2 Flamenco, Tourists’ Experiences and the Meaningful Life

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Introduction

This chapter explores tourists’ experiences of flamenco in Spain and seeks to identify the psychological benefits of such experiences for the tourists who engage in them. Culture and heritage have become a popular rationale for travel. Over the last decades, tourism has emerged as a regular phenomenon, and the demand for new places and distinctive forms of tourism has grown more complex. Places of cultural significance are, therefore, increasingly seeking to attract tourists on the basis of their unique heritage, and by so doing, some regions have become known for a particular type of cultural tourism. This is the case of Andalusia, a southern region of Spain, which is known for its rich and deeply rooted flamenco heritage. Flamenco involves cante (song), baile (dance) and toque (the guitar). The rhythmic punctuation by handclaps and other methods is also an intrinsic feature of the flamenco art. Contrary to popular belief, the song is at the core of flamenco, and from it germinated the dance and instrumental accompaniment. The flamenco song, in its different styles, encompasses the plaintive chant of the Moors, the Jews and reflects the gypsy struggle throughout Spanish history. While flamenco was long considered as the vulgar expression of mysterious outsiders, artists like composer Manuel de Falla (1876–1946) and poet Federico García Lorca (1898–1936) strived to elevate its status. Although flamenco has long been directed to tourists through diverse promotional strategies, it is perhaps only with the rise of globalization processes that flamenco has successfully consolidated its status as an art form. According to Aoyama (2009, p. 99), ‘the survival of flamenco art is as much a successful result of regional tourism promotion as it is a reflection of the growth in cultural consumption’. With the growth of cultural consumption, Aoyama points to the new consumptive practices of the growing mass of creative individuals in search of unique, authentic and place-specific cultural experiences.

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This trend towards distinctive experiences and skilled consumption of regional culture corresponds to what Richards and Raymond (2000) describe as creative tourism, whereby in fully engaging in cultural activities, participants are likely to enhance their creative potential and develop some knowledge about the activity, the local culture, and the local community. Furthermore, the activities undertaken by these creative individuals are conducive to positive outcomes such as self-fulfilment and allow the development of identities (Richards and Wilson, 2006). Creative tourism is akin to Stebbins’ (1982) concept of serious leisure, in that the participants invest a significant amount of time and effort in pursuing meaning-making activities which require a certain level of skills, knowledge and experience. Although the benefits of creative forms of tourism have been established for destinations (e.g. Richards, 2011), there has been very little empirical evidence of the benefits of such tourism practices on the people who engage in them. To address the lack of insights into the benefits of creative tourism practices to the participants, this chapter, therefore, holistically explores the relationship between tourists’ experiences of flamenco in Seville and their well-being. Before the methods and the research findings are presented, a brief review of recent literature highlights the links between leisure/tourism and tourists’ well-being.

**Leisure, Tourism and Well-being**

Outside the creative tourism literature, some recent research has examined the more general importance of leisure and tourism participation to well-being and quality of life. From a broad perspective, there seems to be a clear connection between leisure participation and improved quality of life. For instance, based on an extensive review of literature from an international context, Isawaki (2006) argues that leisure-like activities do promote the quality of people’s lives in at least five ways: (i) positive emotions are experienced in leisure contexts; (ii) leisure promotes self-esteem and self-identities; (iii) people feel culturally and socially connected through leisure activities; (iv) leisure participation facilitates learning and self-development; (v) leisure promotes character strengths and resilience.

Likewise, Newman et al. (2013) review 363 research articles linking leisure and subjective well-being, and identify five core psychological mechanisms that positively contribute to subjective well-being through leisure participation. These five mechanisms are detachment-recovery, autonomy, mastery, meaning and affiliation. The basic idea behind the concept of detachment-recovery is that people who engage in leisure activities, which draw on resources not used in their job activity, will recover from the strain experienced at work or simply overcome everyday life pressures. Autonomy has to do with free choice and a sense of control in individuals’ decisions to engage in leisure activities. The concept of mastery describes challenging experiences which lead to various learning outcomes such as improved skills. Meaning is experienced in activities that are perceived to be important in one’s life. Lastly, affiliation relates to a sense of social relatedness.

