market segmentation and the most common ones are demographic, behavioral, psychographic, and geographic segmentation. Demographic segmentation includes factors like age, gender, income, education, social status, family, life stage, and occupation (Yieldify, 2022). Customers in this group belong to Generation Y or Millennials which means they have an age range of 27 to 42 and Generation Z has an age range of 11 to 26 years old. They are both female and male and are mostly well-educated concerning the environment and well-travelled (The Centre for the Promotion of Imports from Developing Countries, 2023). These tourists can be divided between middle age or senior and young ecotourists. Young ecotourists have travelled a lot and worked or studied abroad and are interested in exploring new and faraway destinations. Young ecotourists can be divided into high-income but little-time ecotourists and smaller daily budget but extensive-time tourists. High- income but little-time ecotourists are young professionals with high incomes but can only travel up to three weeks and travel often in couples. The smaller daily budget but extensive time ecotourists are mostly backpackers and gap-year travellers who travel between a month and a year. Middle age or senior ecotourists are experienced travellers who no longer live with their children (The Centre for the Promotion of Imports from Developing Countries, 2023). For a clear overview please have a look at textbox 1 and 2 below.

### Textbox 1. Customer Persona



Geographic segmentation includes factors like country, city, density, language, climate, area, and population (Yieldify, 2022). Customers in this group live in the United States of America and Canada. The most common language spoken and used in both countries is English. These tourists mostly come from the cities of Miami and Fort Lauderdale located in the Florida area in the United States due to their proximity to the country of Costa Rica and are looking for eco-travel and lush rainforests (Islander News, 2023). In addition, these tourists also come from the cities of Toronto, Montreal, and Calgary located in the Ontario, Alberta, and Quebec area in

Canada as they visit the country mostly to escape the cold winter weather, relax in natural environments, and direct flights departure often from these cities to Costa Rica (AM Costa Rica, 2023).

Continuously, Psychographics segmentation includes lifestyle, concerns, personality, values, attitudes, activity, interest, and opinion (Yieldify, 2022). Customers in this group are mostly explorers and individual mass tourists which means they are educated and pleasure-seeking nature lovers (Amplify XL, 2022). They are interested in learning about nature, how to preserve it, and the surrounding culture at the destination which enhances their satisfaction. They could also have a certain background in environmental studies or just be curious about the world around them.

### Textbox 2. Customer Persona Differences

Also, they might find pleasure in being surrounded by nature without having to worry about the negative impacts they have on the environment (Amplify XL, 2022). They like to travel by plane and stay around for a week in a destination.

These ecotourists mostly prefer Costa Rica as their number one ecotourism destination as the country offers a lot of nature-based activities and they prefer to travel in December, March, and July.





these tourists prefer land-ecotourism activities with small or medium-sized local companies. Their motivation to travel to ecotourism destinations and book ecotours is to find something new, self-discovery, and relaxation. Furthermore, according to the Centre for the Promotion of Imports from Developing Countries (2023), high-income but little-time ecotourists want to fit as much as possible into their trip, prefer comfort & high-quality services, and are looking for once-in-a-lifetime experiences. The smaller budget but extensive time ecotourists prefer less expensive accommodation and inexpensive authentic activities while engaging with local communities and experiencing local activities and products (The Centre for the Promotion of Imports from Developing Countries, 2023). They often want to give back to local communities so they combine their travels with volunteering activities and find sustainable travel a priority. In addition, senior ecotourists enjoy spending time in natural environments and actively look for new experiences. They seek high-quality tourism for a high price so they are willing to pay more and spend more on authentic and meaningful experiences. These tourists also seek higher standards of comfort than younger ecotourists (The Centre for the Promotion of Imports from Developing Countries, 2023).

Lastly, Behavioral segmentation includes purchase, usage, intent, occasion, buyer stage, user stage, life cycle stage, engagement, and benefits sought (SurveyMonkey, n.d.). Customers in this group like to book and plan everything by themselves and read reviews before booking tours online. They will spend between 50 to 100 euros on ecotourism tours and activities. Also, they would spend more money on tours if the activity was part of their bucket list. In addition, ecotourists are willing to spend more money on experiences that are authentic and meaningful (The Centre for the Promotion of Imports from Developing Countries, 2023). They will pay for tours and activities that are sustainable only if the price fits the trip's budget and the service provider is offering it. They mostly use Booking.com, Airbnb Experiences, and Expedia to book their tours and activities at the destination. Instagram and YouTube are their preferred social media platforms to find inspiration and information. According to the Centre for the Promotion of Imports from Developing Countries (2023), young ecotourists use technology as part of their experience at a destination during their pre-trip planning, during the trip, and post-trip.

## 2.2.4 Competitors Analysis

There are two types of competitors direct and indirect competitors. Direct competitors are businesses that offer similar products or services as one's own company and indirect competitors are businesses that provide a different product or service but could serve the same purpose as one's own business (Ahmed, n.d.). Some of the major companies operating in the ecotourism market are National Geographic Expedition, Rickshaw Travel, Small World Journeys, Steppes Travel, AndBeyond, Nature Discovery, Undiscovered Mountains, Travel Leaders, Goway Travel, Intrepid Travel, G Adventures and Booking Holdings Inc (Business Wire, 2022). In addition, major players are also Gondwana Ecotours, Natural Habitat Adventures, Adventure Alternative Ltd, Aracari Travel, Cheesemans' Ecology Safaris, and Frosh International Travel (Grand View Research, 2022). Other major tour operators and companies in the ecotourism market are Responsible Travel, Contiki Tours, and Discover Corps.

These major tour operators and companies are making several initiatives to strengthen their market position in the ecotourism market and are offering authentic and immersive experiences to eco-travellers around the world (Grand View Research, 2022). However, not all of these competitors can be regarded as the main competitors for the startup. After comparing these competitors to the business idea involving the products or services they offer to customers it can be concluded that the main competitors of the startup based on the worldwide ecotourism market are Gondwana Ecotours, Natural Habitat Adventures, Responsible Travel, Discover Corps, National Geographic Expedition, Steppes Travel, Goway Travel, Intrepid Travel, and G Adventures. Also, it has been concluded that the main competitors of the startup regarded as online travel agencies that were also compared based on the services and products they offer to customers are GetYourGuide, TripAdvisor, Expedia Group, TourScanner, TourRadar, Bookmundi, and Viator. These online travel agencies or third-party platforms

are regarded as the best platforms in the travel and tourism industry to book tours, activities, excursions, and attractions around the world (Riddle, 2023). For an overview of this comparison, please have a look at table 5.

Next, one should also look at competitors that provide ecotours and are operating in Costa Rica. Several most known competitors operating in Costa Rica are Eco Tours Costa Rica, Costa Rica Jade Tours, Native's Way Costa Rica, My Costa Rica, Costa Rica Expeditions, Costa Rica Horizontes Nature Tours, Green World Adventures, Greenway Nature Tours, and others (Bookmundi, n.d.). However, after comparing these competitors with the business idea it has been concluded that the main competitors operating in Costa Rica based on the products and services they offer are Eco Tours Costa Rica, Costa Rica Jade Tours, Native's Way Costa Rica, and My Costa Rica. Furthermore, in order to summarize the findings into a more specific approach one will be dividing the competitors mentioned above into direct and indirect competitors.

***Direct competitors of the startup are:***

Online Travel agencies or third-party platforms are GetYourGuide, TripAdvisor, Expedia Group, Booking Holdings Inc, TourScanner, TourRadar and Viator, My Costa Rica, Native's Way Costa Rica, Costa Rica Jade Tours, and Eco Tours Costa Rica. These competitors are well-known platforms and tour operators that offer similar products and services based on already existing day tours and operate in the same sector or industry as the startup. For an overview of this information, please have a look at table 5.

***Indirect competitors of the startup are:***

Gondwana Ecotours, Natural Habitat Adventures, Discover Corps, National Geographic Expedition, Intrepid Travel, G Adventures, Goway Travel, Steppes Travel, and Responsible Travel. These tour operators offer different products and services which are mainly based on multiple-day package tours created by the service provider such as 8-to-15-day package tours and operate in the same sector or industry as the startup. For an overview of this information, please have a look at table 5.

## 2.3 SWOT Analysis

- ***SWOT Analysis – Competitors***

Below one can see a SWOT analysis made based on the competitors of the startup. Different competitors were identified and compared based on their products, services, and platform' features. According to Shewan (2022), using a SWOT analysis has several benefits such as identifying which elements or features are internal or external but also to understand the performance or progress of companies in comparison to their internal or external environments. Strengths and Weaknesses are considered internal factors because they are still under the control of the business owner or team. Opportunities and Threats are considered external factors as there is little to no company influence here (Shewan, 2022).

A way to better understand the SWOT analysis is by connecting the internal and external factors such as by connecting Strengths with Opportunities, Strengths with Threats, Weaknesses with Opportunities, and Weaknesses with Threats. An example of this is by connecting the Strength of no language barrier to the Opportunity of personalization of trips. This strength can be used to maximize the opportunity identified in this analysis which is the personalization of trips as there will be no communication issues between the customer and the business owner as the travel agent.

One can also see a SWOT analysis made based on the skills and attitudes of the entrepreneur. As a new business owner knowing what needs to be worked on, what needs to be considered, and what one is good at could lead to business growth and personal development. For a clear overview please have a look at textbox 3 and 4 below.

**Textbox 3. SWOT Analysis Competitors**

SWOT ANALYSIS	
STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communication skills</li> <li>Excellent productivity</li> <li>Industry expertise</li> <li>No language barrier</li> <li>No big expenses</li> <li>Market research</li> <li>Good time-management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unreliable or limited cash flow in the early stages</li> <li>No staff besides the business owner</li> <li>No previous business experience</li> <li>Little to no market presence or reputation</li> <li>Lack of capital</li> <li>No previous experience in business strategy</li> <li>Weak online presence</li> </ul>
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expansion of the business idea</li> <li>Small group tours for group or solo travellers</li> <li>Personal travel consultancy for customized tours or packages</li> <li>Personalization of trips</li> <li>Affordable package tours</li> <li>Online booking</li> <li>Customer's tour experience showcase via photos or videos</li> <li>Showcasing certified or awarded service providers with an eco-label</li> <li>Informative content through social media platforms &amp; blog articles</li> <li>Immersive tours and activities with local service providers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rising costs</li> <li>Social perception</li> <li>Technological changes</li> <li>Natural disasters &amp; climate change</li> <li>New laws and regulations</li> <li>Competition increase</li> <li>Data security</li> <li>Safety at the country of destination</li> </ul>

- SWOT Analysis – Entrepreneur**

**Textbox 4. SWOT Analysis Entrepreneur**

SWOT ANALYSIS	
STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Good at organizing, planning, and booking trips</li> <li>Good presentation skills</li> <li>Good communication skills</li> <li>Good work ethic</li> <li>Great team player</li> <li>Good leadership skills</li> <li>Good time management</li> <li>Positive mindset</li> <li>Pro-active &amp; independent</li> <li>Empathetic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No previous building business experience</li> <li>No big professional network</li> <li>Workaholic</li> <li>Perfectionist</li> <li>Impatient</li> <li>Lack of financial &amp; administrative skills</li> <li>Self-doubt</li> <li>Stubbornness</li> </ul>
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delegate work</li> <li>Utilize professional network</li> <li>Adopt a learning mindset</li> <li>Maintain a growth mindset</li> <li>Invest in personal development &amp; education</li> <li>Consider feedback and suggestions</li> <li>Consider coaching platforms &amp; potential mentors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overworking</li> <li>Burned out</li> <li>High levels of stress</li> <li>Lack of cash flow</li> <li>Lack of support</li> <li>Bankruptcy</li> </ul>



## 3 Products & Services

This chapter will discuss what types of products or services are being offered by the startup, the price of the products or services, and how the startup will compete with similar businesses offering the same products or services.

### 3.1 Products & Services Description

A business product or service can be anything a business could generate profit out of (Duermyer, 2022). The products or services offered by the platform are eco-cultural tourism tours and activities. However, the online platform will not be creating new eco-cultural tourism tours and activities but rather hosting already existing ecotours and activities organized by local service providers such as tour operators or local businesses. These ecotourism tours and activities will be offered specifically to customers travelling to Costa Rica to take part in eco-cultural tourism activities. In Appendix II one can see how many times different people such as tourists are interested in taking part in ecotourism specifically in Costa Rica compared to other competing ecotourism countries such as Australia. This is also another reason why Costa Rica has been chosen for its already existing ecotours. These ecotours and activities will take place in two different areas in Costa Rica which are Monteverde and La Fortuna. Customers in this case tourists will be able to go into the online platform and search for eco-cultural tourism tours and activities they are interested to take part in involving these areas in Costa Rica and make a reservation directly through the calendar of the specific local service provider. Several tours and activities based on ecotourism that will be offered on the online platform are hiking, cycling, wildlife viewing, bird watching, kayaking, snorkeling, scuba diving, whitewater rafting, zip lining, canopy, walking, camping, bungee jumping, meditation, cultural visits and more (Owens, 2022). These eco-tours and activities will be provided to small groups of travellers, such as small groups of families, friends, couples, or even solo travellers. Also, these eco tours and activities will involve day tours, activities with a short duration, guided tours, and self-guided tours and activities.

Next, the features and products or services that will set the startup apart from other competitors operating as online travel agencies such as GetYourGuide are to offer customized trips, small group tours below 15 people, multiple day tours, online booking or reservation options, Google or Facebook reviews, affordable customized tours and activities, personal travel consultancy for customized tours, informative blog articles, customers Help Center, videos and photos of customers' experience when taking the tours and customers will be able to see which service providers' tours and activities are sustainable certified or awarded in some way showing an online eco-label or badge. These products and services are needed by the market as it is already known that 76 percent of global travellers want to feel connected to nature again and 61 percent are interested in taking part in ecotourism as sustainability has had an impact on tourist's travel choices and travel behaviour (Avantio, 2023).

Continuously, describing the price of the products or services the business will offer is also important. As mentioned before the tours and activities the platform will offer to customers are already existing eco-cultural tourism tours and activities from local businesses or tour operators in Costa Rica. This means there is an already existing fixed price or minimal price set by the local businesses or tour operators which means some limitations concerning the price of the ecotours and activities exist. However, the online platform will act as a middleman between the service providers and tourists meaning that revenue will be earned through commissions. This means that the online platform has to consider the local businesses and tour operators' minimal prices and quote a higher price to its customers. This way of working related to the price of products and services depends on the contract between the middleman which is the online platform and its partners in this case tour operators or local businesses. In addition, according to Viator (n.d.), prices for ecotours and activities in Costa Rica can cost between 20 euros to around 3000 euros depending on the activity and the amount of days.

## 3.2 Products of Competitors

As mentioned before there are several competitors related to the startup in the ecotourism market. Below one can see comparison table 5 where different competitors were compared based on the different features and aspects they provide to their customers. These competitors can be divided into two groups which are online travel agencies and tour operators. Intrepid Travel, National Geographic Expeditions, and G Adventures belong to the tour operator category and the other competitors belong to the online travel agency category. Each of these competitors offers a trip, tour, or activity to Costa Rica in different ways. This means that the comparison in the table was based on the specific trips each company offers to customers visiting Costa Rica as their main travel destination. G Adventures is an example of this as the company only offers package tours to Costa Rica and customized trips. There are no specific departure dates to take part in the package tour and the package tour is based on a small group of travellers. As they only offer package tours these include multiple-day tours. Also, customers can book these tours online using G Adventure's main website and also read other travellers' reviews about the trips G Adventure offers to customers. This is an elaboration on how to read and understand the comparison chart mentioned above.

The products or services that the startup will offer are unique and have a competitive advantage over existing competitors. The table below was used by the startup to position and compare itself and its products and services over its competitors. The startup can be categorized as an online travel agency rather than a tour operator as the ecotours and activities that the startup offer are not created by the startup but rather by already existing tour operators. This means that the competitive advantage of the startup lies on the right side of the comparison table and might include several of the features other online travel agencies such as Expedia are lacking. To conclude, there are three generic strategies based on the competitive strategy that companies should consider when entering a new industry which are Differentiation, Cost Leadership, and Focus (Porter, 1985).

**Table 5.** Comparison Chart

Ecotourism Comparison Chart							
FEATURES	INTREPID TRAVEL	NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC EXPEDITIONS	G ADVENTURES	TRIPADVISOR	EXPEDIA	GETYOURGUIDE	TOURRAAR
Package Tour	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓
Customized Trips	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
Specific Tour Dates	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Small Group Tours	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Multiple Day Tours	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓
Reviews	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Online Booking	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

The startup will consider Differentiation Focus as its competitive strategy because the focus will lay on having distinctive product and service features. To be more specific Differentiation Focus means focusing on a niche market in this case ecotourism and having differentiation as its competitive advantage (Porter, 1985). The reason for this is that the startup seeks to distinguish its products and services from that of its competitors as a goal to be unique and solve its target group's problem.

## 4 Sales & Marketing Plan

In this chapter one will discuss the marketing strategy and sales strategy that the startup will be based on. Also, a division between a marketing plan and a sales plan will be discussed.

### 4.1 Marketing Strategy

A marketing plan is designed to figure out how a business can locate prospective customers and who they are specifically (Dun & Bradstreet Inc, n.d.). A marketing plan contains one or even more marketing strategies that describe how a business will accomplish a particular goal or mission through campaigns, content, channels, and marketing software (Chi, 2022). The marketing mission related to the business mission is to attract an audience of eco-travellers and sustainable services providers, educate them and convert them into users of the platform. Key performance indicators that will facilitate the startup to achieve its short-term goals are tracking website visitors using organic web traffic, increasing brand awareness through tracking follower growth, tracking the conversion rate of visitors who completed a desired action, tracking social media engagement and traffic such as visitors, likes, shares, comments, and others (Riserbato, 2021). Other indicators that were considered are referral traffic to know where visitors are coming from and tracking organic keyword performance. The startup wants to drive traffic to its main website pages such as the products and services page, blog pages, and social media accounts. Following the AARRR framework, the forecast would be that 100 people would come to the website through advertising than 20 out of the 100 people would sign up for the newsletter or visit additional pages or social accounts. 7 out of the 20 people return to the website then three people recommended the website to friends or colleagues and lastly only 1 person follows the call to action (Muzyka, 2022).

Next, the type of content that will be created related to the marketing mission and buyer persona involves blog posts, YouTube videos, reels or shorts, newsletters, social media posts such as text and photos, and ads. The content volume will be based on weekly blog posts, weekly or bi-weekly Instagram and YouTube reels, or shorts. Also, two Instagram posts per week, a bi-weekly or monthly YouTube video, bi-weekly or weekly ads, and monthly newsletters. In addition, the channels on which this content mentioned above will be distributed include Instagram, YouTube, email, and the startup's website. Continuously, different types of paid advertising will be also used on different channels such as search ads on Google ads platform, social media ads on Instagram, and YouTube ads for video ads or instream ads (Peterson, 2023). In addition, Google display ads on other people's websites will also be used and the startup will also use affiliate marketing to earn money by registering through niche affiliate programs. Furthermore, previously mentioned competitors that rank highly on search engines such as Google for keywords that the startup wants to rank for as well are Eco Tours Costa Rica, TripAdvisor, Viator, My Costa Rica, and Bookmundi. In addition, Eco Tours Costa Rica has a big presence on Facebook as social media platform but it is also visible on Instagram and YouTube.

### 4.2 Sales Strategy

The startup will sell its products and services mainly using hybrid channels. An owned direct channel that will be used is the startup's website. Products and services will be provided by the startup's partners which are the services providers based in Costa Rica and belong to the partner indirect channel. Sales will also be made through affiliate marketing involving blog posts with affiliate links from partners' affiliate programs in which a commission is earned for each sale. To convert the startup's audience into customers certain incentives will be provided such as free downloadable itineraries, free tips and suggestions, free digital gifts, discounts, and referral rewards. The startup's sales goals include increasing sales and social media engagement, growing brand awareness, improving website performance, and acquiring new customers or partners within a year. To measure the sales goals' success several key performance indicators were mentioned above.



