Tourism Management Perspectives 34 (2020) 100678

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Tourism Management Perspectives

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/tmp

Holidays with my horse: Human-horse relationships and multispecies tourism experiences

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Animals
Holidays
Horses
Multispecies ethnography
Power
Tourism

ABSTRACT

More people are choosing to include their 'pets' and companion animals in their holidays, but provision for and understanding of nonhuman travellers remain limited. Multispecies tourism provides opportunity for the creation of rich, personally meaningful experiences that are key to satisfaction, but also has potential for producing stress and disappointment. The limited field of multispecies tourism tends to focus on dogs, whereas this paper considers some of the different issues raised when humans and horses holiday together. Auto/ethnographic vignettes of human-horse partnerships 'on holiday' are used to consider questions of interspecies trust and relationships as enacted through tourism, and to reflect on some of the complexities and contradictions inherent in these practices. These tourism activities prompt consideration of what makes a 'good' holiday and for whom, as well as some of the power relations inherent in multispecies tourism.

1. Introduction

Holidays are an opportunity for relaxation and fun, spending time with friends and family away from the pressures and demands of everyday routines. We look forward to our holidays, saving money and planning activities to make the most of that precious time away together. But what if that 'family' does not consist of only human members? Many people now consider their 'pets'[1] and companion animals as friends and family members, and so want to include them in special events and activities, such as holidays (Charles & Davies, 2008; Chen, Hung, & Peng, 2011). These multispecies holidays, involving humans and other species together in locations beyond their usual spaces for interaction, offer exciting opportunities for interspecies fun and bonding, but may also pose complex, even unexpected challenges. In this paper I consider one such example, that of people taking their horse away on holiday, and question how including nonhuman animals in tourism experiences may require some rethinking of our common-sense understanding of concepts such as 'tourist' and even 'holiday'.

Tourism studies has only recently begun to consider nonhuman entities as (potential) travellers. Ivanov (2018) calls on tourism organisations and researchers to recognise that nonhuman travellers – whether they be animals, toys or robots – are "a neglected niche of tourists" (p.11). Such nonhuman travellers are dependent on their human companions – who make decisions about services to consume, where to go, and of course pay for the trip – but also may require different types of services than human tourists, be that in relation to travel, accommodation, food or other facilities (Gretzel & Hardy, 2015; Ivanov, 2018). Dog 'owners', particularly those closely bonded to their 'pet', are willing to pay extra for 'pet'-friendly facilities (Taillon, MacLaurin, & Yun, 2015). However, the provision of services aimed at nonhuman travellers, and their human companions, remains limited and accessing information about such services can be difficult (Carr & Cohen, 2009; Chen, 2018; Kirillova, Lee, & Lehto, 2015). There is clearly a market gap that needs addressing, as well as further research to understand better the needs, desires and constraints of more-than-human travellers (i.e. humans and nonhumans, animate and inanimate, travelling together).

The possibilities of multispecies holidays offer more than just commercial opportunities for the tourism industry to diversify into niche markets. As the burgeoning field of human-animal studies shows, thinking through human-nonhuman relationships and interactions opens up theoretical, conceptual and empirical insight, and challenges researchers and practitioners to think beyond anthropocentric paradigms (Dashper, 2019). Tourism studies can, therefore, benefit from

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[1] A word about language is needed in relation to the topic of this article. In the human-animal studies field (from which this paper draws) words like 'owner' and 'pet' are problematized, as they position the animal as an object or property rather than as a living individual being. These words are commonly used in everyday language and are widely understood and so I use them here for clarity, but I apply them only in this form – 'owner' and 'pet' – to signify the problematic nature of the terms. See Belk (1996), Cooke (2011) and Dashper (2017) for further discussion of the complexities surrounding terms like 'pet' and 'owner' in interspecies relationships.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2020.100678
Received 16 October 2019; Received in revised form 19 March 2020

multispecies perspectives to open up new debates and discussions about both applied and theoretical issues central to the field, ranging from practical and ethical issues associated with wildlife tourism, to questioning our conceptual apparatus for understanding what tourism is and means to different participants.