In their recent review of literature on quality of life and well-being research in tourism, Uysal, Sirgy et al. (2016) also emphasize the contribution of vacations to life satisfaction. They argue that recreational trips positively contribute to many life
domains such as social life, family life, cultural life and work life, and that longer vacations tend to have longer-term positive effects on quality of life than shorter trips. Tse's (2013) study on the impact of tourism on Chinese people's sense of well-being points to similar findings. Among other benefits, Chinese people who travel perceived themselves to be happier, more optimistic about the future, more confident and more satisfied with their lives than those who do not travel. Further evidence of the positive effects of tourism on people's lives is found in a recent book edited by Filep and Pearce (2014) on tourist experience and fulfilment. Filep and Pearce summarize the core themes that emerged in the 11 different studies featured in their book. These themes are: (i) enhanced pleasure; (ii) positive relationships; (iii) greater competence; (iv) flow; (v) personal transformation; (vi) improved fitness levels; and (vii) better overall quality of life. These themes are similar to the basic factors that are associated with the concept of subjective well-being, which, according to Kernan and Unger (1987), include: (i) arousal; (ii) intrinsic satisfaction; (iii) involvement; (iv) mastery; (v) perceived freedom; and (vi) spontaneity. Each of these factors impacts our perception of our quality of life (Richards, 2014).

It should be noted that psychologists who have grappled with the well-being concept have used different terms to describe it, such as subjective well-being, psychological well-being and eudaimonia. For instance Ryan and Deci (2001) and Waterman (1993) distinguish between subjective well-being (or hedonic well-being) and eudaimonia (or eudaimonic well-being). The former relates to satisfaction derived from momentary pleasures, as in the experience of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), and the latter consists of higher-order outcomes, such as when someone feels that they are living an authentic life, or feels fulfilled through the pursuit of meaningful activities. Psychological well-being is a term employed by Ryff and Keyes (1995), which describes different aspects of self-realization. Psychological well-being is, therefore, akin to eudaimonic well-being. In the rest of this chapter, I will either refer to well-being in general when both aspects, hedonic and eudaimonic forms of well-being are brought together, or I will specify which forms of well-being are relevant to the tourists' experiences.

Research Context and Methods

The data presented in this chapter were collected in Seville between September 2009 and May 2010. Seville is the capital city of the southern region of Andalusia, and with a population of about 703,261 inhabitants (Ayuntamiento de Sevilla, 2014), it is Spain's fourth-largest city behind Madrid, Barcelona and Valencia. In 2006, Seville was appointed the first UNESCO City of Music, within the framework of the Creative Cities Network of UNESCO's Global Alliance for Cultural Diversity. If Seville can boast of itself as a place of musical tradition of many genres, it is mostly known for being the birthplace of legendary flamenco artists such as Pastora Imperio (1885–1979), la Niña de los Peines (1890–1969) or Niño de Ricardo (1904–1974). Even today, the region of Seville is the hub of many artists and flamenco business establishments. Flamenco in Seville has been described as a creative industry (Thimm, 2014), the Andalusian capital being the host of many flamenco institutions and cultural events, such as the Bienal de flamenco de Sevilla (Seville flamenco fair), the museo de
Baile flamenco (flamenco dance museum) or its many flamenco schools and tablaos (flamenco taverns). Most of these cultural attractions and businesses largely rely on foreign visitors’ spending. For example, Aoyama (2009) estimates that, in Seville alone, the annual earnings generated by the flamenco school industry is approximately €2 million. Although flamenco does not contribute significantly to the city’s economy, it is Seville’s leading cultural segment; a segment which has been predominantly exploited by the local authorities for promoting the destination. The creative tourists who visit Seville to partake in flamenco courses are, however, a lucrative segment for fractions of the local community, which in turn impacts the living conditions of those community members.

Fieldwork activities consisted of 20 in-depth semi-structured interviews in which flamenco-related images were used to elicit responses, and some participant observation sessions. The interviews, which took the form of informal conversations held on bar terraces, were conducted with French and English native speakers from Canada, France, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Wales, England, Australia and the USA. The research participants were recruited at various flamenco schools in the historic districts of Macarena and Triana. All the informants (16 females and 4 males) either took flamenco guitar or dance classes and stayed in Seville for between a week and a few months. I used observation on various occasions such as in activities shared with some of the research participants. For example, informants and myself attended flamenco performances that were preceded and followed by strolls around the city. I also observed flamenco dancers before, during and after their dance classes at flamenco schools. The purpose of using observation was to uncover emotions and explore tourists’ practices. For instance, during the interviews, participants consumed food and beverages which provided some insights into how people feel about their bodies. Additionally, I engaged in casual conversations with the owners or/and the foreign employees (mostly French aficionados) working at various flamenco schools. Field notes were taken and the analysis of the interview data was carried out following Charmaz’s (2006) three-step coding process (initial, focused and theoretical), whereby transcripts were coded for themes which were then clustered to form core categories.