## 5 Financial Planning & Budget

This chapter discusses the different financial consequences of the project involving different financial models. Also, it elaborates if the project is financially feasible and offers a complete overview of relevant data.

### 5.1 Finance & Budget

As mentioned before the startup has a legal structure of a sole proprietor as it involves only one individual being responsible for the daily operations of the business and there are minimal fees expected to be paid when registering in the chamber of commerce. However, in the upcoming years, the legal structure of the startup could change to a private limited liability company. The main financial goal or objective of the startup is to have and maintain a profitable online business. There are several financial consequences of the professional product as the project is mainly based on building a startup. In order to have a clear overview of the financial consequences of the project several financial data based on income & expenses and costs & revenues will be discussed. Financial statements that were used are the cash flow statement, the income statement, and the balance sheet. Considering that the startup has not started operating there is no previous financial data available. All numbers shown in the statements are a representation or estimation of already established small businesses in the travel and tourism industry. The cash flow and the income statement are based on a monthly and annual forecast but the balance sheet is only based on a specific time and involves the first three years as well. For a clear overview please have a look at tables 6, 7, and 8 below.

**Table 6.** Income Statement

Income Statement	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
<b>Revenue</b>															
Ecotours Brokerage Commission	€ 2.750,00	€ 2.750,00	€ 2.750,00	€ 2.750,00	€ 2.750,00	€ 2.750,00	€ 2.750,00	€ 2.750,00	€ 2.750,00	€ 2.750,00	€ 2.750,00	€ 2.750,00	€ 33.000,00	€ 37.950,00	€ 43.642,50
Affiliate Programs Commission	€ 833,34	€ 833,34	€ 833,34	€ 833,34	€ 833,34	€ 833,34	€ 833,34	€ 833,34	€ 833,34	€ 833,34	€ 833,34	€ 833,34	€ 10.000,08	€ 11.500,09	€ 13.225,10
Travel Planning & Consultancy Sales	€ 3.083,34	€ 3.083,34	€ 3.083,34	€ 3.083,34	€ 3.083,34	€ 3.083,34	€ 3.083,34	€ 3.083,34	€ 3.083,34	€ 3.083,34	€ 3.083,34	€ 3.083,34	€ 37.000,08	€ 42.550,09	€ 48.932,60
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>€ 6.666,68</b>	<b>€ 6.666,68</b>	<b>€ 6.666,68</b>	<b>€ 6.666,68</b>	<b>€ 6.666,68</b>	<b>€ 6.666,68</b>	<b>€ 6.666,68</b>	<b>€ 6.666,68</b>	<b>€ 6.666,68</b>	<b>€ 6.666,68</b>	<b>€ 6.666,68</b>	<b>€ 6.666,68</b>	<b>€ 80.000,16</b>	<b>€ 92.000,18</b>	<b>€ 105.800,20</b>
<b>Cost of Goods Sold</b>															
	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -
<b>Total Cost of Goods Sold</b>	<b>€ -</b>	<b>€ -</b>	<b>€ -</b>	<b>€ -</b>	<b>€ -</b>	<b>€ -</b>	<b>€ -</b>	<b>€ -</b>	<b>€ -</b>	<b>€ -</b>	<b>€ -</b>	<b>€ -</b>	<b>€ -</b>	<b>€ -</b>	<b>€ -</b>
<b>Gross Margin</b>	<b>€ 6.666,68</b>	<b>€ 6.666,68</b>	<b>€ 6.666,68</b>	<b>€ 6.666,68</b>	<b>€ 6.666,68</b>	<b>€ 6.666,68</b>	<b>€ 6.666,68</b>	<b>€ 6.666,68</b>	<b>€ 6.666,68</b>	<b>€ 6.666,68</b>	<b>€ 6.666,68</b>	<b>€ 6.666,68</b>	<b>€ 80.000,16</b>	<b>€ 92.000,18</b>	<b>€ 105.800,20</b>
<b>Operating Expenses</b>															
Holiday allowance	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ 1.777,78	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ 1.777,78	€ 1.992,89	€ 2.234,03
Salary	€ 2.000,00	€ 2.000,00	€ 2.000,00	€ 2.000,00	€ 2.000,00	€ 2.000,00	€ 2.000,00	€ 2.000,00	€ 2.000,00	€ 2.000,00	€ 2.000,00	€ 2.000,00	€ 24.000,00	€ 26.904,00	€ 30.159,38
Advertising	€ 332,27	€ 332,27	€ 332,27	€ 332,27	€ 332,27	€ 332,27	€ 332,27	€ 332,27	€ 332,27	€ 332,27	€ 332,27	€ 332,27	€ 3.987,24	€ 2.246,33	€ 2.246,33
Outsourcing Website Maintenance	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ 30,00	€ 30,00
Business Registration Fees	€ 75,00	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ 75,00	€ -	€ -
Content Management System	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -
Website Theme	€ 120,99	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ 120,99	€ -	€ -
Outsourcing Logo and Website	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ 500,00	€ -
Google Workspace and email	€ 2,80	€ 2,80	€ 2,80	€ 2,80	€ 2,80	€ 2,80	€ 2,80	€ 2,80	€ 2,80	€ 2,80	€ 2,80	€ 2,80	€ 33,60	€ 33,60	€ 33,60
Telecommunication	€ 15,99	€ 15,99	€ 15,99	€ 15,99	€ 15,99	€ 15,99	€ 15,99	€ 15,99	€ 15,99	€ 15,99	€ 15,99	€ 15,99	€ 191,88	€ 191,88	€ 191,88
Internet	€ 40,00	€ 40,00	€ 40,00	€ 40,00	€ 40,00	€ 40,00	€ 40,00	€ 40,00	€ 40,00	€ 40,00	€ 40,00	€ 40,00	€ 480,00	€ 480,00	€ 480,00
Business Bank Account Fees	€ 24,75	€ 24,75	€ 24,75	€ 24,75	€ 24,75	€ 24,75	€ 24,75	€ 24,75	€ 24,75	€ 24,75	€ 24,75	€ 24,75	€ 297,00	€ 297,00	€ 297,00
Business Liability & Professional Insurance	€ 7,00	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ 25,66	€ 25,66	€ 25,66	€ 25,66	€ 25,66	€ 25,66	€ 160,96	€ 384,90	€ 384,90
Courses	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ 22,25	€ 22,25	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ 22,25	€ 22,25	€ -	€ 89,00	€ 89,00	€ 89,00
Travel, Meals and Entertainment	€ 131,86	€ 131,86	€ 131,86	€ 2.074,73	€ 131,86	€ 131,86	€ 131,86	€ 131,86	€ 131,86	€ 131,86	€ 131,86	€ 131,86	€ 3.525,19	€ 2.408,40	€ 2.408,40
Accountancy	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ 931,39
Domain Registration	€ 0,26	€ 0,26	€ 0,26	€ 0,26	€ 0,26	€ 0,26	€ 0,26	€ 0,26	€ 0,26	€ 0,26	€ 0,26	€ 0,26	€ 3,12	€ 20,00	€ 20,00
Website Hosting	€ 9,30	€ 9,30	€ 9,30	€ 9,30	€ 9,30	€ 9,30	€ 9,30	€ 9,30	€ 9,30	€ 9,30	€ 9,30	€ 9,30	€ 111,60	€ 111,60	€ 111,60
<b>Total Operating Expenses</b>	<b>€ 2.740,22</b>	<b>€ 2.557,23</b>	<b>€ 2.557,23</b>	<b>€ 4.522,35</b>	<b>€ 4.357,26</b>	<b>€ 2.557,23</b>	<b>€ 2.582,89</b>	<b>€ 2.582,89</b>	<b>€ 2.582,89</b>	<b>€ 2.605,14</b>	<b>€ 2.605,14</b>	<b>€ 2.582,89</b>	<b>€ 34.853,34</b>	<b>€ 35.689,40</b>	<b>€ 39.617,51</b>
<b>Income (Before Other Expenses)</b>	<b>€ 3.906,46</b>	<b>€ 4.109,45</b>	<b>€ 4.109,45</b>	<b>€ 2.144,33</b>	<b>€ 2.309,42</b>	<b>€ 4.109,45</b>	<b>€ 4.083,79</b>	<b>€ 4.083,79</b>	<b>€ 4.083,79</b>	<b>€ 4.061,54</b>	<b>€ 4.061,54</b>	<b>€ 4.083,79</b>	<b>€ 45.146,80</b>	<b>€ 56.310,58</b>	<b>€ 66.182,69</b>
<b>Other Expenses</b>															
Depreciation	€ 6,67	€ 6,67	€ 6,67	€ 6,67	€ 6,67	€ 6,67	€ 6,67	€ 6,67	€ 6,67	€ 6,67	€ 6,67	€ 6,67	€ 80,04	€ 80,04	€ 80,04
<b>Total Other Expenses</b>	<b>€ 6,67</b>	<b>€ 6,67</b>	<b>€ 6,67</b>	<b>€ 6,67</b>	<b>€ 6,67</b>	<b>€ 6,67</b>	<b>€ 6,67</b>	<b>€ 6,67</b>	<b>€ 6,67</b>	<b>€ 6,67</b>	<b>€ 6,67</b>	<b>€ 6,67</b>	<b>€ 80,04</b>	<b>€ 80,04</b>	<b>€ 80,04</b>
<b>Net Income Before Income Tax</b>	<b>€ 3.899,79</b>	<b>€ 4.102,78</b>	<b>€ 4.102,78</b>	<b>€ 2.137,66</b>	<b>€ 2.302,75</b>	<b>€ 4.102,78</b>	<b>€ 4.077,12</b>	<b>€ 4.077,12</b>	<b>€ 4.077,12</b>	<b>€ 4.054,87</b>	<b>€ 4.054,87</b>	<b>€ 4.077,12</b>	<b>€ 45.066,76</b>	<b>€ 56.230,54</b>	<b>€ 66.102,65</b>
Income Tax	€ 1.386,93	€ 1.386,93	€ 1.386,93	€ 1.386,93	€ 1.386,93	€ 1.386,93	€ 1.386,93	€ 1.386,93	€ 1.386,93	€ 1.386,93	€ 1.386,93	€ 1.386,93	€ 16.643,16	€ 20.765,93	€ 24.411,70
<b>Net Profit/Loss</b>	<b>€ 2.512,86</b>	<b>€ 2.715,85</b>	<b>€ 2.715,85</b>	<b>€ 750,73</b>	<b>€ 915,82</b>	<b>€ 2.715,85</b>	<b>€ 2.715,85</b>	<b>€ 2.690,19</b>	<b>€ 2.690,19</b>	<b>€ 2.667,94</b>	<b>€ 2.667,94</b>	<b>€ 2.690,19</b>	<b>€ 28.423,60</b>	<b>€ 35.464,61</b>	<b>€ 41.690,95</b>

The startup is based on an online business so a new computer is necessary. A new computer is the only investment activity of the startup. It depreciates every year and has a life expectancy of five years (Walter, 2023). Moving forward with the operating activities the only activity that will not cost money in the first year is hiring an accountant as this person will be hired in the third year of business operations. Accounting fees for small businesses or startups are between 1.000 to 5.000 euros annually (Cameron, 2022). In addition, outsourcing will only take place in the second and third years as they are not considered fundamental activities.

Registering the startup at the chamber of commerce and making a lifetime payment for a website theme are the only activities taking place once in the first year. Holiday allowance is known as the 13th month and it takes place once every year in May and it involves a rate of 8 percent of one's total gross income (Wood, 2021). Next, registering a business domain costs less in the first year and then increases in the following years. The average Dutch resident spends 40 euro per month on the Internet. Also, in the Netherlands, the minimum gross wage in 2023 for someone older than 21 years old working full-time is almost 2000 euro per month (Government of the Netherlands, n.d.). However, the average annual pay raise between 2021 and 2022 in the tourism industry was 12.1 percent which represents an increase in the second and third years (Flynn, 2023). Continuously, operating activities that show a decrease from the first year to the second and third years are advertising and travel costs. In the first year, more money needs to be spent on social media ads in order to increase brand awareness which means between 15 to 200 euro or 450 to 6.000 euro but in the upcoming years, this need could decrease (Nutshell, 2023).

With regards, to travel costs and representation in the first year the business owner might have to take trips within the Netherlands to be assisted with building a profitable company. Also, the business owner will need to take trips to Costa Rica in the dry season such as in April to partner up with service providers and have successful business meetings. However, for the second and third years, these activities could decrease depending on business growth. The business owner could participate in online courses to develop her skills in the months previous to the holiday or high season in order to have a better understanding of how to assist customers when in high demand for tourism products and services. Concerning business insurance in the first month there is an administration cost to be paid and as a self-employed customer, the insurer offers six months of no payment needed. After the six-months the monthly amount increases. The monthly payment of business and liability insurance through a Dutch bank is based on certain factors and it is estimated to be around 25 euros but it can increase depending on other additional options.

Lastly, according to Maunder (2023), in 2023 self-employed entrepreneurs have to pay income tax which is based on a rate of 36,93 percent on income up to 73.000 euros. In order for the startup to have healthy growth the revenue of the startup should increase each year at a rate between 10 percent and 25 percent (C2FO, 2022). More than half of marketers or business owners using affiliate marketing have an annual revenue of 10.000 euros (Widmer, 2023). Also, the annual revenue of a home-based online travel agent or small tour operator is 37.000 euros (Ogg, 2023). However, a 10 percent commission rate on every sale also applies (Core Commissions, 2023).

**Table 7.** Cash Flow Statement

	Jan/24	Feb/24	Mar/24	Apr/24	May/24	Jun/24	Jul/24	Aug/24	Sep/24	Oct/24	Nov/24	Dec/24	12-Mo. TOTAL	Year 2	Year 3
REVENUE	€ 6.666.68	€ 6.666.68	€ 6.666.68	€ 6.666.68	€ 6.666.68	€ 6.666.68	€ 6.666.68	€ 6.666.68	€ 6.666.68	€ 6.666.68	€ 6.666.68	€ 6.666.68	€ 80.000,16	€ 92.000,18	€ 105.800,20
OPERATING ACTIVITIES															
Salary	€ 2.000,00	€ 2.000,00	€ 2.000,00	€ 2.000,00	€ 2.000,00	€ 2.000,00	€ 2.000,00	€ 2.000,00	€ 2.000,00	€ 2.000,00	€ 2.000,00	€ 2.000,00	€ 24.000,00	€ 26.904,00	€ 30.159,38
Google Workspace and email	€ 2,80	€ 2,80	€ 2,80	€ 2,80	€ 2,80	€ 2,80	€ 2,80	€ 2,80	€ 2,80	€ 2,80	€ 2,80	€ 2,80	€ 33,60	€ 33,60	€ 33,60
Telecommunication	€ 15,99	€ 15,99	€ 15,99	€ 15,99	€ 15,99	€ 15,99	€ 15,99	€ 15,99	€ 15,99	€ 15,99	€ 15,99	€ 15,99	€ 191,88	€ 191,88	€ 191,88
Internet	€ 40,00	€ 40,00	€ 40,00	€ 40,00	€ 40,00	€ 40,00	€ 40,00	€ 40,00	€ 40,00	€ 40,00	€ 40,00	€ 40,00	€ 480,00	€ 480,00	€ 480,00
Advertising	€ 332,27	€ 332,27	€ 332,27	€ 332,27	€ 332,27	€ 332,27	€ 332,27	€ 332,27	€ 332,27	€ 332,27	€ 332,27	€ 332,27	€ 3.987,24	€ 2.246,33	€ 2.246,33
Business Bank Account Fees	€ 24,75	€ 24,75	€ 24,75	€ 24,75	€ 24,75	€ 24,75	€ 24,75	€ 24,75	€ 24,75	€ 24,75	€ 24,75	€ 24,75	€ 297,00	€ 297,00	€ 297,00
Business Liability & Professional Insurance	€ 7,00	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ 25,66	€ 25,66	€ 25,66	€ 25,66	€ 25,66	€ 25,66	€ 160,96	€ 384,90	€ 384,90
Courses	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ 22,25	€ 22,25	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ 22,25	€ 22,25	€ -	€ 89,00	€ 89,00	€ 89,00
Travel and Representation	€ 131,86	€ 131,86	€ 131,86	€ 2.074,73	€ 131,86	€ 131,86	€ 131,86	€ 131,86	€ 131,86	€ 131,86	€ 131,86	€ 131,86	€ 3.525,19	€ 2.408,40	€ 2.408,40
Accountancy	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ 931,39
Holiday Allowance	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ 1.777,78	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ 1.777,78	€ 1.992,89	€ 2.234,03
Taxes	€ 500,00	€ 500,00	€ 500,00	€ 500,00	€ 500,00	€ 500,00	€ 500,00	€ 500,00	€ 500,00	€ 500,00	€ 500,00	€ 500,00	€ 6.000,00	€ 6.726,00	€ 7.539,84
Domain Registration	€ 0,26	€ 0,26	€ 0,26	€ 0,26	€ 0,26	€ 0,26	€ 0,26	€ 0,26	€ 0,26	€ 0,26	€ 0,26	€ 0,26	€ 3,12	€ 20,00	€ 20,00
Website Hosting	€ 9,30	€ 9,30	€ 9,30	€ 9,30	€ 9,30	€ 9,30	€ 9,30	€ 9,30	€ 9,30	€ 9,30	€ 9,30	€ 9,30	€ 111,60	€ 111,60	€ 111,60
Outsourcing Logo and Website	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ 500,00	€ -
Website Theme	€ 120,99	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ 120,99	€ -	€ -
Content Management System	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -
Business Registration Fees	€ 75,00	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ 75,00	€ -	€ -
Outsourcing Website Maintenance	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ 30,00	€ 30,00
Income Tax	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ 16.643,16	€ 20.765,93

NET CASH FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES	€ 3.240,22	€ 3.057,23	€ 3.057,23	€ 5.022,35	€ 4.857,26	€ 3.057,23	€ 3.082,89	€ 3.082,89	€ 3.082,89	€ 3.105,14	€ 3.105,14	€ 3.082,89	€ 40.853,36	€ 59.058,76	€ 67.923,28
INVESTING ACTIVITIES	Jan/24	Feb/24	Mar/24	Apr/24	May/24	Jun/24	Jul/24	Aug/24	Sep/24	Oct/24	Nov/24	Dec/24	12-Mo. TOTAL	Year 2	Year 3
Computer	€ 400,00	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ 400,00	€ -	€ -
NET CASH FROM INVESTING ACTIVITIES	\$ 400,00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 400,00	\$ -	\$ -
FINANCING ACTIVITIES	Jan/24	Feb/24	Mar/24	Apr/24	May/24	Jun/24	Jul/24	Aug/24	Sep/24	Oct/24	Nov/24	Dec/24	12-Mo. TOTAL	Year 2	Year 3
	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -
NET CASH FROM FINANCING ACTIVITIES	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -
YEAR ENDING	Jan/24	Feb/24	Mar/24	Apr/24	May/24	Jun/24	Jul/24	Aug/24	Sep/24	Oct/24	Nov/24	Dec/24	12-Mo. TOTAL	Year 2	Year 3
Net Increase or Decrease in Cash and Cash Equivalents During Period	€ 3.440,22	€ 3.057,23	€ 3.057,23	€ 5.022,35	€ 4.857,26	€ 3.057,23	€ 3.082,89	€ 3.082,89	€ 3.082,89	€ 3.105,14	€ 3.105,14	€ 3.082,89	€ 41.253,36	€ 59.058,76	€ 67.923,28
Cash and Cash Equivalents at Beginning of Period	€ 1.000,00	€ 1.000,00	€ 1.000,00	€ 1.000,00	€ 1.000,00	€ 1.000,00	€ 1.000,00	€ 1.000,00	€ 1.000,00	€ 1.000,00	€ 1.000,00	€ 1.000,00	€ 12.000,00	€ 12.000,00	€ 12.000,00
CASH AND CASH EQUIVALENTS AT END OF PERIOD	€ 4.006,46	€ 4.609,45	€ 4.609,45	€ 2.444,33	€ 2.809,42	€ 4.609,45	€ 4.583,79	€ 4.583,79	€ 4.583,79	€ 4.561,54	€ 4.561,54	€ 4.583,79	€ 50.746,80	€ 44.941,42	€ 49.876,92

Table 8. Balance Sheet

ASSETS	First Year	Second Year	Third Year
Current Assets			
Cash	€ 50.746,80	€ 44.941,42	€ 49.876,92
Total Current Assets	€ 50.746,80	€ 44.941,42	€ 49.876,92
Fixed Assets			
Computer	€ 320,00	€ 240,00	€ 160,00
Total Fixed Assets	€ 320,00	€ 240,00	€ 160,00
Total Assets	€ 51.066,80	€ 45.181,42	€ 50.036,92

LIABILITIES & EQUITY	First Year	Second Year	Third Year
Liabilities			
	€ -	€ -	€ -
Total Liabilities	€ -	€ -	€ -
Equity			
Owners Draw	€ 51.066,80	€ 45.181,42	€ 50.036,92
Total Equity	€ 51.066,80	€ 45.181,42	€ 50.036,92
Total Liabilities and Equity	€ 51.066,80	€ 45.181,42	€ 50.036,92
Balance sheet in or out of balance?	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
	Balanced!	Balanced!	Balanced!