Most of the research in the small field of nonhuman travel focuses on understanding constraints to travel, or the service adaptations that might be required to accommodate different beings (Chen, Peng, & Hung, 2014; Ivanov & Webster, 2017). This provides important information, but little insight on why interspecies travelling is important to the human partner and the meanings attached to these activities. Some quantitative research has shown that a close bond between animal (usually dog) and 'owner' indicates a strong willingness to pay extra for suitable services (Hung, Chen, & Peng, 2016), but offers little insight into the nature of those bonds, and how they play out in the context of tourism experiences. Further, almost all research on multispecies tourism focuses on dogs, as perhaps the most common animal to be taken on holiday with a human owner (Carr, 2014, 2017). However, other species of animal are sometimes included in holidays, and vacationing with these animals may pose different issues and challenges to those beginning to be identified in relation to dogs. This paper begins to address some of these gaps in understanding of more-than-human tourism by focusing on human-horse encounters, which in the context of a holiday are significantly different to those between humans and dogs. In contrast to previous literature I move beyond considerations of practical and market-oriented aspects of more-than-human travel and associated facilities and focus more on the embodied experiences of multispecies tourism, and how interspecies relationships and interactions shape holidays and help create meaningful experiences for the (human) tourist. This leads to difficult questions related to power and agency that are central to understanding some of the complexities of multispecies tourism and begins to move beyond anthropocentric paradigms for understanding human-animal interactions in and through tourism.

The paper begins with a discussion of the limited extant research on horses in tourism, before going on to introduce the theoretical framework that guides this study, which is based on insights from the broader human-animal studies field (Dashper, 2017). The research approach, based on ethnographic and autoethnographic traditions - specifically multispecies ethnography - is then explained. Two narratives illustrating some of the complexities of multispecies tourism between humans and horses are presented and some of the theoretical and conceptual issues posed are discussed in the final sections.

2. Horses in the tourism industry

Horses have been involved in human tourism for centuries, whether as means of transport, carrying luggage, or as an attraction in their own right, yet there is surprisingly little research on them. Several authors have illustrated the cultural significance of horses to locations from Australia to Iceland to Morocco, and how this heritage has been used, commodified and sometimes transformed for tourism purposes (Nieminen, 2014; Talley, 2017; White, 2011). Trail riding is a popular horse-based touristic activity and can provide business opportunities for rural entrepreneurs (Kozak, 2017; Pickel-Chevalier, 2015). Numerous challenges have been identified in relation to trail riding, ranging from safety issues, to availability of appropriate trails, to potential soil and environmental degradation (Buchmann, 2017; Kline, Cardenas, Viren, & Swanson, 2015; Schmudde, 2015). For tour operators, many of which tend to be micro-businesses run by people with a passion for horses, equestrian tourism has high operating costs and poses problems with balancing the 'business' side with the 'horse care' side of operations (Gilbert & Gillett, 2014; Helgadóttir & Sigurðardóttir, 2008). Yet despite some clear challenges, equestrian tourism businesses often achieve high levels of customer satisfaction and the sector has illustrated the potential of small businesses working together in clusters to achieve success, particularly in rural areas (Sigurðardóttir & Helgadóttir, 2015; Sigurðardóttir & Steinthorsson, 2018).

This body of research focuses on many of the business aspects of equestrian tourism, but offers limited insight into the core attraction of this type of touristic activity: the horse. Notzke (2019) illustrates that the horse him or herself is central to the tourists' experiences, and issues of care, responsibility, connection and companionship come to the fore. Dashper (2020) discusses how horses in trail riding tourism can usefully be considered workers, helping deliver a service to customers and subject to high expectations and demands in terms of service quality and performance of emotional labour. These studies illustrate that horses involved in the tourism industry are not just objects to be consumed by paying guests, but individual creatures with wants, needs and fears, and with the capacity to shape tourism experiences alongside human guests and tourism workers (Dashper & Buchmann, 2019).