Since the goal of this study was to explore the nature of the tourist experience of flamenco in a broad sense, the central question that guided the research was simply ‘How do tourists experience flamenco in Seville?’ I attempted to tap into tourists’ motives for doing flamenco in Seville, their onsite experience, including the emotions felt while engaging in various flamenco and other touristic activities, and the meanings they derived from their experiences. The interview questions thus reflected this open approach. First, some general questions were asked to establish rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee:

- What is it about flamenco that you like most and why?
- Why did you decide to take this flamenco course?

Once rapport had been established, further and more central questions to the study were introduced such as:

- How could you describe your flamenco experience here so far?
- What is so far your best experience?
Findings

The tourists’ accounts of their experiences in Seville reveal a number of positive states and outcomes which are concordant with well-being themes. These well-being themes are: arousal, mastery, autonomy, affiliation, and meaning. An additional important theme, which, to various degrees, influences the emergence of other themes, is the one of challenge. Each of these themes is now discussed and illustrated with quotations from the interview transcripts. The theme of challenge is not addressed independently here; instead challenge dimensions are discussed in relation to the other themes. Pseudonyms are used to ensure the anonymity of the research participants.

Arousal

Arousal refers to the stimulation of the sensuous body which translates into very pleasurable states of being and highly emotional experiences. To tap into people’s heightened bodily feelings I asked the informants to describe their best or one of their best experiences in Seville. The tourists experienced their bodies in various circumstances such as while attending a concert in the intimate atmosphere of a small pená (flamenco club) where the performers were at reach, or while dancing in the presence of peers at their flamenco school. For example, Laura’s experience while dancing for a dance exam at her flamenco school resembles Csikszentmihalyi’s (1975) concept of flow:

It was definitely a strong moment because I told many people about it . . . It was the first time in my life that I totally felt myself into it . . . Now I understand what it means to give the best of yourself, like you forget that they’re people around you . . . I don’t know. What I was telling my parents is that I don’t know what happened to me there. I think I’ve just really thrown myself into it and when you feel something that others also tell you that they have felt it, there is this satisfaction that, maybe, there is a chance that you can understand . . . In fact, I’ve started to understand what flamenco is about . . . I forgot that this was an exam, ‘cause usually in exams you feel stress. But there, I forgot about it, just like if I were on my own. That was weird, like if I had smoked [pot]. I was fully into it. Yeah, I was into that song . . . like there is this feeling of warmth that takes you, actually like if all the emotions in your whole body were coming out. I was even shivering, really . . .

Laura is totally immersed in her activity to the point that she forgets that there are people around her. Csikszentmihalyi (1975) construes this state as the merger of
action and awareness. Laura’s sensorial arousal and full absorption also reveals here a state of magical transcendence, which is akin to a religious experience. The phrases: ‘I don’t know what happened to me there’ and ‘that was weird’ convey the idea of super-ordinary powers. Laura’s transcendental state is manifest when she says that she felt as if she had smoked drugs and felt that ‘all the emotions in [her] whole body were coming out’. Her description suggests a sense of unity of body–mind and self–environment. By forgetting about everything else around her but dancing, Laura also intimates a loss of separate identity. This account indicates that Laura’s experience is highly gratifying through feelings of satisfaction, comfort and a spur of emotions. Her experience is also rewarding in that through embodied feelings she gets to understand the quintessence of flamenco. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) uses the term autotelic to describe such desirable and rewarding experiences. Flamenco performers have themselves come up with a term which designates the trance-like feeling of the flamenco experience in its climax; they call this altered and pleasurable state of consciousness duende. Here, to describe what duende means, professional flamenco dancer Manuela Reyes (2010) writes:

[W]hen dancing, singing or playing guitar, there comes a moment where so much energy starts to flow, that it seems as if your body will be torn apart. Or, on the contrary, at other times we feel an extreme sensitivity and fragility in our bodies. In such moments, Flamenco seems to have no limits. It can be rancid, pure, free, painful, joyous, sensual, dry, harmonious, powerful, broad, deep, mesmerizing, strong, sensitive, crazy, clean, tough, festive, serious, and one hundred percent emotional.