## 5.2 Financial Feasibility of Project

An investment budget is known to provide insights into which business assets a startup will need in the coming years and also which expenses are involved during these years. In addition, an operating budget focuses more on providing insight into whether a company expects to make a profit or loss in the next three years and a liquidity budget enables a company to track its finances such as how much money is in the bank and in which months extra funds are needed (Zanen, 2023). However, as can be seen above there was no separation created between the three. The reason for this is that the three of them are needed and are all part of a business financial plan. This means that the investment, operating, and liquidity budget can be visualized through the business's income statement, cash flow statement, and balance sheet. Concerning the feasibility of the project, several conclusions can be discussed which are as follows:

- With regard to the operating budget or in this case income statement the money that comes in monthly or annually is sufficient to cover the business's operating expenses, other expenses, and its income taxes while still leaving enough profits at the end. However, in April and May during the first-year profits seemed to be less than expected compared to the other months. The reason for this is the increase in expenses concerning holiday allowance in May and travel costs in April.
- Concerning the investment budget or balance sheet of the startup the amount of money the startup owns involving its assets and the amount of money the startup owes involving its liabilities at a specific moment in time is concluded to be balanced. There are no long-term or short-term liabilities yet to be seen making it a positive balance sheet. Also, the cash in the balance sheet includes the cash and cash equivalents at the end of the period of the cash flow statement which was 50.746,80 euro.
- Regarding the liquidity budget or cash flow statement of the startup, the startup has more cash flowing from its operating activities compared to its investing activities. Even though the startup is in its pre-seed phase it can become a profitable business. In conclusion, the startup has a positive cash flow as the startup is receiving more cash than what it is expending. This means that the startup could use the extra cash to reinvest in the company, pay debts or find new ways to grow.

To conclude, according to the data shown above the business idea is financially feasible.



## 6 Conclusions & Recommendations

This chapter discusses the conclusions and recommendations for the project. Also, it will answer the main management question and several research questions.

### 6.1 Conclusions

The main goal of this business plan was to answer the following question: “How can a new startup feasibly provide ecotourism and cultural tourism tours and activities in a specific destination?” In order to build an ecotourism startup and provide eco-tours and activities in Costa Rica the main goal is to understand what ecotourism is, understand the different definitions that exist, the characteristic, and what type of travellers are considered the startup’s main customers.

Firstly, according to the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (2022), ecotourism is known to be a sustainable form of natural resource-based tourism that focuses primarily on experiencing and learning about nature, it occurs in natural areas and contributes to the conservation or preservation of such areas and it is also ethically managed to be low-impact, non-consumptive and locally oriented. In addition, cultural tourism is defined as a type of tourism activity in which the visitor’s essential motivation is to learn, discover, experience, and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions or products in a tourist destination (United Nations World Tourism Organization, n.d.). According to the United Nations (n.d.), the definition of sustainability is to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In addition, the definition of sustainable tourism refers to tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts while addressing the needs of visitors, the tourism industry, the environment, and host communities (Global Sustainable Tourism Council, 2022).

Responsible tourism is any form of tourism that can be consumed in a more responsible way that minimized negative social, economic, and environmental impacts, generates economic benefits for local people and host communities, and makes positive contributions to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage (Sustainable Tourism, n.d.). With regards to the types of tourism that exist the types of tourism that are defined by the destination and the purpose of the trip and are approved by the United Nations World Tourism Organization are rural tourism, ecotourism, adventure tourism, cultural tourism, business tourism, gastronomic tourism, urban tourism, health tourism, mountain tourism, sports tourism, and coastal, maritime & inland water tourism (Reali, 2022). Next, eco-tourism represents a combination of eco-cultural activities several examples of these activities are hiking, horseback riding, cycling, eco-friendly safaris, wildlife viewing, bird watching, observation of astronomical phenomena, sailing, kayaking, snorkeling, scuba diving, whitewater rafting, zip lining, canopy walk, camping, bungee jumping, meditation, cultural visits, fishing, and mountain biking (Owens, 2022). Also, dancing, festivals, workshops, music, heritage tours, walking tours, singing, drawing, painting, crafting, performances, photography, costume display, cultural artifacts, cooking classes, local food tours, language courses, rituals, ceremonies, and more (Lush, 2023).

Continuously, after some research, the top four destinations for eco-tourism are Costa Rica, Australia, Galapagos Islands, and Iceland. Tourists can be classified into four types of tourists based on the tourist’s typology model which involves the degree to which they seek familiarity and novelty in a destination (Cohen, 1979). These four types of tourists are the drifter, the explorer, the individual mass tourist, and the organized mass tourist. Also, according to Crompton (1979), nine motives based on his theory were identified and classified into socio-psychological motives and cultural motives. This theory based on the motives of pleasure that influences tourists to travel to a destination also involves nine push and pull factors which are escape, self-discovery, relaxation, prestige, regression, enhancement of kinship relationships, facilitation of social interaction, novelty, and education.

Furthermore, the type of tourists that would use the platform are explorers and individual mass tourists. They belong to Generation Y or Millennials and Generation Z. These tourists like to book everything on their own and would probably use a new online ecotourism platform to book their tours and activities. These tourists prefer travelling by plane and staying for a week at the destination. In addition, Costa Rica was the most preferred destination to travel to for ecotourism activities as it has a lot of nature-related activities and is sustainably inclined compared to other countries. Land ecotours and activities are most preferred by these tourists and these tourists prefer taking part in eco-tours and activities involving small to medium-sized local businesses.

With regards to the startup's competitors Booking Holding Inc, Airbnb Experiences, and Expedia are the most common and used platforms that these tourists use to book tours and activities. These tourists would also pay between 50 to 100 euros for an ecotour and activity but they would also be willing to pay more if the tour or activity falls under a bucket list experience. In addition, they prefer customized tours and activities, travelling solo or self-guided and some tourists do not have a preference on the way they take tours such as groups or private as it depends mainly on the price and the activity being offered by the service provider. The motivation to book eco-tours and activities is related to doing and discovering something new, self-discovery, and relaxation.

Lastly, a positive impact of an ecotourism startup focusing on eco-cultural tourism is that the money from tourists goes back into the conservation and preservation of the area and it fosters respect for local cultures and the environment by increasing awareness of conservation (BBC News, n.d.). Also, eco-cultural tourism activities promote environmental and cultural heritage awareness and educate tourists and locals at the same time. However, there are several negative impacts concerning eco-cultural tourism if the environment, animals, and people are managed poorly such as wildlife disturbance, environmental pollution, transculturation, and tourist exploitation. An example of a negative impact concerning eco-cultural tourism is when the number of tourists visiting a certain place increases and people during the tours throw their garbage in the environment which causes environmental and cultural heritage losses (Sadiku, 2022).

## 6.2 Recommendations

The same question applies here in which specific advice will be given related to the feasibility and validation of the project: "How can a new startup feasibly provide ecotourism and cultural tourism tours and activities in a specific destination?" These recommendations including the quantified targets are based on findings involving desk research specifically for new or small startups.

- The first recommendation is to target Millennials and Generation Z ecotourists from Canada and America. 80 percent of these tourists are already interested in participating in ecotourism-related activities in Costa Rica. Thus, the startup should spend around 11% of its annual revenue on digital marketing during its first three years of operation for example by creating social media ads targeting ecotourists coming from Canada and America to Costa Rica.
- The second recommendation is based on creating a profitable business involving the right business model and having different revenue streams. Thus, the startup should expand its income streams by partnering up with at least 10 eco accommodations service providers after the first three years of operations in order to include all elements needed in a travel journey.
- The last recommendation is based on collaborating with sustainable ecotour operators that provide already existing eco and cultural tourism experiences in Costa Rica. Thus, the startup should partner up with at least 10 to 20 sustainable small to medium-sized local service providers in Costa Rica that offer immersive and personalized experiences to eco-tourists.

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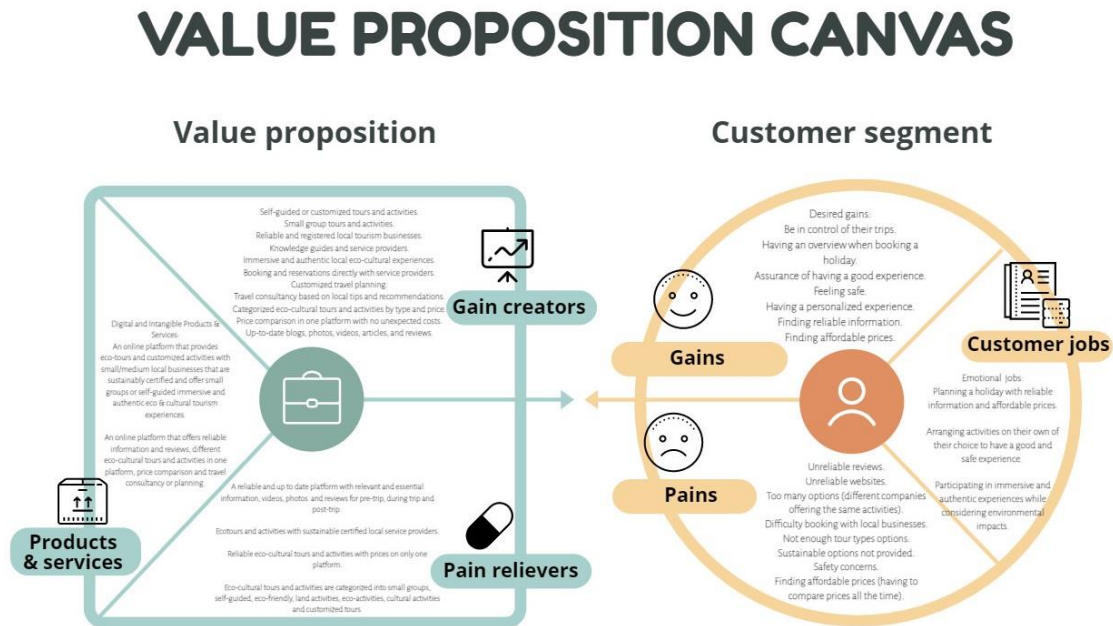
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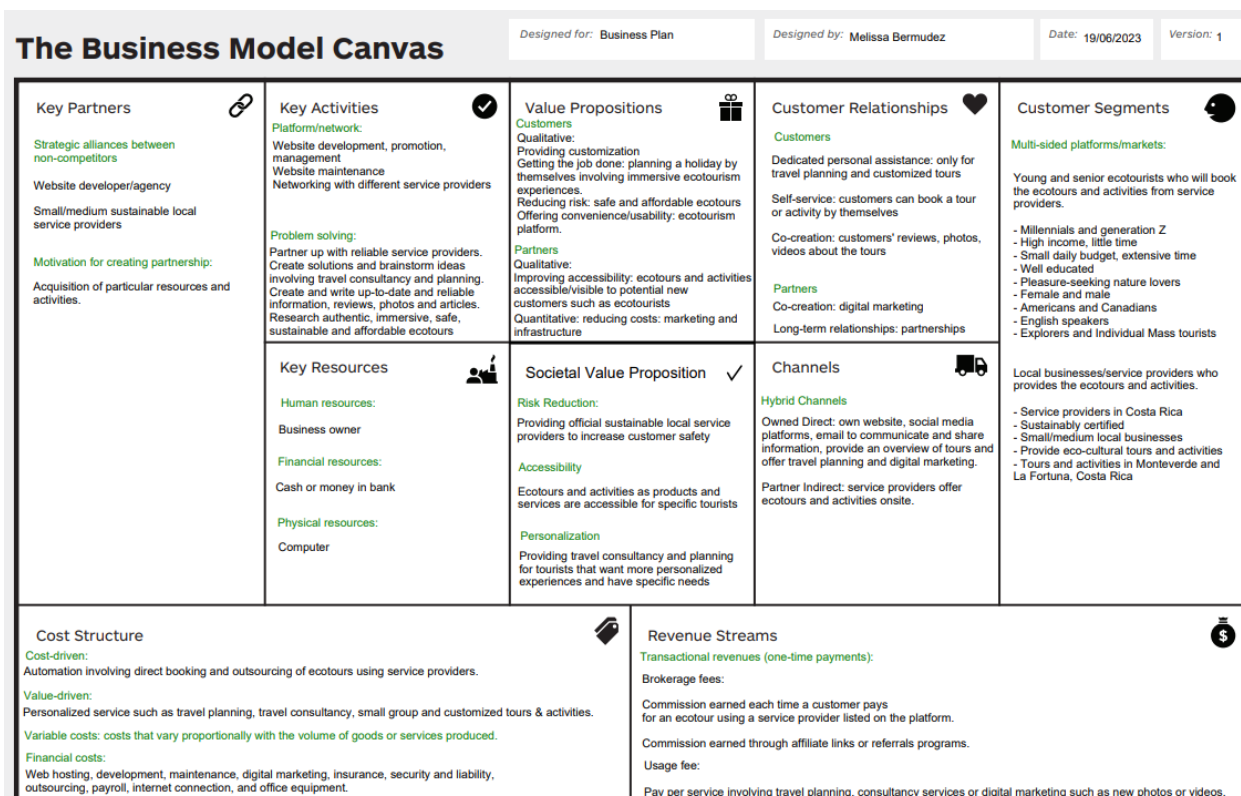
# Appendices

## Appendix I – Business Model & Value Proposition Canvas

**Textbox 9.** Value Proposition Canvas



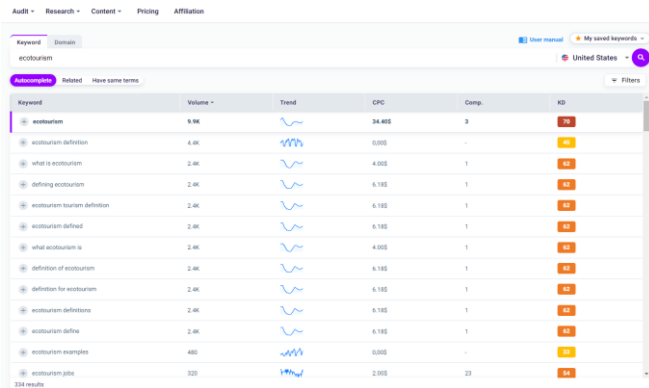
**Textbox 10.** Business Model Canvas





## Appendix II - Keyword Research

**Table 11.** Keyword Explorer

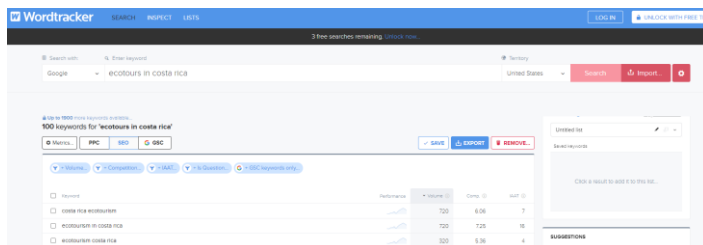


Keyword	Volume	Trend	CPC	Comp.	KS
ecotourism	9.9K		34.405	3	52
ecotourism definition	4.9K		0.005	-	52
what is ecotourism	2.4K		4.005	1	52
defining ecotourism	2.4K		6.185	1	52
ecotourism tourism definition	2.4K		6.185	1	52
ecotourism defined	2.4K		6.185	1	52
what ecotourism is	2.4K		4.005	1	52
definition of ecotourism	2.4K		6.185	1	52
definition for ecotourism	2.4K		6.185	1	52
ecotourism definitions	2.4K		6.185	1	52
ecotourism define	2.4K		6.185	1	52
ecotourism examples	480		0.005	-	52
ecotourism jobs	320		2.005	23	52

334 results

Note. Taken from SEO Tester Online (n.d.), Keyword Explorer.

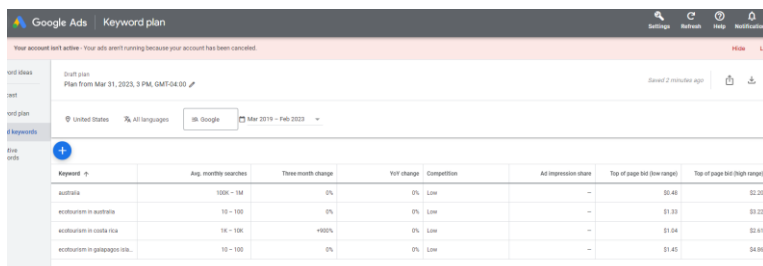
**Table 12.** Ecotourism



Keyword	Volume	CPC	KS
ecotourism in costa rica	720	6.06	7
ecotourism in costa rica	720	7.25	16
ecotourism costa rica	320	5.36	4

Note. Taken from Wordtracker (n.d.), Ecotourism.

**Table 13.** Keyword Plan



Keyword	Avg. monthly searches	Three month change	YTD change	Competition	Ad impression share	Top of page bid (low range)	Top of page bid (high range)
ecotourism	100K - 1M	0%	0%	Low	--	\$0.48	\$2.20
ecotourism in australia	10 - 100	0%	0%	Low	--	\$1.33	\$9.22
ecotourism in costa rica	10 - 100	+100%	0%	Low	--	\$1.04	\$2.87
ecotourism in galapagos isla	10 - 100	0%	0%	Low	--	\$1.45	\$4.96

Note. Taken from Google Ads (n.d.), Keyword Plan.



# BUILDING A STARTUP

Professional Portfolio Substantiation

## BUILDING A STARTUP

For the Young Professional Semester, a business plan and its substantiation will be delivered to the corresponding University and client that are involved in this project.

Author: Melissa Bermudez

Date: June 19, 2023

Substantiation of Professional Product: Business Plan

# Building a Startup

Professional Portfolio Substantiation

Name: Melissa Bermudez Obando

Student number: 460458

Semester: Semester 2

Module: Young Professional Semester

Exam: Professional Product: Substantiation

Class: Tourism Management student DHB4V.YP53

University: Saxion University of Applied Sciences

Location: Deventer, Netherlands

Tutor: Ms. Nicolette Bolte

Date: June 19, 2023

## Summary

This substantiation report supports the professional product created during the Young Professional semester. The information included in this substantiation is based on developing a professional product in this case writing a business plan in order to build a startup. The management question of the client involves providing eco-cultural tourism tours and activities in a specific destination.

The main goal of the substantiation is to answer the management question, research questions, and sub-research questions. These questions involve the ecotourism market, the right customers, the main issue, the solution, and if the business idea can be validated and is feasible.