The unification effect of music, that is the merger of mind–body–environment, is similarly articulated by Sophie:

It is a particular moment in time where the notion of time, space and everything is absent. You’re suspended like that in the air, [a moment] where you can concentrate all your energy, all what the music inspires you, all that passion that you feel inside and also all these things that you feel because of what you went through, you can invest all that within a few seconds. It’s like something suspended out of time. This is nothing more enriching than this, and priceless.

The terms ‘passion’, ‘enriching’ and ‘priceless’ articulated by Sophie are highly evocative of the central role played by the sensuous body in delivering extremely positive and meaningful experiences. This quotation, therefore, not only illustrates that sensations are inextricably enmeshed with positive emotions (Biswas-Diener et al., 2015), but also that embodied practices can be a powerful source of meaning (Howes, 2008; Matteucci, 2017) which in turn are likely to boost tourists’ self-esteem (Isawaki, 2007; Matteucci, 2014).

**Mastery**

The theme mastery includes the holistic element of learning, which in turn may refer to various personal outcomes such as cognitive development, affective development, psychomotor development and personal development (Quinlan Cutler and Carmichael, 2010). Kolb (1984), an American social psychologist and prominent educational theorist, distinguishes between performance, learning and development.
He describes the former as ‘an immediate reaction to a limited situation or problem’ and the latter as ‘lifelong adaptations to one’s total life situation’ (p. 34). Accordingly, performance, learning and development stand on a time continuum, with learning being located somewhere in the middle. Due to the in-situ nature of this study, most of the tourists’ accounts relate to improved performances and skills rather than long-term effects. As the participants were all physically active flamenco learners, their perceived acquisition of motor skills was expected. Indeed, dancers have improved their dancing skills as much as guitar players have enhanced their technique. The following quotes from two guitar learners are illustrative of this:

The one thing about improving here – for me at least – [is that] you never notice that you’ve improved. It’s odd, you know. There’s so much information. It’s kind of all up there; you record everything; so you can look back to it and you know, so you can go back and restudy it; review it. But really the . . . you know, last year, last summer I didn’t notice the improvements until I got back home.

(James)

It’s exciting and for me, personally, it’s wow, I feel myself getting better every day.

(Peter)

Peter, who had only been having guitar lessons for a week, already felt improvement on a daily basis. On the other hand, it took James – here referring to his previous trip – nine months and a return to his home city of Minneapolis before he truly became aware of his progress. Some respondents, who felt challenged in the learning process, showed signs of resilience. The informants’ self-motivation was often expressed in terms of a passion for flamenco and in terms of the pleasure derived from learning and overcoming challenges. For example, despite her temporary discouragement or frustration, Catherine justifies her determination to learn flamenco because of the challenges it represents:

Because flamenco represents a personal challenge; it makes your brain work. I am not old but I’m not 20 years old either. I haven’t started [flamenco] when I was six either, so yes, it is difficult. And there is the pleasure too, maybe the pleasure to be confronted with something difficult; the fact that maybe sometimes I’m struggling to do one step and then bang! At some point it comes and we’re happy, just because we’ve been able to do it.

Catherine’s words clearly indicate that learning does not come without dedication and overcoming some challenges. Challenge is, therefore, a necessary condition for the acquisition of new skills which in turn produces feelings of self-satisfaction.

**Autonomy**

Autonomy connotes the idea of voluntary engagement in leisure activities such as flamenco. Many informants expressed their satisfaction with their own autonomous decision to pursue their dream which was to do flamenco in Seville. For example, Jode, a 30-year-old Canadian informant, left her engineering job in Vancouver to take four daily hours of flamenco classes in Seville over a period of six months. Similarly, despite family pressure, Laura, a fourth-year French student, quit her medical studies to pursue flamenco dance in Seville. Juliette’s account, here, exhibits her determination to change her life and pursue her aspirations:
Well, my trajectory was like this: I studied and right after that I started working. So I never had that time for me, to do those things for me. I completed my studies to please my parents because in terms of objectives, we were not on the same page. I agreed to study accounting because this made them happy and I knew it could be useful one day. So I followed the just path. And after a while, what was supposed to happen did happen, meaning that you wake up every morning telling yourself ‘Damn, this is not my thing, I want to do something that I really enjoy doing’. So, I worked up my courage and that’s it, I am out of here.