In addition, the student as the business owner is the indirect client of the project. However, the main client of the project is a startup expert and this person will evaluate if the decisions taken to develop the business plan are feasible and if the business idea could be validated at a certain moment. Also, this client will be the main person to evaluate if the management issue was successfully answered.

As mentioned before the management question involves eco-cultural tourism tours and activities in a specific country which in this case the country is Costa Rica. This means that the management question and the project as a whole belong to the travel and tourism industry. The travel and tourism industry is an industry that involves different aspects and also different gaps can be seen. A gap in this industry was found by the student which was then translated into the creation of a business idea, the development of a business plan, and building a startup.

The most important concern in this substantiation is to identify which decisions, aspects, and factors are needed to develop a feasible professional product in this case a business plan. These factors and decisions involve the knowledge that needs to be collected, the stakeholders involved such as tourists, the positive and negative impacts it can bring for example environmental impacts, and which trends and developments need to be taken into consideration such as technological developments.

This substantiation will also give a clear understanding of how the management question, the research questions, and the sub-research questions were answered through research and knowledge collection. It will clarify all the work done throughout the whole semester and how results and conclusions were considered. Also, it will give an answer on the feasibility and validity of the project and the business plan.

To finalize, this substantiation includes general and specific information for the development of the professional product that was created and developed by the student as the business owner. Also, it includes only relevant, in-depth, and up-to-date information to clarify the process of knowledge collection and decision-making during the Young Professional semester.



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## 1 Introduction

This introductory chapter discusses how the structure of the project will be based and where to find the necessary information related to the substantiation and the professional product as part of the portfolio.

### 1.1 Introduction to Substantiation

Table 1 below will give a general overview of where specific information can be found in order to assess the portfolio.

**Table 1.** Assessment Information

Assessment criterion	Relevant information within professional product	Relevant information within substantiation
The professional answers the client's question with an appropriate and substantiated professional product.	This information can be found in the business plan and chapter 6: Conclusions & Recommendations.	This information can be found in heading 1.2 The client and the management question and in heading 1.4 Professional product elaboration & Structure.
The professional identifies the most important (internal and external) trends and developments and clarifies their influence on the issue.	This information can be found specifically in heading 2.1 Trends & Developments.	This information can be found in heading 1.3 Internal and external trends & Developments.
The professional collects knowledge in a responsible way to support a decision and values this knowledge.	This information can be found in the business plan itself.	This information can be found in heading 1.3 Internal and external trends & Developments, and in heading 1.5 Knowledge & Insights which also includes 1.5.1, 1.5.2, 1.5.3 and 1.5.4.
The professional justifies how the wishes of the stakeholders have been taken into account in the final product.	Part of this information can be found in chapter 1, chapter 2, and chapter 3 of the business plan.	This information can be found in heading 1.6 Relevant stakeholders for the project and in 1.5.3.
The professional substantiates the extent to which the made choices are socially responsible (e.g. with regard to ethical, intercultural and sustainability aspects).	This specific information cannot be found in the business plan.	This information can be found in heading 1.7 Societal impact of professional product.
The professional demonstrates the financial feasibility of the professional product.	This information can be found in chapter 5: Financial planning & Budget.	This information cannot be found in the substantiation.

## 1.2 The Client and the Management Question

For this project, the main client was the founder or business owner of the startup who in this case was a Tourism Management student. This means that the management question of this project was based on an issue found by the student as the main client. However, as the student did not have any experience before building a startup an indirect client was needed to support this project. Peter Langela was a startup expert, coach, and founder that operated in the computer & information technology industry. In addition, he had a background of over 30 years in entrepreneurship, management, sales, and business development. Besides being a startup coach and venture accelerator manager at different locations in the Netherlands he also worked at a bachelor level where he provided several services such as entrepreneurship, startup coaching, career development coaching, social media marketing, pitch training, public speaking training, workshops, and masterclasses.

Also, by having previous experience as a co-founder and business developer in the Netherlands, Germany, and Turkey he has been regarded as a very suitable candidate to evaluate the progress of the student. This project was of relevance for him as a client as he already provides coaching and training concerning entrepreneurship and business development at the University of Twente and in programs such as Novel-T and EIT-Digital. This means that he could keep up to date with new trends and developments, and new business ideas that could arise in different industries. Also, this project could have represented new partnerships and networking opportunities for his own companies but also to keep innovating in new areas and markets he has not explored yet as a business owner himself.

Next, during the project, the focus lay on finding an answer to a management question: "How can a new startup feasibly provide ecotourism and cultural tourism tours and activities in a specific destination?" The business idea connected to the management question was that the startup will not create new tours or activities instead the online platform will offer already existing eco-cultural tourism tours and activities from other service providers such as tour operators in Costa Rica in a way to connect tourists with sustainable companies and make the process more safe, convenient and efficient. Currently, the size of the company consists solely of the founder or business owner which is the Tourism Management student. According to Bernard (2016), management issues related to the core activity of organizing and managing tours and activities in a company belongs to the Department of travel management. The core activities of the startup are to collect information from different sustainable service providers, display their ecotourism tours and activities on the website, and sell these products and services.

Continuously, the reason behind the business idea was based on the challenges and gaps found in the travel and tourism industry when the student was organizing and planning her trips. After speaking with different tourists, the student noticed that these tourists were agreeing on these issues found when booking their online tours and activities. The gap involved that different platforms that were providing tours and activities online did exist such as Expedia.com but these platforms did not focus on a specific niche or country meaning that the customers ended up having to compare prices, find suitable activities, spend time looking for these activities or tours in search engines such as Google and paying more because there were limited options being offered in an easy and efficient way in only one platform. Also, some of these companies did not educate tourists, did not raise awareness of tourists regarding responsible and sustainable travelling, or were not certified.

Furthermore, the management problem cannot be regarded as something new because it is not a unique issue. However, every day more businesses are focusing on sustainable practices and reducing negative impacts. According to Kelly (2022), sustainability has existed for less than thirty years which means that the situation nowadays has been evolving and changing into creating more collaborative approaches to ensure the long-term operation of the world. The desired situation is to reduce negative impacts on tourism destinations, increase the demand for these types of tours and activities, organize the offer of these types of tours, and increase awareness among all stakeholders involved (The Travel Foundation, n.d.).

### 1.3 Internal and External Trends & Developments

In order to gather the information that was relevant to the project the DESTEP model was used and it involved six different external factors which are Demographic, Economic, Social-cultural, Technological, Ecological, and Political factors (Armstrong, 2021). The trends and developments that were relevant to the client's problem are as follows:

#### ***Internal Trends and Developments:***

According to the World Tourism Alliance (2022), businesses are using big data and digital marketing to promote new forms of tourism marketing by at the same time rearranging their marketing channels. Artificial Intelligence, 5G, robotic technologies, and the Internet of Things are being used to develop and create new opportunities within organisations. These opportunities are based on technological factors varied from developing new payment methods to developing short videos, reducing costs, and improving service efficiency (World Tourism Alliance, 2022). The influence of this trend or development on the issue is that the startup could consider these technological developments when developing the platform, use digital marketing to engage with its customers, and reduce costs. Biometrics payments via Apple Pay and Google Pay are taking travel payments to the next level. Travel operators and other companies will be offering a completely contactless and convenient payment experience for travellers with the use of biometrics at all points of the journey which might include when booking tours and activities (Amadeus, 2022). The influence of this trend on the project is that customers using the platform could have a better user-friendly and convenient experience when paying via the platform or onsite before the activity starts and upgrade their tours at any time.

Nowadays, sustainability products and services offered within organisations that respect local cultures, protect biodiversity, and protect the environment are raising consumers' interest. These ecological factors have created a demand for a whole new range of eco and cultural tourism-related products and services (International Labour Organization, 2022). The influence of this trend on the problem is that customers are already looking for these types of activities online which provides an opportunity to enter the market as travellers are eager to book these eco and cultural-related services. In 2023 there will be an evolution in technology in travel applications and platforms as the demand for better user experience will rise. This means that businesses using applications or platforms will have to evolve to a more seamless user experience across end-to-end trip bookings (Roadbook, 2023).

The influence of this development on the issue is that customers are already using platforms to book their tours which means that travellers might end up finding the eco-cultural platform. However, this platform has to be user-friendly, easy, and efficient in order to provide a better user experience. Concerning demographic factors, the future workforce within organisations will involve multigenerational, inclusive, and diverse employees. According to the International Labour Organization (2022), even though the tourism industry is known to employ younger workers this demographic change will evolve to include a high number of older workers, disabled people, and others. The influence of this trend on the project is that future partners of the platforms might involve different kinds of stakeholders but also tour guides or other tour operator employees might be diverse and could have more work experience or guiding limitations.

#### ***External Trends and Developments:***

Continuously, concerning social-cultural factors it is known that 25 percent of tourists are willing to pay more for travel tours and activities to ensure that they are giving back to local communities in a destination. Despite wanting to give back to local communities and connect during their travels, 29 percent of tourists still feel responsible for reducing the negative impacts of travel and tourism in a destination (Booking.com, 2022). The influence of this trend on the issue is that potential customers of the platform might be more willing to learn about how to reduce their impacts and pay more for activities in which they can connect and create better impact but might also be less willing to travel far away. Environmentally friendly ideas and practices based on the preservation of natural and cultural heritage are top-of-mind concerns for travellers, especially among the Gen Z generation and Millennials. These generations are willing to pay more money for travel brands and experiences that



contribute to local people and preserve natural and cultural heritage. In addition, on average the Gen Z generation is willing to pay 58 percent more on a trip that preserves natural and cultural heritage while Millennials are willing to pay 52 percent more (Emily, 2023). The influence of this trend on the issue is that the startup will know which travellers need to be targeted and be more willing to pay for the activities and tours that the platform and the service providers will provide. Also, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council (2022), sustainability has had an impact on tourists' travel choices and behaviour.

Travellers have become more committed to choosing longer stays, exploring nature, fee-free cancellations, and travelling to less crowded or unfamiliar secondary destinations. The influence of this trend on the project is that the platform could be developed considering customer's behaviour, travel choices, and relevant activities. In 2023, 50 percent of global travellers want to immerse themselves in cultural environments and experience culture shocks and 51 percent are ready to travel to places with a completely different culture and language. In addition, 27 percent of travellers want to actively learn about the local cultural values and traditions of the destination before their trip (Spampinato, 2023). The influence of this trend is that potential platform customers are willing to explore new destinations, take tours that encourage cultural traditions, and learn about responsible tourism.

Next, concerning economic and demographic factors, the strongest growth of tourist arrivals based on regions is expected to happen in Asia and the Pacific reaching 535 million tourist arrivals by 2030. In addition, the fastest-growing region with an expectancy of more than half of the world's population growth by the year 2050 will take place in Africa (International Labour Organization, 2022). In 2040 the number of travellers over the age of 60 is estimated to reach 1.7 billion which means an 89 percent increase compared to 2015. The influence of this development on the project is that the platform could consider the growth of tourist arrivals in a specific region and adjust to it by choosing the most relevant region or country to consider launching the platform and its tours and activities. Consumers are looking into making better and more informed decisions about their spending and travel plans by going to places where their currency will go further as 41 percent of these travellers are thinking of going on even more trips than the previous years. This means that affordable destinations in Asia, Africa, Europe, and South America will rise in popularity (Roadbook, 2023).

The influence of this trend on the project is based on the relevancy of the country to be chosen to develop the platform as affordable countries are booming as travellers are taking more vacations during a year. Furthermore, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council (2021), more and more sustainable alternatives are being financed by the private and public sectors in order for consumers to seek more sustainable options such as how consumers live and travel. The private and public sectors are also focusing on other political factors by considering different initiatives such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement to work together towards a more sustainable future for people and the planet. The influence of this trend on the issue is that the platform might receive financing and partnership opportunities as the public and private sectors are focusing on sustainable alternatives for how people live and travel.

Moreover, the link between each trend and development is that each trend supports one other by giving specific details on how potential customers of the platform behave, how much they are willing to pay, how far they are willing to go, where they travel to, who they are and what they are looking for. In addition, the link between each trend and development with the project is that it sets a path for the business idea to focus on by considering travellers behaviour and plans but it also supports the business idea with current information to make sure the project can be feasible and is a need when entering the market.

Lastly, the trends and developments are reflected in the professional product in different ways. Trends and developments found related to the project have been of major importance in the business plan as these have had an influence on the types of tours and activities the business will offer such as eco-cultural immersive experiences, to whom it will be offered for example millennials, and how technology can be used as a business advantage such as digital marketing to promote a product or service. More information on other specific trends and developments in the travel and tourism industry involving eco-cultural tourism can be found in the business plan.

## 1.4 Professional Product Elaboration & Structure

As mentioned before, the professional product for this project is a business plan that is based on building a startup in the travel and tourism industry. The business plan is a suitable solution for the client's question as it describes and leads to the potential setup of a business and also the validation of a business idea. Also, before moving forward with designing a Minimum Viable Product the business idea needs to be validated and a business plan needs to be created. According to SendPulse (2023), a Minimum Viable Product is known to be a version of a product that has enough features to be usable and satisfy the needs of early customers. For this project, the business plan was focused on eco-cultural tourism tours and activities in a specific destination. The main business idea was to set up an online platform where eco-cultural tourism tours and activities can be provided to customers in a specific ecotourism destination.

The validation of an idea indicates to the business owner and potential investors that there is a potential market and a potential target group that might be interested in the idea. All of this information and more needs to be summarized and presented through the creation of a business plan. It is known that business owners using a business plan to present ideas and potential industry issues have a thirty percent faster growth than those without one (Lindzon, 2022). Another reason why the business plan is a suitable solution for the client's question is that validating a business idea and having a business plan will provide information that will indicate how successful the business is, how it solves a problem, and fulfill a purpose. In addition, a business plan also outlines how a new startup could achieve its business objectives, describes its products, describes its marketing strategies to reach customers, indicates the business finances and budget, and attract investors (Lindzon, 2022).

Next, in order to answer the management question, the research questions, and sub-research questions the business plan had to have a certain structure. According to Lindzon (2022), in general, a business plan should contain between 15 to 20 pages of information. However, a business plan can be created in different ways and can include different information. Some business plans include less information so that investors have a clear overview of the business idea and some are more detailed. The most common business plan outline includes an executive summary, a company description, a market analysis, organization & management, a service or product line, marketing & sales, funding request, financial projections, and appendices (Lindzon, 2022). However, a business plan could also be more extensive and include several extra topics such as SWOT analysis, competitor analysis, marketing strategies, sales strategies, and budget (Hayes, 2023). Other also includes company background, business model, business structure, customer segmentation, target audience, operations plan, and a reference list (Lindzon, 2022).

The business plan created for this project to answer the management question has a structure based on the combination of a large, detailed business plan and a small clear business plan. This means that not all of the topics mentioned above were included in the business plan. The structure of the business plan includes a cover page, a title page, an executive summary, a table of contents, a company description, a company background, a business model, a business structure, a business case, trends & developments, market analysis, source market, target market, customer segmentation, competitors analysis, SWOT analysis, products & services description, products of competitors, and other chapters such as sales & marketing plan, financial planning & budget, conclusions & recommendations, references, and appendices.

The reason for choosing this structure for the professional product in this case the business plan is that future business owners should satisfy the needs of marketers and investors. This means that marketers are only attracted to what is relevant to them such as evidence of customer interest and viable market and investors are only interested in the financial parts (Rich & Gumpert, 2014). This means that a business plan only needs to provide fundamental topics and describe these as accurately, attractively, and detailed as possible involving the viewpoint of the three most important subjects which are the market, the investors, and the entrepreneur (Rich & Gumpert, 2014). This is the reason why the structure of the business plan has been created in this way based only on the market involving topics related to the market itself, its stakeholders and customers, the investors

involving financial resources, and the producer or entrepreneur. Also, in order to confirm that the structure and information provided in the business plan corresponds to other business plans in the industry, an expert review from a startup coach was requested.

Furthermore, when developing the business plan several choices had to be made. These choices involved several advantages and disadvantages for the project. Two important choices that needed to be made involving the business plan were the specific ecotourism destination the project was focusing on and the type of tours and activities offered to customers. In order to provide insights into the advantages of disadvantages of these choices one will compare the professional product with best practices from the travel and tourism industry.

According to Invest SEA (2023), the country of Costa Rica makes up 5 percent of the world's biodiversity involving 29 natural parks, 19 wildlife refuges, and 8 biological reserves, and over 25 percent of the island is protected. This is one of the reasons why Costa Rica was chosen as the ecotourism destination the professional product was going to focus on compared to its other competitors such as Australia, the Galapagos Islands, and Iceland. An advantage of this choice for the project is that the government and its locals already have a deep respect for mother nature and support the nationwide efforts to make Costa Rica a more sustainable destination (Mendez, n.d.).

This means that people in Costa Rica are already talking about and working with sustainability in mind meaning that implementing the business idea could be possible. Another advantage of choosing Costa Rica as an ecotourism destination for the business plan is that the country already prioritizes authentic ecotourism based on people, planet, and wildlife and nearly half of all their international visitors take part in ecotourism in the country (Mendez, n.d.).

In addition, an advantage of choosing Costa Rica to provide eco-tours and activities is that the Costa Rica Tourism Board has created a certification for sustainable tourism where businesses in the tourism and travel industry are evaluated regarding their sustainable practices concerning people, planet, and profit (Mendez, n.d.). This means that the startup could easily collaborate with stakeholders or partners in the country that are already sustainably certified and are offering sustainable tours and activities. These certified sustainable service providers in Costa Rica can be found on the website of the Destination Management Organisation of Costa Rica called Visit Costa Rica.

The online platform could consider these sustainable service providers such as Arenal Rafting or Café Britt Coffee Tour mentioned on the Visit Costa Rica website as partners and provide their tours and activities on the platform (Costa Rica Tourism Board, n.d.). Also, it will allow the platform to add an eco-label to the tours provided so that potential customers are aware of which service providers are sustainably certified.

A disadvantage of choosing Costa Rica as the main ecotourism destination the business plan will focus on and where service providers will be chosen to provide ecotours and activities to customers is that not all service providers such as tour operators in the country have received the certification of sustainable tourism yet (Mendez, n.d.). This can bring limitations to the number of service providers offering ecotours and activities that could be showcased on the platform. Also, another disadvantage is that booking ecotours in Costa Rica might be a bit challenging for customers as greenwashing is minimally regulated in the country.

Moreover, according to Mendez (n.d.), another disadvantage of offering ecotours from service providers in the country of Costa Rica is that the country offers very few genuine conservation projects for injured or ill wildlife. This means that tours and activities offered on the platform that include animals in captivity need to be avoided. Lastly, for other documents related to the elaboration of the professional product and the project in general please have a look at the last appendices.

## 1.5 Knowledge & Insights

Different knowledge was collected before and during the project. The knowledge and insights needed were divided into two phases which are knowledge and insights before starting the project which is the knowledge the student thought was required to develop the professional product and knowledge and insights during the project that the student found necessary.

### 1.5.1 Required Knowledge during the Project

Different knowledge needed before developing the professional product was related to desk, literature, and field research. With regards to field research, the required knowledge that was needed involved understanding customers' behaviour, opinions, ideas, wishes, and needs but also understanding who the potential customer is, their preferences and interest, how much they are willing to pay, and other relevant information. In order to collect this information a qualitative questionnaire, survey, and interviews were expected to be conducted. Continuously, the knowledge expected to be needed concerning literature and desk research involved the definition of certain search terms such as definitions of eco-tourism, cultural tourism, responsible tourism, and sustainable tourism but also the knowledge related to search terms such as business plan, tours, activities, tourism industry, and tour operators. Also, necessary knowledge based on best & bad practices, dos and not, and trends & developments. Literature research and desk research focused on the customers' interest in eco-tourism and cultural tourism tours and activities through quantitative data compared to field research. In addition, knowledge related to models, theories, and concepts needed in order to develop the business plan was the Personas Concept, the Cohen Tourists Typology Theory, the McKinsey Consumer Journey Model or the Buyer's Journey Model, the Business Model Canvas, the Value Proposition Model Canvas, and the Triple Bottom Line Concept.