These examples demonstrate the strong motivation that is necessary for people to leave their comfort zone and engage in artistic activities far away from home. Such personal investment in leisure is described as intrinsic leisure motivation by Newman et al. (2014) who also establish a link between intrinsic motivation and higher levels of life enjoyment and psychological well-being. The words expressed by Juliette above reveal the importance of engaging in interesting activities like flamenco in Seville. Flamenco makes Juliette happy, whereby she feels that her life is more meaningful. Juliette’s experience, therefore, intimates that having important goals and pursuing them are strong predictors of well-being (Diener et al., 2002). By way of further illustration, James explains his motivation in the following terms:

I mean if this is what you want to do, it has to be the number one priority because if it’s not – and that’s fine, people don’t have it as a number priority and they just enjoy going to classes and things. But you know, this is what I do when I’m back in the States. And what I want to do for a lot of time, and I want to teach, and try to make a living out of it. And so the only way that I can do that is to make it a number one priority.

The phrases ‘a number one priority’ and ‘make a living out of it’ particularly point to the notions of being seriously driven and of developing professional skills. Here, for James, flamenco ceases to be a mere hobby to become a career; a leisure career as in the concept of serious leisure in which people ‘find a career in acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience’ (Stebbins, 1992, p. 3). Intrinsic motivation is also evident in the amount of practice hours the informants have put into learning flamenco. Beside self-study time and rehearsals, on average, the 20 research participants have had three flamenco course contact hours every day. Contrary to frivolous or hedonic pursuits, flamenco experiences are characterized by a deliberate search for self-actualization and meaning in life. Autonomous and intrinsic motivation in the flamenco tourism context, therefore, promote eudaimonic well-being through higher levels of self-fulfilment and meaning.

**Affiliation**

Affiliation refers to positive connections to others and a sense of belonging. Of paramount influence on most of the informants’ experience were their interactions with the flamenco artists/instructors and their peers. It is worth mentioning that most of the instructors involved were internationally acknowledged artists, including some prominent figures of the contemporary flamenco scene. Among these key artists were Esperanza Fernandez (singer), Miguel Vargas (dancer), Juan Polvillo (dancer), Manuel Betanzos (dancer), Alicia Marquez (dancer), Isabel Bayón (dancer), Ángel
Atienza (dancer) and Andrés Marín (dancer). Therefore, it is not surprising that these flamenco instructors, who generally inspired respect in their students, were often perceived as both genuine and experts in the art of flamenco, which for the participants then translated into the delivery of high-quality teaching. The fact that the abovementioned flamenco artists were either born in Seville or somewhere else within Andalusia seemed to contribute to their elevated credibility and authentication as real ‘flamencos’. A combination of these two elements, being famous and originating from Andalusia where flamenco was born, may have been the two necessary ingredients as to how research participants authenticated their flamenco instructors. This relationship is highlighted in the following insert as Marie explains the reasons why she decided to come back to Seville:

Well, [I came back] to develop my dance skills but also to immerse myself in the flamenco culture, because here during the lessons you meet the true flamencos, who will sing during the lessons and who will share this . . . I don't know – this vivid flamenco thing with you . . . Because in France, the aficionados are people who have learned it but aren't those true artists – like since they were little kids.

Perhaps, a more insightful dimension of the participants' interactions with their instructors is informed by the very special way participants invest flamenco artists. Most participants revealed their admiration towards flamenco artists regardless of whether these artists were singers, musicians or dancers. This admiration would often attain spiritual dimensions as one would regard flamenco artists as idols or even spiritual leaders. Although this religious aspect was never explicitly mentioned, a number of accounts have revealed this estimation. In the following quote, the repetitive use of the word 'amazing' or the term 'in the presence of greatness' denotes the special way Jode sees and experiences flamenco artists:

You know what I have to say that I've done here related to flamenco have been amazing experiences for me. I don't know. I mean, I think having these teachers that they're like renowned all over the world and having – you know – being able to speak with them, and get their advice and have them correct you and that to me is just . . . So . . . It's . . . It's amazing that people are so . . . – like you pass by Manuela Carrasco walking down the street – you know – like wow! I'm in the presence of greatness. [laughs]

Similarly, Irene's admiration for her flamenco teacher is eloquent while she describes her best experience:

Absolutely the best experience is taking classes with Alicia Marquez. There is no question about it for me. I mean, this is what I came here for. This is what I hoped that it would fill me. So there is no question. And getting to know her better and stuff like that, even on a personal level. She’s a great artist and a great teacher. So, for me this is the best experience . . . You know, now I take two classes with her, choreography – just a regular one and bata de cola. And her bata de cola classes are like she's a queen at bata de cola [laughs] and she does look like a queen in her bata de cola classes . . . Again, it's a very personal thing. To be able to take classes with somebody that I admire and that somebody who's dancing resonates in me, it's absolutely amazing.