Knowledge needed involving the research questions is as follows:

- What is sustainability?
- What is the definition of eco-tourism?
- What is the definition of cultural tourism?
- What is the definition of responsible tourism?
- What is the definition of sustainable tourism?
- What types of tourists exist?
- What types of tourism are there?
- What types of Business Models exist?
- What is the source market of Costa Rica?
- What is the target audience of Costa Rica?
- What is the target market of Costa Rica?
- What is the market segmentation related to Costa Rica?
- Who are the competitors in and outside of Costa Rica?
- What are the best destinations for ecotourism and cultural tourism?
- What types of ecotourism and cultural tourism experiences exist?
- What are the negative and positive impacts of eco and cultural tourism?
- What are the best & bad practices of eco and cultural tourism?

However, other knowledge needed related to sub-research questions is as follows:

- Which type of tourists would use the platform?
- Which country should the platform focus on?
- How much would tourists spend on eco-cultural-tourism activities in the destination?
- Which eco-cultural tours and activities are most booked by tourists?
- What motivates tourists to book eco-cultural tourism activities?
- How long do tourists stay in an eco-cultural tourism destination?



### 1.5.2 Knowledge Collection during the Project

Firstly, concerning desk and literature research the definition of certain search terms such as sustainability, sustainable tourism, responsible tourism, ecotourism, and cultural tourism was collected using Google and Google Scholar as the main search engines. The reason for this was that in order to develop an ecotourism business you first must understand the terminology. Sub-research questions were added to the project later on because these questions supported the project by collecting more specific information related to the platform and its characteristics and also to understand potential customers. In comparison to field research, literature research, and desk research was mainly focused on using quantitative data to collect information involving the ecotourism market, ecotourism tours, and activities and other relevant information compared to field research that focused on qualitative data. The reason for this was to have a deeper understanding of the customer, its challenges, and needs but to also see if the ecotourism market was a suitable market to enter.

Several up-to-date sources from 2023 were compared to find the best destination for eco-tourism. These sources were compared based on the motivation of why this specific destination was regarded as the best for ecotourism, how many times a specific country was mentioned in each source, and how up-to-date and relevant the sources were to the project. The reason for this is to maintain the information collected as reliable, relevant, up-to-date, and valid as possible. Secondly, according to Lalehzari (2021), literature and desk research are characterized as secondary research. In addition, the data collection methods used during the project involving literature and desk research were document review and the internet (Amadebai, 2022). Three books that were used for literature research were *Tourism a Modern Synthesis*, *Business Accounting & Finance*, and *Business Model Generation*. These three books were key to understanding the tourism industry, tourist behaviour, how to create value, and how to apply financial models to a business. During desk research, the AAOCC criteria were used when searching for sources in order to maintain the reliability, relevancy, and validity of the sources found during the project. The AAOCC criteria involve Authority, Accuracy, Objectivity, Currency, and Coverage and it was used to evaluate the sources found in web pages, journal articles, online articles, and other (The University of Alaska Fairbanks Rasmuson Library, 2022). Authority describes the author and its information, Accuracy involves quality and verifiable, and Objectivity describes information as being biased or sufficiently objective. Currency involves the use of information based on its timeline and Coverage involves the topic being adequately covered (The University of Alaska Fairbanks Rasmuson Library, 2022).

Continuously, to analyse the information collected several “W” questions were used such as which research questions were answered by the information collected, what was the main purpose of the information collected, and what meaningful conclusions were found (Hillier, 2021). The reason for this was to stay as much relevant to the management issue as possible and to be critically related to the information collected. Knowledge related to keyword research was collected using several websites specialized in keyword research such as Ubersuggest, Wordtracker, Google Trends, Google Keyword Planner, and SEO Tester Online. In order to collect the necessary data involving keyword research the language of research was set to English and the country to the United States of America.

Next, keyword research was collected by writing several search terms relevant to the project such as ecotourism, ecotourism destinations, ecotourism tours, ecotourism Australia, ecotourism Costa Rica, eco-tours Galapagos Islands and other more specific ones such as Costa Rica guided hiking tours, Costa Rica tour packages and other. Another way used to collect information related to keyword research was writing the words and sentences using YouTube search and Google autocomplete. The reason for using keyword research was to understand if an ecotourism market existed, if it was profitable if there was the possibility to focus on a niche, and to understand what customers are looking for related to ecotourism. Thirdly, field research is characterized as primary research and the data collection methods used in this project are a questionnaire, survey, and interviews and are based on qualitative data (Simplilearn, 2023). Qualitative data in the questionnaire was used as a way to collect data based on potential customers’ opinions, travel behaviour, interest, decisions, and motivations related to using the platform and booking ecotours and activities. The questions created related to the questionnaire or survey involved open-ended and closed questions. The respondents

were mainly general travellers but also travellers that have booked online tours and activities before and travellers who are interested in ecotourism. The reason for this is to collect information as reliable and valid as possible taking into account the type of respondents needed to fill in the questionnaire. If respondents are not appropriate or relevant to the project the results could be unreliable. In addition, the questionnaire or survey was shared in Facebook groups that were interested in travelling and relevant to the project. These questions were created using some market research questions examples based on the different types of market segmentation which are demographic, behavioral, psychographic, geographic, and others (March, 2023). Also, examples of surveys involving website surveys, travel surveys, and psychographic and demographic surveys were used as inspiration to create the questionnaire (QuestionPro Survey Software, n.d.).

Furthermore, qualitative data was also used when collecting data during several interviews as a way to collect interviewees' opinions, behaviour, interest, and motives. The interviews had a semi-structured approach with open questions and were carried out via video call. These interviews focused on experience, behavioural, and opinion questions even though there are five types of interview questions (Indeed Editorial Team, 2023). For the interview guides have a look at appendix V. The interviews were carried out with experts in the field and potential users. An expert was chosen due to her experience in the field that could bring potential insights to the business idea and users were chosen in order to have a deeper understanding of the type of users using the platform and the problem they want to get solved. The reason for choosing a questionnaire and interviews was to understand what the customer wants, who they are, their needs and challenges but also how to approach them, how to approach this market, and the key characteristics that the platform should have to solve their problems. Two interviews were carried out, one with an expert in website development and another with a potential user interested in eco-tourism tours and activities in the country in which the project is focusing. Concerning the preparation to collect data, carry out the interviews and questionnaire several documents were filled out and created and can be seen in Appendix II, III, IV. The information letter and informed consent form were added digitally to the questionnaire using Qualtrics as the main program and for the interviews, both forms were sent via email before the interview.

Fourthly, in order to collect knowledge related to understanding the user's needs, experiences, behaviours, and goals the Personas Model was applied in this project. Through desk, literature, and field research a Persona was created which represented the different user types that might use the platform and its characteristics (Dam & Siang, 2022). To understand the types of tourists or customers the platform will have the tourist typology theory was used. According to Cohen (1979), there are four types of tourists and this theory was applied to the questionnaire as a way to classify the respondents and receive a more specific result. The concept of eco-cultural tourism was also used in order to collect information based on this combination of tourism which involved both the ecological and cultural aspects of a landscape creating a tourist paradise (Cajee, 2014). Knowledge was collected and applied to the questionnaire using Crompton's nine motives of pleasure theory which includes pull and push factors such as self-discovery, relaxation, escape, novelty and others (Crompton, 1979). Lastly, the Business Model Canvas and the Value Proposition Model Canvas were used to collect data related to the business plan as these models focus on developing a business model strategy by looking at the business's customers, partners, revenue streams, costs, and other (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2013).

The information collected using these theories, models, and concepts was also the foundation for creating the questions in field research besides the information also collected through desk and literature research. An example of this is the first question in the questionnaire that involves the types of tourists which can be connected to the Cohen Tourist Typology theory. Another example is the different types of generations which are the Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z (Purdue University Global, n.d.). In addition, the information collected from the respondents of the questionnaire and interviews was analysed using the method of data analysis called content analysis as it focuses on analysing and examining the text and the presence of words (Hotjar Ltd, 2022). The knowledge collected based on field research, desk, and literature research was of importance in order to answer the research questions and sub-research questions that came during the project and the main management question.

### 1.5.3 Results of Knowledge Collection: Findings

Firstly, the results related to desk research and literature research will be discussed and presented in order to answer the management question, the research questions, and the sub-research questions. In order to develop the project, the definition of certain important terms was researched. According to the United Nations (n.d.), the definition of sustainability is to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In addition, the definition of sustainable tourism refers to sustainable practices in and by the tourism industry which aims to minimize the negative impacts but also maximize the positive impacts. It is tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts while addressing the needs of visitors, the tourism industry, the environment, and host communities (Global Sustainable Tourism Council, 2022). Another important term to understand and to know the difference is responsible tourism, which stands for tourism that exhibits responsible behaviour involving the tourists, their actions, the industry, and how the tourism provision is managed. In other words, responsible tourism is any form of tourism that can be consumed in a more responsible way that minimized negative social, economic, and environmental impacts, generates economic benefits for local people and host communities, and makes positive contributions to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage (Sustainable Tourism, n.d.). The difference that exists between these types of tourism is that sustainable tourism does not refer to a specific type of tourism but is an aspiration for the impacts of all types of tourism instead responsible tourism refers to the behaviour and style of travellers (Global Sustainable Tourism Council, 2022).

Continuously, for this project responsible tourism plays an important role as the business idea wants to increase and encourage more responsible behaviour among tourists by raising awareness. In order to give the project a focus or niche the definitions of eco-tourism, cultural tourism, and its characteristics will follow. According to the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (2022), ecotourism is known to be a sustainable form of natural resource-based tourism that focuses primarily on experiencing and learning about nature, it occurs in natural areas and contributes to the conservation or preservation of such areas and it is also ethically managed to be low-impact, non-consumptive and locally oriented. In addition, cultural tourism is defined as a type of tourism activity in which the visitor's essential motivation is to learn, discover, experience, and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions or products in a tourist destination. These attractions or products can relate to a set of distinctive material, intellectual, spiritual, and emotional features of a society that encompasses arts and architecture, historical and cultural heritage, culinary heritage, literature, music, creative industries, and the living cultures with their lifestyles, value systems, beliefs, and traditions (United Nations World Tourism Organization, n.d.).

Secondly, according to Whelan (2013), eco-tourism involves the search for the authentic which applies to the authenticity of the landscape and wildlife but also to the cultural traditions and practices in an area. Examples of eco-cultural experiences are harvesting rice with farmers or eating traditional fruits with local islanders. In addition, during the whole project, the student refers to the type of tourism that the project involves as eco-cultural tourism or eco-tourism. The reason for this is that the concept of eco-cultural tourism refers to tourism that incorporates and combines both ecological and cultural aspects of a landscape creating a tourist paradise (Cajee, 2014). There are different types of eco-tourism subcategories which are eco-lodging, agro-tourism, community development, and eco-tours. In this case, the project focuses on or niche down to eco-tours which involves taking part in excursions to specific areas in order to increase awareness and support conservation. Examples of these ecotours are hiking, rafting, bird watching, and others (Burland, 2020). Continuously, according to Cohen (1979), tourists can be classified into four types of tourists based on the tourist's typology model which involves the degree to which they seek familiarity and novelty in a destination. These four types of tourists are the drifter, the explorer, the individual mass tourist, and the organized mass tourist. In Appendix I one can find more in-depth information about each type of tourist. According to Reali (2022), types of tourism that are defined by the destination and the purpose of the trip and are approved by the United Nations World Tourism Organization are rural tourism, ecotourism, adventure tourism, cultural tourism, business tourism, gastronomic tourism, urban tourism, health tourism, mountain tourism, sports tourism, and coastal, maritime & inland water tourism.

The tourism sector has evolved from the basic types of tourism which are domestic tourism, inbound tourism, and outbound tourism to almost more than 40 types of tourism of which cultural tourism and eco-tourism are part of (ColorWhistle, 2023). Thirdly, some information from the sources found involving the already mentioned eco-tourism destinations will follow. The Galapagos Islands in Ecuador were the first place added to the UNESCO World Heritage Site and where Charles Darwin came up with the theory of evolution. Steps taken to protect these islands include a \$100 conservation fee, limiting the number of visitors to the islands, and planning boat routes according to the island's capacity (Woodley, 2023). In addition, Iceland is rich in thermal energy and other renewable sources and 85 percent of its power is made by renewable energy. Low-impact activities that immerse visitors in this country are ice caving, puffin watching, the northern lights, glacier hikes, and soaking in the blue lagoon (Zahair, 2023). Last but not least, Australia has the world's largest reef area and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site which means that conservation and sustainable travel have become important here considering that this place is home to thousands of aquatic species and marine animals (JoinMyTrip, 2023).

Next, as eco-tourism represents a combination of eco-cultural activities several examples of these activities are hiking, horseback riding, cycling, eco-friendly safaris, wildlife viewing, bird watching, observation of astronomical phenomena, sailing, kayaking, snorkeling, scuba diving, whitewater rafting, zip lining, canopy walk, camping, bungee jumping, meditation, cultural visits, fishing, and mountain biking (Owens, 2022). Also, dancing, festivals, workshops, music, heritage tours, walking tours, singing, drawing, painting, crafting, performances, photography, costume display, cultural artifacts, cooking classes, local food tours, language courses, rituals, ceremonies, and more (Lush, 2023). The positive impacts of eco-cultural tourism are money from tourists goes back into the conservation and preservation of the area and it fosters respect for local cultures and the environment by increasing awareness of conservation (BBC News, n.d.). Also, eco-cultural tourism activities promote environmental and cultural heritage awareness and educate tourists and locals at the same time. There are several negative impacts concerning eco-cultural tourism if the environment, animals, and people are managed poorly such as wildlife disturbance, environmental pollution, transculturation, and tourist exploitation. An example of a negative impact concerning eco-cultural tourism is when the number of tourists visiting a certain place increases and people during the tours throw their garbage in the environment which causes environmental and cultural heritage losses (Sadiku, 2022).

In 2021 land eco-tourism accounted for around 70 percent of the revenue share as this rise is driven by consumer demands for land-based eco-tourism activities such as safaris, wildlife watching, and national park visits. In addition, marine activities are expected to grow by 14.6 percent from 2022 to 2030 as consumer preferences have changed to adventure activities, leisure vacation activities, or journeys on coastal waters (Grand View Research, n.d.). There are several motives that influence tourists to travel to a destination or in this case to take part in eco-cultural tourism activities and tours. According to Crompton (1979), nine motives based on his theory were identified and classified into socio-psychological motives and cultural motives. This theory based on the motives of pleasure that influences tourists to travel to a destination also involves nine push and pull factors which are escape, self-discovery, relaxation, prestige, regression, enhancement of kinship relationships, facilitation of social interaction, novelty, and education. Findings concerning some of the research questions such as types of business models, best & bad practices, source market, target audience, target market, market segmentation, and competitors can be found in the business plan.

Fourthly, findings related to the search terms used are as follows. The search term ecotourism has the highest ranking compared to other keywords results. This means people are looking for this term online which also means there is demand for this type of tourism and its activities. Also, most people interested in ecotourism were looking for ecotourism tours in Costa Rica compared to the other two countries mentioned before. The average monthly searches for ecotourism in Australia and Galapagos Islands are 10 to 100 compared to Costa Rica which is 1000 to 10000. The purpose of the people searching for ecotourism in Costa Rica is informational which means that the users want to find an answer to a specific question they have. When writing the words "ecot", "ecotourism" or "ecotourism in" on YouTube and in Google the first suggestions provided by YouTube search and Google autocomplete were ecotourism, ecotourism Costa Rica, ecotours Costa Rica, or ecotourism in Costa Rica. For an overview of keyword research please have a look at the business plan.



With regards to literature research from the books *Tourism a Modern Synthesis*, *Business Model Generation*, and *Business Accounting and Finance* the first book discusses that a destination from a tourist's perspective can be classified into environmental destinations, business tourism centres, a short break, and a day-trip destination (Page & Connell, 2014). The second book discusses that there are eleven ways to create value for customers such as through offering lower prices, customization, newness, and others (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). In addition, four factors that influence the pricing of products and services in any industry are advertising, novelty, fashion, and reputation (Gowthorpe, 2018). Lastly, field research has a more qualitative approach as the customer's behaviour, needs, and opinions are important for the project. The student conducted two interviews and a questionnaire based on qualitative data with specific respondents. The questions created for the questionnaire and interview guide were created using the information collected through desk and literature research in order to make the findings relevant to the project. The findings of the interviews and questionnaire were used to answer the management question, the research questions, and the sub-research questions. Other relevant models that the results can relate to and apply to involving desk, literature, and field research were the Personas model, the Business Model Canvas, and the Value Proposition Model Canvas, and can be seen in the business plan.

### ***Questionnaire's findings:***

The questionnaire was filled in by around sixty respondents from all over the world who have a passion to travel and have travelled before. The type of tourists that would use the platform are explorers and individual mass tourists. They belong to Generation Y or Millennials and Generation Z. These tourists like to book everything on their own and would probably use a new online ecotourism platform to book their tours and activities. Reviews are regarded as the most important aspect when tourists decide to book a tour or activity on an online platform. These tourists prefer travelling by plane and staying for a week at the destination. Costa Rica was the most preferred destination to travel to for ecotourism activities as it has a lot of nature-related activities and is sustainably inclined compared to other countries. Land ecotours and activities are most preferred by these tourists and they use social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube to find inspiration and information about tours and activities in a destination. Booking Holding Inc, Airbnb Experiences, and Expedia are the most common and used platforms to book tours and activities. These tourists would pay between 50 to 100 euros for an ecotour and activity but also they would be willing to pay more if the tour or activity falls under a bucket list experience. Sustainability in eco-tours and activities is only considered important when the tourist has the budget to pay for it and if the choice is being provided by the service provider. Tourists prefer taking part in eco-tours and activities involving small to medium-sized local businesses. Also, there is a preference for customized tours and activities, travelling solo or self-guided and some do not have a preference on the way they take tours such as groups or private as it depends on the price and activity being offered by the service provider. The motivation to book eco-tours and activities is related to doing and discovering something new, self-discovery, and relaxation. More in-depth information can be found in Appendix IV.

### ***Interview findings:***

Things to consider when building a website are knowing the platform's target group, making the platform user-friendly, making the information on the platform clear and general. The standard layout of a website should include a home page, an about us section, a contact us section, a product, and a service page, and show the platform's social media platforms. To make online payments through a website secure one needs to have an SSL certification and 2 factors authentication. Google Analytics can help a business owner to measure the performance of a website and important plug-ins to consider adding to a website are a calendar, google maps, and reservation forms. A common challenge for users on a website is finding information. A website is considered user-friendly when the text is easy to read, it has less intense colors, and is accessible. For more information, please have a look at Appendix VI. The most important finding with regard to the interview with a tourist is that ecotourist like to be responsible for their own experiences while on vacation. Also, there are a lot of companies offering the same experiences so it can be challenging when booking on their own. Sometimes ecotourists do not know how to book tours with locals and sustainable tours are not always offered as an option. La Fortuna is a great choice to do ecotourism activities in Costa Rica.



### 1.5.4 Quality of Knowledge Collected: Discussion

Different knowledge and insights were gathered during the project in order to find out information for the professional product but also for the management question and research questions. However, information related to the characteristics or profile of an ecotourist was lacking. The reason for this is that ecotourism belongs before to different types of tourism such as adventure tourism and nature tourism meaning that specific information related to ecotourists was difficult to find and the sources were not always up to date. Thus, more relevant and up-to-date information concerning ecotourists was something that the student would have liked to find out more about. Continuously, the knowledge that turned out to be less useful afterward was related to certain questions of the questionnaire. Some questions in the questionnaire such as type of tourist and type of generation did not have a big gap in their results. An example of this is the question of which tourist type the respondent was and as can be seen in Appendix IV the results did not seem to be of much difference between each other. Also, the question related to the types of tours respondents like to participate in such as group, private or solo tours. These results only specify which types of tours tourists like to participate in but not with how many people they usually travel with such as solo, couple, or family.