The research participants have also evoked feelings of togetherness or a sense of belongingness which resulted from their interactions with peers. For most aficionados the sense of community they have expressed is enriched by the friendship they have developed with some peers. Thus, their friendships built through flamenco are
likely to strengthen their connection to the art of flamenco and to the general ‘flamenco culture’ as Juliette puts it. Here, Juliette describes this particular aspect of her experience in Seville:

Friendship. Yes, friendship. In a way, before in Luxembourg, I was already feeling it in a sense that very few people do flamenco and we became a little family. And here, there is some of that too. There’s a lot of competition and everything, but there is still this passion that unites many people – a culture and all that – and that’s friendship too . . . I’m not the only one. There’re many people who feel the same about this art [flamenco], about life in general too.

The above quotations from Marie, Jode, Irene and Juliette all point to this special bond that they feel with respect to peers and the flamenco artists. This special bond may also ascribe a sense of social identity to them. This finding is in line with the literature, which highlights the beneficial role of social leisure activities in producing positive emotions and fostering meaningful relationships, which in turn enhance quality of life (Newman et al., 2014).

Meaning

The data reveal that meaning-making flamenco activities promotes positive emotions and life satisfaction. Meaning is closely linked to autonomy (or intrinsic motivation), and both are associated with some substantial levels of effort. For the research participants who actively participate in dance and guitar lessons, flamenco produces more than mere gratification; flamenco is seen as an outlet for passion and self-development over an entire life span. The following quotation clearly shows the importance that Jode ascribes to doing flamenco in Seville, a nourishing activity that is also extremely enjoyable and that she intends to more routinely incorporate into her life:

Well, I plan to somehow, I don’t have a concrete plan, but I want to make flamenco part of my life in some way. If it’s just dancing once a month or even less like – I just want to have it there – you know? And like I guess coming from engineering, it was like a pretty safe place to be, like I had a good job, an income (laugh) and having to leave it and like telling people what I was doing, like most people thought that was kind of crazy . . . I think that [passion]’s a good word for that feeling of ‘feeling alive’ – like there is that passion that you feel when you’re doing it, but I did not have that in engineering. Yeah, I mean it was fun and all problem solving but it’s different, it’s different.

Jode presents her engineering occupation as fun and safe which involves some skills for problem solving tasks, thus an activity which invests her creativity. However, and despite the good life of her Vancouver-based engineering career, Jode strives to pursue a more meaningful life in which flamenco takes a salient role. This 30-year-old Canadian uses the word ‘passion’ and the phrase ‘feeling alive’ to refer to her engagement in flamenco activities, thus unmistakably elevating flamenco to a meaning-making and happy activity in her life. Flamenco is also given a privileged status in the subsequent insert in which Juliette refers to flamenco as a super-ordinal force giving meaning to her life:

Throughout this year things have happened . . . like it’s not just ‘you’re born, you work, you die’, life is more than this. And when things happen to you, you say to yourself ‘jeez',
I don’t know if it is the Lord or a guardian angel or . . . Good things have happened in that year.

Peter, a 29-year-old Welsh man, similarly talks about his experience in spiritual terms when he says that he feels ‘blessed’ to be able to experience Seville’s lively flamenco culture:

I’m quite blessed really ‘cause I’ve been here, I could afford to pay for two weeks and . . . I consider myself to be very very lucky. I’m grateful to everything, to the energies of here, you know. (Peter)

These testimonies allude to the idea that life is worth living and that flamenco plays a central role in it. Although there are signs of hedonic pleasures in the tourists’ accounts, there is more evidence of eudaimonic themes such as self-actualization and meaning. Elsewhere (Matteucci, 2013) I have equated this search for emotional well-being, meaning, and personal growth through flamenco with a spiritual journey; a journey at the centre of which flamenco is a sacred cultural object. The following quotation from Lea, a 30-year-old Swiss citizen, unambiguously suggests that her flamenco journey has enabled her to connect with her true self:

When I came here, without really knowing anything [about the local culture and mentality], I really found myself again in the way . . . the attitude that people have towards life in general . . . It’s like if it had opened my eyes about the things that I really like, the things that I have always liked, which I have always looked for. It wasn’t like something which was given to me but it was already in me and I’ve just realized that.

Lea’s experience in Seville corresponds to a pivotal moment in her life, a unique moment in which her old life configuration tumbles down and from which new potentialities emerge. French philosopher Michel Onfray (2008) has described this pivotal moment in life as an existential hapax (hapax existentiel in French), that is a psychical, spiritual as well as an embodied experience, during which tensions are lifted and contradictions are elucidated. Hapax means that this experience is unique in that it happens only once in a life time. Further, this hapax is existential because Lea’s experience is cathartic; her old uneasy self crumbles to dust, making room for her new self to surface.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have examined the psychological benefits of tourists’ experiences of flamenco in Seville, Spain. The creative tourists who partook in flamenco courses reported multiple positive outcomes such as rewarding emotional experiences, resilience, self-satisfaction through skills development and determination, social relatedness, greater meaning in life and self-discovery. The aficionados have experienced many personal challenges in their pursuit of flamenco, and these challenges have helped them develop some character strengths as well as boost their self-satisfaction. It is clear from the research participants’ testimonies that their flamenco journey has contributed to improve their quality of life through their attainment of well-being. These findings are in line with the extant literature that underscores the role of leisure experiences as a contributor to quality of life (Isawaki, 2006). However, some grey
areas remain and deserve further research. For example, one main issue concerns the relationship between temporary positive experiences and long-lasting well-being. In other words, it is unclear how much of the flamenco tourists’ well-being stays after their return home and how long such benefits last?

The research findings point to a number of implications for practice. Practitioners seeking to improve the quality of life of visitors should consider three main aspects. First, creative tourists like the flamenco aficionados in this study are intrinsically motivated and seek to experience authentic facets of local cultures such as original art forms and the local people (including artists) in non-tourist environments. Therefore, activities that provide opportunities for genuine interactions between locals and visitors are likely to be valued among tourists. Service providers such as local artists should be carefully recruited based on their artistic skills, their level of proficiency but also on their optimism and their social ability to motivate tourists and engage with them in a sincere and cheerful manner. Such encounters are likely to instil positive emotions (such as attachment to people and place) and generate friendships among participants; friendships, thus, becoming a main factor for tourists to repeat future visits. Additionally, the heterogeneity and intimacy of non-tourist settings (e.g. dance and music schools, bars, private spaces) should be perceived as authentic, and confer meaning to the tourist experience.

Second, challenging activities, which require some efforts and active engagement, are more likely to produce positive effects in the long run (Huta and Ryan, 2010). Tourism practitioners, therefore, should craft cultural activities that are likely to push people’s boundaries in a way that participants are forced to resort to their inner strengths in order to overcome some challenges. By overcoming challenging situations, tourists are likely to develop some skills, feel more competent and confident. Furthermore, by reaching the important goals they had set for themselves, tourists’ well-being should be enhanced (Ryan and Deci, 2001). In addition, challenging activities may provide favourable conditions for social bonding among tourist participants.

Third, the more the tourists’ bodies and senses are stimulated the more rewarding their experiences are (Matteucci and Filep, 2017). Through sensually unsettling environments and activities in which tourists’ bodies are exposed to new sensations, practitioners should be able to deliver highly emotional, memorable and unique experiences to the people who participate in them. The activation of the sensuous body may be facilitated through non-tourist spaces which have the potential to push tourists outside their comfort zone and confront their embodied identities (Edensor, 2006; Onfray, 2007). Furthermore, such environments should not always protect tourists from experiencing unpleasant feelings; instead sometimes tourists’ well-being may be enhanced through challenging performances, and new and disruptive sensualities.

This chapter has demonstrated that a cultural manifestation like flamenco has the power to enhance tourists’ well-being. Flamenco, in the form of dance and music courses held by local artists in culturally significant places (e.g. Seville) which require some personal investments on behalf of all participants (consumers and producers alike), offers opportunities for social bonding, self-development, self-fulfilment and meaning. The creative tourist experience of flamenco, thus, provides a valuable example of how tourism can contribute to tourists’ quality of life.
Notes

1 The word *duende* in Spanish means ‘goblin’ or ‘spirit’ or ‘magic’ or ‘charm’, depending on the context in which the word is used.

2 *Bata de cola* is a flamenco dress with a train.

References