Next, validity and reliability were important aspects of this project. In order to increase the reliability of the project a measurement instrument was used such as an interview guide for the two interviews and a questionnaire for the survey. Both had fixed questions and some were closed-ended questions divided into different categories such as activities, tourists, spending, and others. This was to maintain the stability of the research as the respondents might fill in the same answers in a questionnaire if asked again. In addition, for field research respondents and interviewees were given standardized instructions involving Qualtrics as the platform to fill in the survey, a consent form, and an informational letter. With regards to the stability of the measurement procedure, the student made a recording of the interviews and found a quiet place to hold the interviews. Considering stability and the absence of random measurement errors the sample size of the questionnaire was around sixty respondents, which can be concluded as the more respondents the more stable the results. However, as the research was mainly qualitative some results left much to be desired concerning the knowledge collected as there was only a limited number of respondents found to fill in the questionnaire. This resulted in having questions with several potential results because the gap between the responses was not big enough.

Furthermore, concerning construct validity, the questions in the survey and in the interviews were created based on theories, concepts and models of experts. An example of this was the first question in the survey that involved the types of tourists that can be seen in the travel and tourism industry based on the theory of an expert. In addition, internal validity was increased during the interviews by interviewing interviewees alone so that they could feel safe to share information, ask them follow-up questions so that they could give more in-depth answers, and summarize during the interviews. Also, concerning external validity, even though there was a limitation in the size of respondents for field research desk research was carried out to collect more relevant information. Specific documents and sources were chosen based on the topic of the project. In addition, the majority of respondents were travellers or experienced travellers so this means that the respondents are considered as a representation of the population of tourists. However, as field research was mainly qualitative some issues related to the validity of the results can be seen. An example of this can be seen in the questionnaire where most of the respondents belong to Generation Y or Millennials. This means that most respondents were young but that does not mean entirely that Generation Y ecotourism is regarded as important or they are the biggest target group for ecotourism. It could mean that most people who received the survey were millennials and this could have changed depending on the social circle of the student.

With regards to ethical aspects of the research process, all interviewees had to fill in a consent form and had to read the informational letter informing them about the reason and topic of the project. Also, in the online questionnaire, an informational letter and consent form was shared which respondents had to agree on before filling in the survey. Also, no personal information was asked for during field research, and information obtained confidentially was not shared with others or added into the project.

## 1.6 Relevant Stakeholders for the Project

It is known that the tourism industry is one of the biggest industries in the world and because of that several stakeholders are involved at some level (Tourism Teacher, 2023). An example of this is tourists whose responsibilities, interests, and roles included visiting attractions, spending money, and promoting activities (Rahman, 2023). Another example is small businesses which played a role in maintaining the sustainability of a destination and providing local opportunities in the industry (Gursoy & Nunkoo, 2019). These stakeholders were chosen as the most relevant to the professional product as they can be regarded as the main partners and customers who could have a direct influence on the startup's financial resources such as revenue and profits. Table 2 below offers an overview of this.

**Table 2.** Stakeholder's interests, roles, responsibilities, and actions

Stakeholders	Interests	Roles	Responsibilities	Actions
<b>Business Owner</b> <i>Internal &amp; Involved in the creation of the business plan</i>	Making profit & providing valuable services to solve a problem.	Direction of business idea and creating a business plan.	Direct creation, execution, growth decision-making and direction of business plan and operations.	No actions are needed to create support among this stakeholder.
<b>Tourists</b> <i>External &amp; Involved in the implementation of the business plan</i>	Visiting attractions and have immersive experiences.	Main customers of service providers and participant in destination activities.	Promoting attractions, activities and spending money.	Use persuasion as a communication tool to increase knowledge sharing & awareness.
<b>Local residents</b> <i>External &amp; Involved in the implementation of the business plan</i>	Being involved in decision-making processes related to a destination tourism development.	Service providers but also local tourists so customers in a destination.	Adding value to a destination.	Keep informed and consult with them when needed on specific areas or topics.
<b>Small and medium businesses (Local service providers)</b> <i>External &amp; Involved in the implementation of the business plan</i>	Offer tourism services and products in an authentic and sustainable way.	Contribute to sustainable tourism development in the destination and local ownership.	Maintain sustainability of the destination they operate and provide opportunities for locals in the industry.	Use persuasion as a communication tool. Organize meetings. Keep informed and involved when making decisions.
<b>Tourism Organisations &amp; Operators</b> <i>External &amp; Involved in the implementation of the business plan</i>	Provide tours and activities and other travel options.	Planning and book tourism attractions and activities for tourists.	Provide information about a destination and promote local tourist attractions.	Seek partnership by organizing peer-to-peer meetings to communicate vision.

Tourists as stakeholders were considered in the professional product by providing relevant ecotours and activities preferred to these customers. In this way, tourists would be able to visit attractions, promote them after their trip, spend money to participate in these activities, and have immersive experiences. Local residents' interests, roles, and responsibilities are also considered in the professional product in a similar way to tourists as they can also be customers of service providers. However, local residents can also be service providers themselves by owning a small or medium tourism business and offering their services to tourists through the platform in a way to add value to a tourism destination. The interests, roles, and responsibilities of small & medium businesses are similar to the ones of tourism organisations & operators. The professional product takes all of this information into account by providing and promoting in the platform already existing and relevant ecotours and activities created by these stakeholders for foreign and local tourists. In this way, these stakeholders can become partners of the platform, provide sustainable tours and activities, promote local tourist attractions and activities, and provide information regarding tours or the destination.

Next, the way this project has created support to implement the professional product and to overcome present or future identified resistances from stakeholders is by using the ADKAR model of change management. According to Jouany and Martic (2023), ADKAR stands for Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, and Reinforcement. An action that can be taken involving the awareness phase of change management is to organize a meeting with the project's stakeholders to make them aware of the need for a change by communicating the business's vision, giving them access to all the information they need, communicate the benefits the change will bring and its impacts (Mind Tools Ltd, n.d.). Table 2 elaborates on the actions needed to lower stakeholders' resistance to the project.

## 1.7 Societal Impact of Professional Product

Nowadays, ecotourism takes place when travellers, visitors, and locals are socially responsible and emotionally committed to the environment, nature, and cultures of the location they visit (Kukreja, n.d.). However, the positive and negative impacts of ecotourism can also be seen around the world.

### ***Positive Effects on Societal Issues:***

When discussing societal issues ethical aspects are also a part of it. Ecotours and activities not only involve the environment such as nature and people but also animal welfare. Ecotourism has promoted the protection of wild animals and their natural habitats. This means that tourists taking part in ecotourism tours and activities have been discouraged and educated to stop neglecting and abusing animals such as by petting or riding them while travelling (Kukreja, n.d.). This brings positive effects on ethical issues involving wild animals and their habitats. These positive effects on the societal issue are relevant to the problem of the client because ecotours are at the core center of the business meaning that to be a responsible and sustainable company tours and activities that promote wildlife exploitation or natural habitat disturbance should not be promoted in the ecotourism platform. Also, according to Kelly-Shankar (2021), ecotourism encourages an intercultural understanding by providing cultural literacy as these ecotourism activities and tours involve educating a wider population by promoting environmental awareness, increasing education among locals and tourists and encouraging conservation and appreciation of natural and cultural heritage. This issue is relevant to the project because through the platform education could encourage different stakeholders to participate in responsible tourism.

Continuously, the project which is based on an eco-tourism platform brings several indirect positive contributions to societal issues related to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations which include goal number 1 ending poverty, goal number 8 decent work and economic growth, goal 11 sustainable cities and communities, goal 13 climate action, goal 14 life below water and goal 15 life on land (United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, n.d.). These societal issues are relevant to the client's problem because directly and indirectly, the platform will contribute to achieving some of these goals such as by promoting responsible tourism, creating new job opportunities for tour guides, promoting decent work for low-income households working in the tourism industry, raising awareness on climate action and conservation and educating tourists and locals about natural and cultural heritage.

### ***Negative Effects on Societal Issues:***

Next, the main goal of the ecotourism platform is to provide tourists with a more responsible and sustainable way of travelling by increasing their awareness, educating them, and creating a demand for this type of tourism. However, preserving the environment by taking ecotourism tours and activities might be a challenge in itself. These ecotourism tours and activities might take tourists to new places maybe even places relatively untouched by humans. The interaction between the new environment and tourists could result in the degradation of the ecosystem, disruption, and high demand for resources such as food and water and could stress the environment to accommodate more people (Kukreja, n.d.). This issue is relevant to the project as it gives an idea of how to provide better and responsible ecotours involving different stakeholders and it shows that education among tourists and stakeholders is necessary.

Lastly, an indirect negative effect involves unemployment and relocation of locals due to ecotourism. If there is a huge demand for ecotourism activities in a specific area it will lead to development and expansion as the visitation areas become a big part of the travel industry (Kukreja, n.d.). This will result in unemployment for locals not working in the tourism industry and possibly forced relocation as the locals' quality of life and job opportunities might decrease. This issue is relevant as it indicates that there should be a limitation to the number of tourists visiting an area and joining in a particular activity. This also means that mass tourism should be avoided and only small group tours should be provided on the platform.

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# Appendices

## Appendix I – Types of Tourists

### Textbox 3. Types of Tourists

The Types of Tourist			
Type	Familiarity	Novelty	Others
The Drifter	Lowest	Highest	Highly adventurous; lives within the local community
The Explorer	Lower	Higher	Travels alone; seeks comfortable accommodations and reliable transportation
The Individual Mass Tourist	Higher	Lower	Not bound to a group; somewhat controlled time and itinerary
The Organized Mass Tourist	Highest	Lowest	Follows a tour guide; follows an itinerary fixed in advance

*Note.* Taken from Erick Cohen (1979), Rethinking the Sociology of Tourism.

## Appendix II – Permission Data Collection Form

**Textbox 4.** Data Collection Form

## Permission data collection

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**General information<sup>1</sup>**

Name student 1	Melissa Bermudez Obando
Student number student 1	460458
Name student 2	Klik of tik om tekst in te voeren.
Student number student 2	Klik of tik om tekst in te voeren.
Name student 3	Klik of tik om tekst in te voeren.
Student number student 3	Klik of tik om tekst in te voeren.
Name student 4	Klik of tik om tekst in te voeren.
Student number student 4	Klik of tik om tekst in te voeren.
Name lecturer	Nicolette Bolte
Module	Young Professional Semester
Test	Professional Product Portfolio
Academic year	2022-2023
Quarter	Semester 2 Quarter 3 & 4

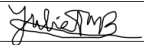

**Brief explanation of planned data collection**

The student will gather data related to writing a business plan and its substantiation. Research will be collected through the use of Qualtrics. Surveys and questionnaires will be conducted with specific respondents such as eco & cultural tourism tourists but also expert interviews will be conducted. This data collection is needed in order to find out the feasibility of the project and the business idea.

**Agreement lecturer**

I do not foresee any (risk of) violation of the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (NGWI) or the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) during the planned data collection. I therefore grant permission to carry out the data collection as proposed. This permission is valid for six months after signing this form.

**Signatures**

Date	16-3-2023
Signature student 1	
Signature student 2	
Signature student 3	
Signature student 4	
Signature lecturer	

<sup>1</sup> If the research is carried out by fewer than four students, part of the form may remain empty. If the research is carried out by more than four students, a second copy of this form may be attached with the details of the other students.

**Note.** Taken from Saxion University of Applied Sciences (n.d.), Permission Data Collection.



## Appendix III – NGWI & Informed Consent Form

This consent form was part of the NGWI guidelines which was based on protecting respondent's and interviewee's privacy when participating in field research such as questionnaires, interviews, and others. Several forms belong to the NGWI guidelines and can be seen in this report. These forms were used during field research and examples of these forms are a consent form, an informational letter, and others. Below one can see a blank consent form in order to protect the responds privacy. However, each respondent had the opportunity to fill the form in and if needed the student could provide the filled forms.

### Textbox 5. Consent Form

#### Template informed consent

This template for informed consent is intended for legally capable adults.

If you are conducting research involving people, you will carefully inform potential participants about your research by means of an information letter and then ask permission to participate in your research. This template is a standard format for requesting this permission. You can do this by means of a paper form, which is customary for interviews or focus groups for example, or you can do this online if you are conducting an online questionnaire.

If you use a paper version of this consent form, you have your participants sign it prior to the interview or focus group. With an online version, you ask the participant to read the information and only click < continue> if they want to participate.

#### Informed consent <title of your research>

We ask you to indicate below whether you consent to participate in this survey. Please read the following points carefully.

As a participant in this research:

	Yes	No
I have been informed about the nature, method and purpose of this research in a way that is clear to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I got enough time to decide about my participation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I had the opportunity to ask questions about this research	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know that participation is voluntary	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know that I can end my participation at any time, without justification	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I grant permission for the collection, storage and use of the data I provide for the purpose of this research	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know that the results of this interview can be used for a report or (scientific) publication	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I grant permission for the reuse of the data I provided after this research has ended for new research in the same area. Ethical standards will be taken into account.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know that only for the purpose of verifying research integrity other people than the researchers may have access to the data I provided	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that all information I provide in this study is anonymous and cannot be traced back to me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know that I can get access to the procedures for data collection and storage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know that I if I withdraw my participation in this research, the data provided up until the moment of withdrawal can be used, unless I ask for the deletion of these data	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Optional</i>		
I grant permission for audio recordings. These can only be listened to by the researcher(s) or for the purpose of verifying research integrity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I grant permission for video recordings. These can only be watched by the researcher(s) or for the purpose of verifying research integrity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name: .....

Signature: .....

Date: .....

#### Interviewer

As interviewer I declare that I have given a verbal explanation on the nature, method and purpose of the research. I declare that I am willing to answer any additional question on this research to the best of my knowledge.

Name: .....

Signature: .....

Date: .....

Email: .....

#### Online

If you have read the information above and agree to participate, then click on CONTINUE.

**Note.** Taken from Saxion University of Applied Sciences (n.d.), Informed Consent.

## Appendix IV – Questionnaire, Results & Informational Letter

### Figure 6. Questionnaire Results & Letter



#### Introduction:

Dear participant, firstly, thank you so much in advance for your attention concerning this information letter. Being part of this research is crucial for me, so I thank you for your participation. I would like to ask you to please fill in this questionnaire which is about an eco-tourism and cultural tourism platform. Ecotourism is known to be a sustainable form of natural resource-based tourism that focuses primarily on experiencing and learning about nature, it occurs in natural areas and contributes to the conservation or preservation of such areas and it is also ethically managed to be low-impact, non-consumptive and locally oriented (Global Sustainable Tourism Council, 2022). Examples of ecotourism activities are hiking, horseback riding, cycling, eco-friendly safaris, wildlife viewing, bird watching, observation of astronomical phenomena, sailing, kayaking, snorkeling, scuba diving, whitewater rafting, zip lining, canopy walk, camping, bungee jumping, meditation, cultural visits, fishing and mountain biking (Owens, 2022). Keep in mind that participation is completely voluntary but in order to participate your permission is required. Before deciding if you want to do this I will explain why I would appreciate you filling out this questionnaire. In addition, please read the information provided carefully. If you have any questions or doubts, please contact me. At the bottom of this information letter, you can find the contact information.

#### Execution of the research:

In this research about an eco-tourism and cultural tourism platform, an online qualitative questionnaire will be provided to be filled in by participants. The participants are adults with different age gaps that take vacations or travel to different destinations and participate in eco-tourism or cultural tourism. The questionnaire will be provided to be filled in online through a website called Qualtrics. Data from this questionnaire will be collected by means of analysing the answers to the questionnaire. Concerning this research interviews, questionnaires and surveys will be conducted. An average of more than three expert interviews will be conducted and the student will conduct a questionnaire among approximately 30 to 50 eco-tourism or cultural tourism tourists.

#### Use, storage and reuse of data:

In this research, no personal data of participants will be collected. Also, the stored data or the data gathered cannot be traced back to individual participants. For this research, I only ask for personal opinions which mean no gender or age information will be requested. In order to protect the participants' data and to limit privacy risks as much as possible, as a Tourism Management student I comply with the requirements of the General Data Protection Ordinance (AVG) or General Data Protection Regulation requirements. Considering the GDPR the student ensures that all the specific conditions are met to protect the data from the participants and decrease privacy issues. The data will be stored until August 2023 which means almost a whole semester. The data will be stored using Qualtrics which is a university website and only me and the university have access to it. The data collected will be based on personal travel habits, travel opinions and behaviours, budget, activities, tours, destinations, and sustainability. This link will refer you to the AVG: <https://autoriteitpersoonsgegevens.nl/nl/over-privacy/wetten/algemene-verordening-gegevensbescherming-avg>

#### Ethical review or advice:

For this research, advice or consent has not been requested or needed from the Saxion Ethics Advisory Committee. Also, approval or consent from The Law on Medical Scientific Research involving Human Beings (WMO) does not apply here.

#### Contact:

For more information, doubts, or questions about this research, please contact me:  
Student(s): Name: Melissa Bermudez Obando  
Email: 460458@student.saxion.nl  
Telephone number: +31645049856

#### Title of the research:

Eco-Tourism & Cultural Tourism Platform

#### Background and purpose of the research:

The reason for this research is to analyse if tourists involved in eco-tourism and cultural tourism activities and tours would use a platform to make their bookings more efficient and less time-consuming. Also, the purpose is to have a better insight into tourist behaviour, and opinions and to find out if there is a real need for this type of platform in the tourism and travel industry. In addition, to find out if tourists choose eco-tourism and cultural tourism activities when traveling to a destination. This research is part of the Young Professional Semester of the Tourism Management Programme at Saxion University of Applied Sciences.

#### Contribution required from the participant:

As a participant, you will be asked to complete an online questionnaire through the Qualtrics website based on 10 to 20 questions. There is no need to prepare in advance for this. It will take about 5 to 10 minutes to complete this questionnaire of about 10 to 20 questions.

#### Advantages and disadvantages of participating in the survey:

To the best of my knowledge, there are no disadvantages associated with participation in this research. The questions that may be asked are not potentially confronting questions or difficult in any way to answer as most participants are experienced travellers or are interested in the research topic. In addition, an advantage of participating in this survey is that the questionnaire only takes around 5 to 10 minutes to complete.

#### Voluntary participation:

As already mentioned before, if you participate in this research you can always change your mind and still stop as it is completely voluntary. The student will then only use your data until you decide to stop. If you object to participation you can email the student below. However, as the questionnaire is entirely anonymous it would be a bit difficult for the student to delete the answers from the data that has been collected.

#### Costs or fees:

If you participate in this questionnaire keep in mind that you will not be paid to participate in this research. Also, there are no costs or compensation involved in participating.

#### Responsible lecturer:

Name: Ms. N. Bolte  
Email: n.y.bolte@saxion.nl  
Telephone number: +31 (0)6 455 94089

In case of any complaints about data management, you can also contact Saxion University of Applied Sciences via the Complaint and Dispute Desk: <https://www.saxion.nl/over-saxion/organisatie/klachtenloket>.

Reference to the statement of consent:

(online):

Lastly, a statement of consent accompanies this information letter and it provides you as a participant with information on how the data you enter in this questionnaire is being processed. By digitally signing this consent form, you give me as the student permission to use (anonymously) the data you have entered. Keep in mind that whether or not you decide to participate in this online survey has no effect on your further study progress and no assessment will be given for it. Click through to the next page for the statement of consent or also called a consent form to give your permission to participate in this research. After signing this consent form, you can proceed to the questionnaire.

(offline):

This information letter is accompanied by a statement of consent or also known as consent form. By signing this statement of consent or a consent form you fully agree to participate in this survey or interview.



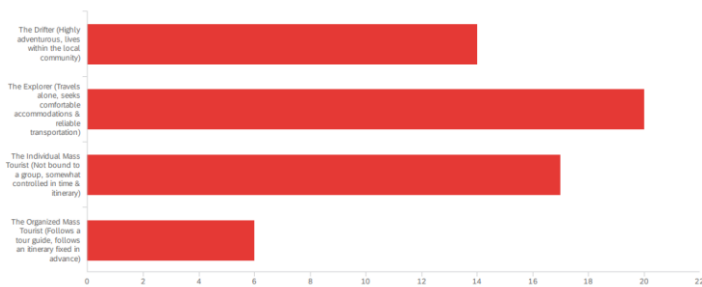
This consent form is intended for legally capable adults that want to participate in this research. The purpose of this consent form is to ask participants for permission to participate in this research and to collect their data. As this is an online questionnaire a standard format for requesting permission will apply. Please read the following document if extra information is needed concerning informed consent, what it entails and what you are agreeing on.

[Informed Consent Form](#)

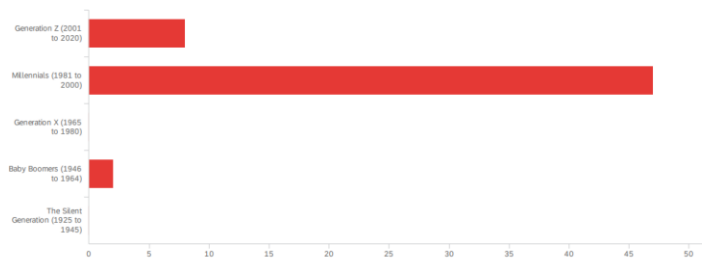
Indicate below whether you agree with the consent form.

I have read the statement of consent and agree to the terms and conditions set out therein.

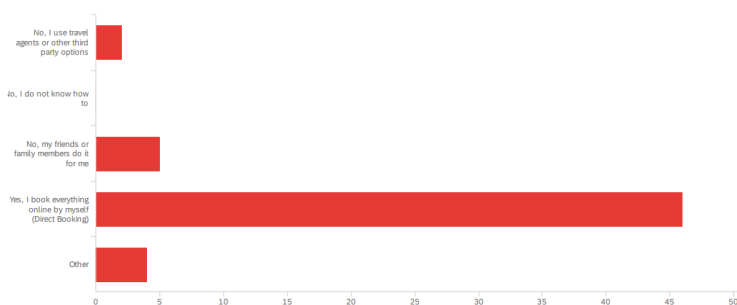
Q1 - What type of tourist are you?



Q2 - Which category below includes your generation?



Q3 - Do you book your tours and activities online?



Q3\_5\_TEXT - Other

Other

I just flight or get to a location and start to explore. I avoid booking in advance

Hotel concierge

I book activities on the spot or when iam in the country

I usually don't book visits or tours in advance. I visit sights and if I want to enter I buy a ticket on the spot. This is also because a lot of booking sites can be very unclear about dates and times.

Q4 - What are your biggest challenges, struggles, or issues when booking tours or activities online? (or organizing & planning trips online)?

What are your biggest challenges, struggles, or issues when booking tours o...

Finding correct information

None

Optimizing logistics (eg. Route optimization), planning ahead,

Finding cheap place too stay

Sometimes get Cancelled

The biggest struggle is combining everything together in relation to transport, accommodation and activities. Like there are certain requirements I look for the accommodation - has to be reachable by public transport, can't be a tourist hotspot but more have a local vibe, can't be too expensive as I'm only there to sleep and the activities I would like to see are reachable. Ultimately, it comes down to organizing and putting everything together from transport, to accommodation to activities and attractions.

None

Not enough information about the area where I will stay

I find that everyone moves at a different speeds. So when you book online in advance you never know what speed you are coming to have or what you have to encounter.

The prices differ, sometimes it is cheaper to book personally. Also, I love to ask locals what do they recommend and that I can't do before hand

None

hidden costs

Finding affordable places

Not knowing where to find the cheapest options

I want freedom when I travel, I don't like being time-bound

It can be hard to determine if I should trust tge reviews— everyone values different experiences so it's hard to trust reviews from strangers

Doing research into what the best price- quality of each tour.

Not knowing where to start, or what all of my options are in certain areas I will be traveling in

Security... It is always risky because you do not know if it is actually how they describe it online

Being in a place where it is new and I don't know where do I start

The Anuban bank cards not being accepted everywhere is my biggest challenge sometimes.

Getting the best price

Filling in BS Covid-19 related health forms

Lack of details on the direct booking website like start time and end time, driving directions, contact info etc

Trust, Price, Reviews

Don't book online

Duo to covid if the vaccination card is needed

Finding the best prices and sometimes you have to book activities way in advance

I think the whole process is challenging but fun at the same time.

Finding reliable organizations vs local tours that offer a price that aligns with the quality

Quick changes in pricings &amp; costs

Local tours in less developed countries sometime can be hard to find, especially the less tourist ones

Making decisions, too many options, trust in foreign agents

All the different choices!

To find something for a good (cheap) prise which is also nice

Finding high quality businesses

Trying to align all the flights and prices

Price comparisons

bookings without much flexibility.

Finding the best prices

Filtering out through the possibilities, having to rely on all reviews of others to know if this is a honest business with sustainability in mind.

Finding cheapest option that ar reliable

You have to do a lot of researchers in order to find one website that is reliable

Pricing

No struggles

Not being sure what to expect from the tour when I get there, also not being able to trust certain third party websites for booking.

There are lots of websites to choose from and I don't know which one to choose.

Finding activities

Not knowing the entire planning of the activity or what does the actvity include

Websites can be unclear about dates and times, or they contain hidden fees. Besides, tickets are often time-bound, giving you less freedom to just explore.

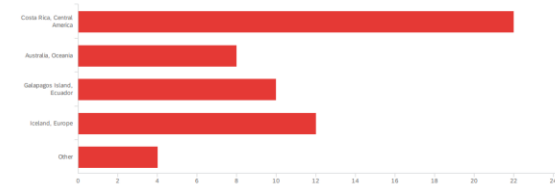
Timing

Finding information about the local situation and point of view

finding a tour/activity whose duration suits my interest and stamina, and also visits only where I want to see

The time it takes to research and the many options and information available that makes it hard to summarise and decide

Q5 - In which country would you be more motivated to book eco-tourism activities and tours & why?



Q5\_1\_TEXT - Costa Rica, Central America

Costa Rica, Central America

I find this location has more to offer than the others and I have been to the others

I do not know a lot about this place, a tour could help me

Costa Rica is such a nature based destination and tourism should enhance the preservation and rebuilding of nature

Lots of nature activities and adventures

Because of the possibilities of partaking in outdoor activities due to the climate

There's many options since there's a lot of nature. You can go as cheap as you want or close to the city for a "one day tour"

Central America

Lots of nature and not commercialised hopefully

Yes, A lot of nature

I've seen some nature pictures of Costa Rica that I would like to explore

Because CR is very sustainably inclined

Costa Rica

yes just seems like beach natural places

Because there are several spiritual retreats here where you can make use of Ayahuasca and I think this would combine beautifully with eco-tourism

Because of biodiversity and they offer a lot of meditation and retreats. It would be great to book a tour in nature or a guided meditation

They might be cheaper than in Europe but still helping the local nature and people

Q5\_2\_TEXT - Australia, Oceania

Australia, Oceania

It's a dream to go for a year to Australia

Visiting Koalas is a dream for my daughter

I just see myself being more likely to visit Australia since I've always wanted to go. And to my knowledge it offers a lot in terms of eco-tourism activities.

Highest on my bucketlist to visit.

Known to have a great diversity in climate and nature

I heard a lot of news about the greenery of this specific area. I also curious about the environmental life of this area

Australia is so much known for its natural wonders

Q5\_3\_TEXT - Galapagos Island, Ecuador

Galapagos Island, Ecuador

Want to dive here

Good nature, needs to be protected

Because it's not a place you visit very often and you want to see the best parts

1. Beautiful landscape and unique animals. Ecuador is on my bucketlist after my visit to Costa Rica.

Because I love the sea and diving among fish

Q5\_4\_TEXT - Iceland, Europe

Iceland, Europe

The Country are trying to eco-friendly to protect their nature

Closest to me

Because of the nature behind it, I think that place is out of this world

because it seems like one big adventurous nature reserve that should be preserved

Iceland

Europa

I have never been to Europe yet - history

Q5\_5\_TEXT - Other

Other

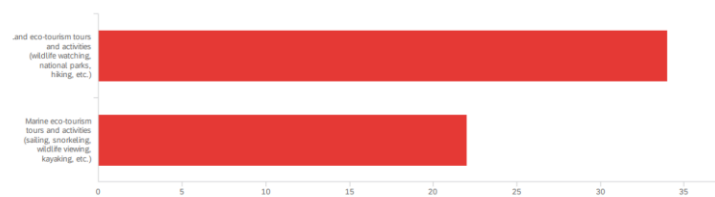
Not sure

Europe in general, because I want to explore more than one country there.

Caribbean, Africa and Latin America as there is a lot of wildlife & culture to see there.

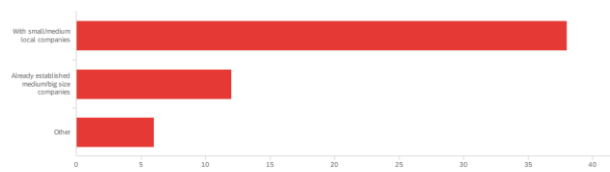
All of the above, because I haven't visited any of them and would be interested in eventually visiting all of them

Q6 - Would you prefer booking land eco-tourism tours and activities or marine activities?





Q7 - Would you prefer booking online eco-tourism activities and tours with small local companies or already established medium/big size companies?



Q7\_3\_TEXT - Other

Other

None of the above, but I'll take some ideas and accomplish it

Either

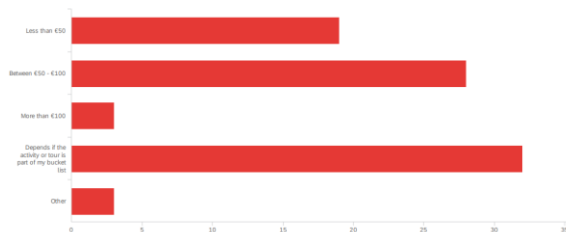
Doesn't really matter, the price and reviews have to be good.

To me, the size of the company doesn't matter as much as the value I'm getting for the amount I'm paying.

Both but it's up to the prices

It's not about the size for me, but I would prefer a company that has experience and/or is established.

Q8 - How much would you be willing to pay for eco-tourism activities and tours? (multiple answers allowed)



Q8\_5\_TEXT - Other

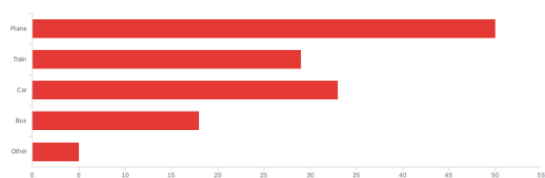
Other

Also depends on the region an area you going to some places are already tourist traps and some that are unexplored are magical.

Depends on the activity and the length of the activity

Depends on the activity and the duration. Diving or a guided day-long hike would cost more than an hour long meditation session

Q9 - What is your preferred mode of transportation when travelling? (multiple answers allowed)



Q9\_5\_TEXT - Other

Other

Motorcycle

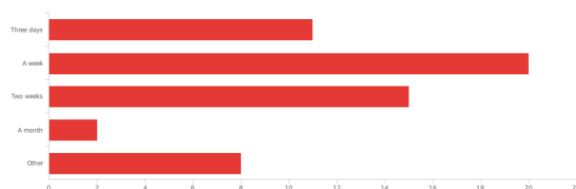
Ship

Don't really have a preference as long as I get there

flights for international travels and public transportation for domestic ones, I try to use bus or subway if I can

Cycle

Q10 - How long do you stay in a destination when travelling?



Q10\_5\_TEXT - Other

Other

But again it also depends if there are any activities or if there is nothing going on

Depends on the destination and what kind of trip it is

Short trips; 4-7 days (more city trips etc). Real holidays 2,5 - 6 weeks depending on the distance

depends on the location and intended activities

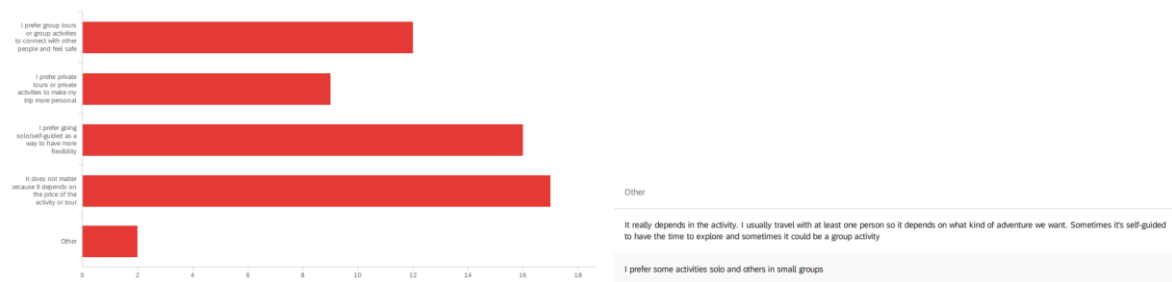
2 to 3 weeks normally

It depends but normally from three days to two weeks

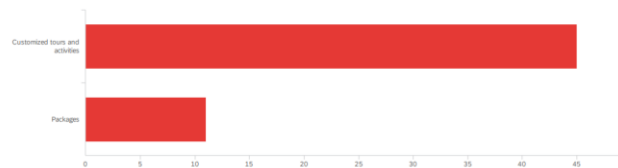
Depending on the place I go to and trip I go on I live in Curaçao so if I go to my neighbouring island Bonaire I would go for a few days but if I would go to China for example I would go for 1-2 months

Depends on the destination, city trips for 3 days, but more natural locations anywhere from a week to a month

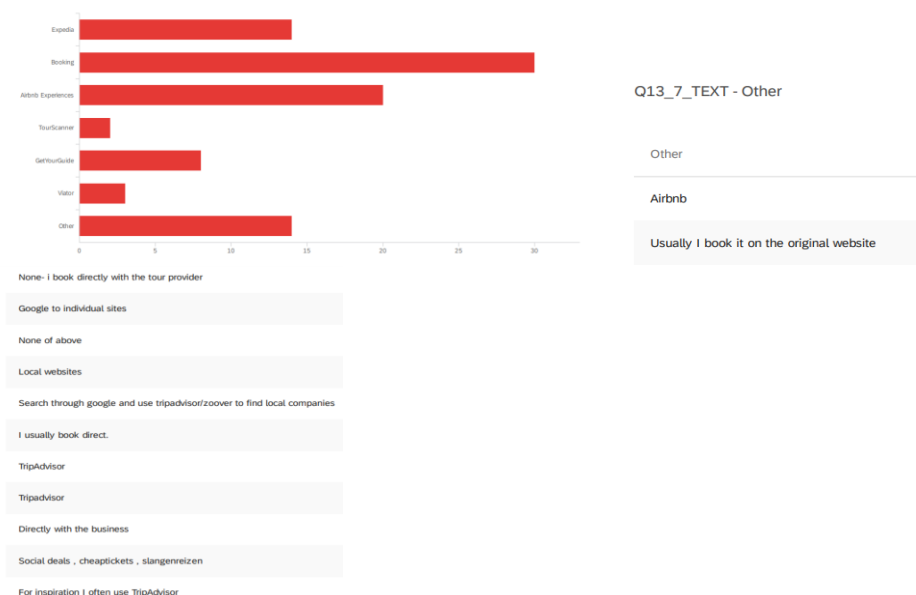
Q11 - Would you prefer taking group tours, private tours, or going solo/self-guided?



Q12 - Would you prefer booking customized tours and activities or packages?



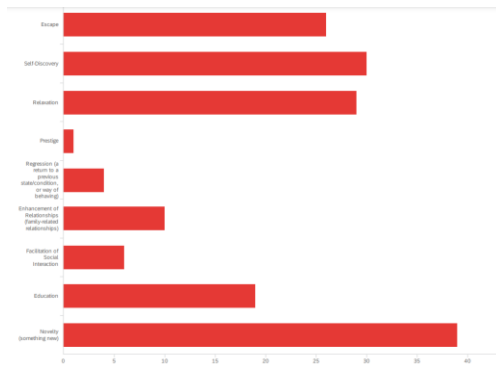
Q13 - Which online platforms do you use the most to book tours and activities? (multiple answers allowed)



Q14 - Which social media channels do you use the most to inspire and inform you about tours and activities in a destination? (multiple answers allowed)

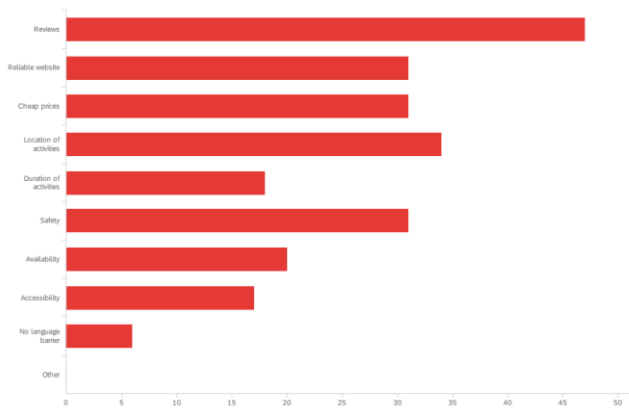


Q15 - What motivates you to book eco-tourism tours and activities in a destination? (multiple answers allowed)



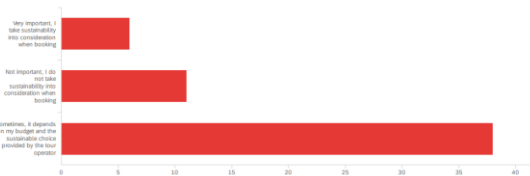
Q16 - What is most important to you when booking tours and activities online? (multiple

answers allowed)



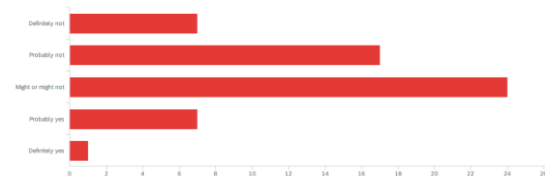
Q17 - How much is sustainability important to you when booking online eco-tourism tours

and activities?



Q18 - Would you prefer having a consultation with an online travel consultant before

planning a trip to or booking a tour/activity in a destination?

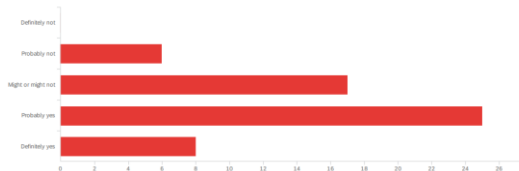


Q20 - Any extra comments, suggestions, or insights you would like to share?

Q19 - Would you use a new website (online platform) that lists all the eco-tourism tours

and activities visitors can book in a destination? (Think about booking.com but only of

ecotourism tours and activities).



Any extra comments, suggestions, or insights you would like to share?

No

"Ecotourism" can be a dangerous word that providers can use to mislead consumers. It would be great if the platform provided details about what specifically is "eco" about their company, what sets them apart from a sustainability perspective, what they're doing to give back to local communities, etc... there can be downsides to ecotourism, so the website can maybe address them and help offset them

use of appropriate social media advertising for different generations (for example facebook for boomers/gen X, instagram for millennials, tiktok for gen Z)

For me it is important to state whether there will be local guides or not

I would look at a general website where you have the option to select eco-tourism tours when searching for things. Booking those tours will get you a 10% discount for example.

It would be nice if you could link the activity to a (YouTube) video, to get some ideas about the location or tour

For a better overview of the questionnaire please have a look at:

[https://saxion.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_dnUCRD6kDatysse](https://saxion.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_dnUCRD6kDatysse).

## Appendix V – Interview Guides

### Textbox 7. Two Interview Guides

#### Interview Guide

##### Interview 1

Respondent: Platform's user & customer

##### ❖ Type of Tourist

###### 1. Question – What kind of tourist are you?

- The Drifter (highly adventurous, lives within the local community)
- The Explorer (travels alone, reliable transport and comfortable accommodations)
- The Individual Mass Tourist (not bound to a group but somewhat controlled in time & itinerary)
- The Organized Mass Tourist (follows tour guide and fixed itinerary)

Answer:

###### 2. Question – Which Generation are you?

- Generation Z (2001 – 2020)
- Millennials (1981 – 2000)
- Generation X (1965 – 1980)
- Baby Boomers (1946 – 1964)
- The Silent Generation (1925 – 1945)

Answer:

###### 3. Question – How do you plan or organize a trip?

Answer:

###### 4. Question – Do you book everything related to planning a trip by yourself or through a travel agent and why?

Answer:

###### 5. Question – Why did you choose to travel to Costa Rica?

- Escape
- Self-Discovery
- Relaxation
- Prestige
- Enhancement of relationships (family-related relationships)

- Facilitation of social interaction
- Education
- Novelty (something new)
- Regression (a return to a previous state/condition or way of behaving)

Answer:

###### 11. Question – Did you book group tours, private tours, or going solo, and why?

Answer:

###### 12. Question – To which area/city or part of Costa Rica would you travel again and why?

Answer:

##### ❖ Platform

###### 13. Question – What were your biggest challenges, struggles, doubts, or issues when organizing a trip to Costa Rica online and in general?

Answer:

###### 6. Question – How did you organize & book your tours and activities?

- Booked everything on one platform
- Use several platforms

Answer:

###### 7. Question – On average how much did you spend on each activity or tour you booked?

Answer:

###### 8. Question – Did you book tours and activities with locals or already established companies and why?

Answer:

###### 9. Question – What activities did you do while in Costa Rica?

Answer:

###### 10. Question – How long did you stay in the destination and why?

Answer:

###### 14. Question - Which online platform did you use to book your tours and activities in Costa Rica and why?

- Expedia
- Booking
- Airbnb Experiences
- TourScanner
- GetYourGuide
- Viator
- Other:

Answer:

###### 15. Question – If you had the possibility would you have chosen a customized tour or a package deal, and why?

Answer:

###### 16. Question – Which social media channel did you use the most to inspire you and inform you about things to do (tours & activities) in Costa Rica?

- Facebook
- Instagram
- TikTok
- YouTube
- Other:

17. Question – How much is sustainability important to you when organizing a trip to Costa Rica (tours, activities, restaurants, and accommodations)?

Answer:

18. Question – If you could plan your trip to Costa Rica again what would you have done differently?

- Scheduled a consultation with an online travel consultant for only tips & feedback
- Residents' Q&A meeting through an Online travel consultant
- Online Travel consultant plans everything for you
- Online Travel consultants book everything for you but do not organize the trip

Answer:

19. Question – What is important to you when booking tours and activities online?

- Reliable website
- Reviews
- Cheap prices

- Location of activities
- Duration of activities
- Safety
- Availability
- Accessibility
- No language barrier
- Other:

Answer:

20. Question – What do you think about using a new online platform (website) that only offers eco-tourism activities and tours in Costa Rica?

- Preference for an online platform that offers only eco-tours and activities
- Preference for an online platform that offers ecotours, wellness activities, eco accommodations, travel articles, and travel consultancy

Answer:

## Interview Guide

### Interview 2

Respondent: Website Developer

1. Question –What are things to consider when building a website?

Answer:

2. Question – What is the standard layout of a website?

- Home
- About us
- Products/Services
- Contact us
- Additional pages

Answer:

3. Question – Which web hosting company would you recommend using?

- GoDaddy
- Bluehost
- DreamHost
- IONOS

Answer:

5. Question – How can you make sure online payments through a website remain secure?

- SSL certificate

Answer:

6. Question – How can you measure how well a website is performing?

- Google Analytics

Answer:

7. Question – Which plug-ins are considered important to have on a website?

- Events Calendar
- Reservation
- Forms
- Comment
- Google Maps

Answer:

4. Question – Which website builder would you recommend using?

- WordPress
- Wix
- Squarespace
- Weebly

Answer:

8. Question – What type of content should a website include?

- Images (slow down performance)
- Videos
- Written words
- Interactive tools
- Landing pages (how many)

Answer:

9. Question – When is a website considered user-friendly?

Answer:

10. Question – What are common challenges people have when using a website?

Answer:

Answer:

11. Question – Based on your expertise what features should this type of website contain?

Answer:

12. Question – What are the dos and don'ts when building a website?

Answer:



## Appendix VI – Interviews Transcriptions & Analysis

### • **Transcript Interview #1 – Tourist – Trip to Costa Rica**

**Interviewer:** M.B

**Interviewee:** L.L

**Date:** May 4, 2023

**(Start of Interview)**

#### **Fragment 1.1 CODE: type of tourist**

**[Interviewer]:** Thank you once again for being here and participating in this interview. I would like to start with the first question, which is how do you describe yourself or what kind of tourist do you think you are for example, and explorer or drifter?

**[Interviewee]:** Okay, well from both examples I think I am an Explorer. I like to travel alone, be independent of others and make my own decisions. I also like to have reliable transportation for example renting a car to move around at my own pace and I love to book comfortable accommodation to get the most out of my trip.

#### **Fragment 1.2 CODE: generation, CODE: planning a trip**

**[Interviewer]:** Okay perfect. My next question is about the type of generation you belong to and how you plan a trip. So, depending on a specific generation, tourists tend to organize trips differently. What do you think about this?

**[Interviewee]:** Yes, I agree completely [Laughing]. I am a Millennial born in 1998 and what I usually do is ask for tips on my Instagram by posting stories so that my friends and other people can give me a nice recommendation for destinations. Then I create a file via Word documents, buy the flight tickets, and then I map out the entire trip [Laughing]. Before I forget I also use websites like reisjunk.nl for things to do in certain places and I read Google reviews to see how other travellers experience their visits. After that, we just book the accommodation using Airbnb and mostly we put the different activities in a Word file and book them on the spot.

**[Interviewer]:** Seems like you have a good idea of how to book everything yourself online. Am I right?

**[Interviewee]:** Yes, definitely. I book everything by myself. This way I am responsible for my own experience and also the thing is that I like to be in control of whatever I decide to do on vacation [Laughing]. I know what we like best and can arrange that into our trip but If I decide to give it away to a travel agent then I am mostly reliable on the choices of someone else.

#### **Fragment 1.3 CODE: reason to travel**

**[Interviewer]:** Yes, I completely understand I am also a person that likes to book everything by myself and go through the whole struggle just to be responsible for my own experience [Laughing]. Okay, so now I would like to ask you several more in-depth questions about your recent trip to this ecotourism destination which is Costa Rica. Why did you choose to travel to Costa Rica? Was it to experience something new?

**[Interviewee]:** Yes, exactly. We have never been to Costa Rica, and we were told it was a really nice place to visit if you love nature and we wanted to explore a new country full of wildlife and nature.

#### **Fragment 1.4 CODE: booking tours**

**[Interviewer]:** How did you book or organize your tours in Costa Rica?

**[Interviewee]:** I mostly use one platform like GetYourGuide a lot, but actually we did not use it this time to go to Costa Rica. Some platforms have their own booking system via their website so I just had to google the company and pay sometimes there were a lot of different companies as well offering the same activities as rafting or canopy so I had to compare the companies based on Google reviews, choose the highest stars and booked it online using a credit card.

**[Interviewer]:** How much did you pay on average for these tours and activities?

**[Interviewee]:** Well, we booked them with already established companies because it was the easiest way and I did not know how to book tours with locals themselves and if I knew I think would have chosen an already established company because it gives me more assurance of having a good experience So in general I think we spend on average 35 dollars per person on each activity or tour that these companies offered.

#### **Fragment 1.5 CODE: types of activities**

**[Interviewer]:** ~~Yes I understand. Sometimes safety and having a good experience can influence our decision to take tours but in my opinion, you did pay a good price for each activity.~~ What types of activities did you do?

**[Interviewee]:** Well, we did multiple activities while in Costa Rica. We visited the La Fortuna Waterfall, we visited the Mistico Hanging Bridges Park. We did a hike in the 1968 Arenal Park. Also, we joined a rafting tour on the Balsa River, and did a hike in the Santa Elena Cloud Forest Park, and we went canyoning through the jungle and also, we visited the Poas Volcano.

#### **Fragment 1.6 CODE: duration of the trip**

**[Interviewer]:** ~~Wow it seems like you did do a lot~~ [Laughing]. How long did you stay in the country?

**[Interviewee]:** Yes, we stayed 10 days in total in Costa Rica because it was aligned with our days of vacation. We stayed around 2-3 days in one area, to visit the sightseeing and to do other activities but if I have to go again, I will go to La Fortuna. It was full of activities; the surroundings are really beautiful, and the restaurants were also very nice. Somehow La Fortuna gave me a really good overall experience and feeling.

#### **Fragment 1.7 CODE: type of tours**

**[Interviewer]:** ~~I am glad to hear that because La Fortuna is definitely a beautiful place to visit again.~~ Did you also do mostly group activities or it was all self-guided or private?

**[Interviewee]:** We booked a group tour of the rafting activity, there was no other way. We wanted to book a private tour at the cloud forest park but unfortunately, there was no guide available. The reason we wanted it was because we wanted to see wildlife that we would see ourselves.

#### **Fragment 1.8 CODE: challenges when travelling**

**[Interviewer]:** Okay I understand. So far you have told me about all the great things during your trip but were there any struggles or challenges when travelling to this country or that you have in general?

**[Interviewee]:** Yes, so at first, it was hard to look for a car to rent because the prices were really high and we could not find a good company. Booking Airbnb was a struggle because I wanted it to be perfect and the search for perfect goes a long way. For this trip, I did not use booking or GetYourGuide or any platforms to book tours online so finding reliable local tours on the spot was also a bit tricky.

#### **Fragment 1.9 CODE: Customized tour, CODE: package tour**

**[Interviewer]:** After this experience do you think you would have chosen also for customized tours or packages as an option?

**[Interviewee]:** Yes if the package deal had all the tours and activities we wanted, it would have been a great option.

**Fragment 1.10 CODE: social media**

**[Interviewer]:** Did you use social media to inspire you to choose things to do in the country?

**[Interviewee]:** Yes, I did. I used Facebook and Instagram.

**Fragment 1.11 CODE: sustainability**

**[Interviewer]:** Okay and was sustainability important to you when planning this trip or just in general when planning other trips?

**[Interviewee]:** Not really. To be honest it is not that important to us. We did not have sustainable options either to choose from.

**Fragment 1.12 CODE: online travel consultation**

**[Interviewer]:** Okay and looking back at your trip would you have done something differently? Maybe having an online consultation with a travel agent or advisor?

**[Interviewee]:** Yes, I think I would have scheduled a consultation with an online travel consultant but only for tips & feedback. So that I can still be in control of our trip but also enjoy the recommendations of others.

**Fragment 1.13 CODE: booking through websites**

**[Interviewer]:** Okay I see. You mentioned that you book everything on your own online so my question is what is important to you when booking tours and activities on these online websites?

**[Interviewee]:** Mostly if it's a reliable website if it has cheap prices. I also check the reviews and make sure it is safe.

**Fragment 1.14 CODE: ecotourism platform**

**[Interviewer]:** Well we are now at the end of the interview so my last question would be what are your thoughts about using an online platform that offers eco-tourism tours and activities in Costa Rica?

**[Interviewee]:** It would be a great idea. Preference for an online platform that offers eco-tours, wellness activities, eco accommodations, travel articles, and travel consultancy. It would give people a chance to see various types of activities and choose from different options. It would also be super useful to have an overview when booking a holiday.

**[Interviewer]:** Well that is it. Thank you once again for your cooperation.

**(End of Interview)**

- **Transcript Interview #2 – Website Developer – Online Platform**

**Interviewer:** M.B

**Interviewee:** R.B

**Date:** May 1, 2023

**(Start of Interview)**

**Fragment 2.1 CODE: building a website**

**[Interviewer]:** Thank you for being here and participating in this interview. I would like to start by reminding you that this interview will be recorded. So, starting with the first question what are things to consider when someone wants to build a website?

**[Interviewee]:** Well first you need to know who your target group is and how to make it user-friendly. By this I mean, for example, making sure the information is clear and global and not that in-depth. Also, making sure the website is searchable for example the location, having contact information written on the website, and ranking high in search engine optimization.

**[Interviewer]:** Okay and what is a good and standard layout of a website? For example, a home page or contact us?

**[Interviewee]:** Yes, a home page is important, and about us, contact us, a product and service page but also do not forget about putting in the header the logo of the company and in the footer the social media of the company.

**[Interviewer]:** Okay, noted. Thank you and so which platforms should someone use to build a website? For example, WordPress.

**[Interviewee]:** Yes, that is a good question [Laughing]. So, I mostly use WordPress because the end user in this case a client does not need to ask permission to update content the content is made by a website developer but WordPress is not so user-friendly if created by an inexperienced website developer. One thing to consider is that a website can have 3 to 5 pages or only one page and it should include a contact form so that users do not have the need to email you directly. Also, Wix.com and Squarespace are good website builders.

**Fragment 2.2 CODE: website hosting platforms**

**[Interviewer]:** What about hosting which web hosting platforms would you recommend?

**[Interviewee]:** I would recommend Bluehost because it is cheap and has many options. You need to check which one is better for you because it depends if the website includes mostly text then it could be cheaper but if it is mostly images it can be expensive because it needs more space So, think about the size of your potential website and the amount of traffic it will get. Some platforms also give you recommendations to upgrade if needed.

**Fragment 2.3 CODE: online payments**

**[Interviewer]:** Okay that is good to know and what about online payments through a website? How can you make online payments through a website remain secure?

**[Interviewee]:** Well, all online websites need to be secure through an SSL certificate or two factors authentication. Most hosting websites or builder platforms have this payment security added to the user's monthly or annual payments. You can also link your website to PayPal, Stripe or use Shopify as an online store.

**Fragment 2.4 CODE: website progress**

**[Interviewer]:** ~~Okay I understand.~~ Okay so after you have created a website how can you measure if it is going good or bad like its progress?

**[Interviewee]:** You can only do two things one would be to use Google Analytics and the other would be to use the monitor tools that your web hosting platform is providing to you.

### **Fragment 2.5 CODE: plug-ins**

**[Interviewer]:** ~~Yes, I guess depends also on what you want to measure on the website.~~ Okay, so in your opinion now discussing the plug-ins which ones are the most important to add?

**[Interviewee]:** It all depends on what types of websites you have but the most common and most important are reservation forms or just general forms. Of course, adding a calendar plug-in and maybe for your business idea a Google Maps plug-in could also be important so that people can see where the location of the activity is.

### **Fragment 2.6 CODE: the content of the website**

**[Interviewer]:** Okay now looking into what a website should look like or include, what kind of content is recommended for example fewer videos more text etc.?

**[Interviewee]:** Yes, so if you use written words do not use a lot of text just basics, and balance it out with illustrations. You can also use interactive tools for example linking to social media or WhatsApp. Images do not need to be of high quality and put videos just as display not uploaded onto the website. Instagram pictures that can be seen on a website are also displayed and not directly uploaded onto the website. Do not forget that you also need to pay for data like you need to store the data you get from, for example, reservation forms. Some hosting websites do not include this database storage so you might need to pay for it. If you decide to create an online store look for online store websites that have 100 gigabytes as a start. Websites are more informative so a call to action is also important to add.

**[Interviewer]:** You mentioned user-friendliness on a website is important but when is a website considered user-friendly?

**[Interviewee]:** The letter type needs to be nice to read, if you have a lot of info make sure the background is white so not that colorful because it makes you tired when reading. It can also be dark blue, dark grey, and white. The menu structure needs to be easy access to information, more clickable and it can also be a single page website so that means you need to scroll down for more information. Also, choose colors that match each other. You can use a website called colorhunt.com, or Adobe to choose color patterns that match each other. Make sure to use colors that are clear and soft.

### **Fragment 2.7 CODE: challenges of a website**

**[Interviewer]:** What about the challenges when using a website?

**[Interviewee]:** Well, the most common challenge is finding information. Users struggle to find information and they get lost while finding it. Also, users do not want to spend time reading and scrolling through the whole website to find something. So as a recommendation, you should point out or do like a top 3 ecotours or make the home page easy access.

### **Fragment 2.8 CODE: website features**

**[Interviewer]:** ~~Thank you for your recommendation. Now that we are discussing the ecotourism platform I am planning on creating I would like to ask you~~ what kind of features do you recommend for the website.

**[Interviewee]:** There are a lot of features but I guess the most common are chat for customer service, your social media. If you are thinking of adding images or videos do not upload them into the platform but more as a video display. You should add images or videos because people are more into visuals



than text. Another feature could be Google Maps to find the places and their surroundings but please maintain the website as simple as possible so that it can be easy to use. [Laughing].

### **Fragment 2.9** *CODE: best and bad practices*

**[Interviewer]:** [Laughing] I understand. ~~There are a lot of websites where you end up searching for something and finding different non-relevant results.~~ My last question is what are dos and don'ts when building a website?

**[Interviewee]:** That is easy. For the do, I would say have a logo that appears on your pages each time the user searches things or scrolls. Have a contact us page. Make sure the header stays on top and make sure people can find your website online. Now for the things to avoid I would say watch out which color you use, do not put a lot of text, and just keep it simple.

**[Interviewer]:** Well, thank you so much for all the information you shared it was very helpful.

**(End of Interview)**

**Table 8.** Operationalisation Table & Summary

Code	Sub-code	Fragment numbers	Summary
Tourists Behaviour	Type of tourist	1.1	Ecotourists are explorers and millennials who travel to find something new in a destination and use social media to inspire themselves before booking a trip. Also, is open to receiving tips from a travel expert and has challenges related to finding local tours, booking accommodation, and others.
	Generation	1.2	
	Reason to travel	1.3	
	Social media	1.10	
	Sustainability	1.11	
	Online travel consultation	1.12	
	Challenges when travelling	1.8	
Travel planning	Planning a trip	1.2	Most tours were booked with already established tour operators and tourists stayed a week or two in the destination and mostly books everything by themselves.
	Booking tours	1.4	
	Duration of the trip	1.6	
Tours	Type of tours	1.7	There is a preference for package tours, group tours, and land-ecotourism activities.
	Types of activities	1.5	
	Customized tour	1.9	
	Package tour	1.9	
Websites	Booking through websites	1.13	Tourists can book tours using other websites such as GetYourGuide but they could potentially use the startup idea as well. To build a website one needs to make sure it is user-friendly and use WordPress or Bluehost for hosting it. To measure a website one could use Google Analytics. Things to add to a website are texts, images, different plug-ins, and features such as forms.
	Ecotourism platform	1.14	
	Building a website	2.1	
	Website hosting platforms	2.2	
	Online payments	2.3	
	Website progress	2.4	
	Plug-ins	2.5	
	The content of the website	2.6	
	Challenges of a website	2.7	
	Website features	2.8	
	Best and bad practices	2.9	

## Appendix VII – Declaration of own work



### Declaration of own work

I hereby declare that:

- I am fully informed about the Professional Product PF criteria;
- all the work I have conducted to fulfill these criteria is entirely my own;
- I have not been assisted by any other person, except the coaching offered within HBS guidelines.

Name: Melissa Bermudez Obando  
Date: June 19, 2023

Signature: 

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