Horses involved in the broader leisure sector have received a little more attention as sentient beings. Leisure horses, usually 'owned' by a single human, have a status comparable to 'pets', and can be considered 'companion species' in the sense proposed by Haraway (2003). These interspecies relationships are often close and develop over extended periods of time, built on mutual trust and respect, yet fraught with ambivalent and often conflicting power relations (Dashper, 2014; Gilbert, 2014). Leisure horses may also be involved in tourism practices, although their roles and experiences will differ to those of the trail horses involved in the service of commercial organisations which form the focus for the research cited above. Leisure horses may go 'on holiday' with their 'owner' and so the vacation can become a context through which these interspecies relationships are performed, negotiated and sometimes even break down. In the next section I draw on work from the field of human-animal studies to establish a framework for understanding these interspecies relationships that I then use to inform the analysis of human-horse holidays offered below.

3. Theorising human-animal relationships

To understand the experiences of multispecies tourism it is necessary to think about the relationships between the key actors, and how those relationships evolve and sometimes dissolve through tourism practices that take these often well-established interspecies relationships and position them in a very different context, in geographic, social and relational terms. Relationships between humans and companion species, usually taken to include domesticated animals such as cats and dogs, as well as horses, have some similarities to relationships between human family members or friends. People often talk of their 'pets' as kin, recognising them as individual sentient beings with unique personalities, likes and dislikes, and the ability to develop and engage in distinct relationships with individual humans (Charles, 2014; Sanders, 1990). Thus it is not surprising that many people want to include their 'pet' in their holiday experiences, as this is a time of fun, relaxation and joy that they want to share with all their loved ones, human and non-human. However, while (some) human-animal relationships may show similarities to relationships between humans, they are not the same. Belk (1996: 138) argues that "[p]ets often share some of the status of other family members, but their status is most commonly an inferior one." 'Pets' occupy a liminal position in families; at once valued as a loved intimate member of the group, yet also kept at a distance and subject to practices such as training, neutering and selective breeding that seek to minimise their 'animalness' (Fox, 2006). This helps explain why the 'pet' – apparently a valued member of the family – is often not included in family celebrations and holidays and may be sent instead to a boarding facility to be cared for by strangers, an experience likely to be anything but joyful for the animal. Thus 'pets' are almost, but not quite, family.

Horses occupy a slightly different position in relation to their human companions and caretakers than 'pets' that share the physical location of the family home. Horse 'owners' often express many of the same

sentiments as 'pet owners' about their equine charge, attributing distinct personalities, espousing love and affection and investing significant resources of time, money and emotion in their care and well-being (Dashper, 2017). However, horses differ from family 'pets' in several ways that are important for the development of interspecies relationships and that will affect tourism experiences. For example, horses are large animals, need physical space, access to extensive forage (be that hay or grass), and thrive in the company of other horses (see Keaveney, 2008). Consequently, horses need special facilities and cannot stay in a hotel room with their 'owner' or join the family for a meal.

Importantly, the very nature of human-horse relationships differs to that between humans and dogs or cats. The majority of human-horse relationships in a leisure context are built around the practice of riding, and this requires a level of physical intimacy and connection between the two species (Game, 2001). Horses thus occupy a specific role in (some) humans' lives, and perform an active function – being ridden – around which the interspecies relationship is built. Horses that are taken away with their 'owner' on holiday will almost certainly be riding horses, and the holiday itself will thus be based at least to some extent on the activity of riding. Therefore, unlike a dog who may accompany his or her 'owner' to a variety of tourism attractions on holiday simply as a companion, a horse's role on a multispecies holiday is likely to be much more constitutive of that trip – horse-riding is likely to be a key focus of the vacation. The human-horse relationship, and their joint practices (usually based around riding), thus forms a central feature of these multispecies holidays and exerts considerable influence on the satisfaction, or otherwise, of the human partner with the vacation.

I have argued elsewhere (Dashper, 2017) that the relationships that develop between individual horses and humans through sport and leisure practices are complex, deeply embodied and fraught with unequal power relations. Horse 'owners' usually see their horse as an individual 'person' (see also Sanders, 1990), and a horse taken away on holiday with his or her human may act and respond in different ways, depending on mood, general feelings and personality, in much the same way as human behaviour varies with time and context. To understand multispecies holidays involving horses and humans we therefore need to consider the horse as an individual, with capacity to shape the tourism encounter for good and for bad, as can the human partner. Human-horse relationships are built through complex interactions that occur across species, spatial, temporal and sensorial boundaries. Communication between people and horses requires negotiation of some sort of shared understanding, and the very act of riding epitomises a close and complicated form of interspecies embodied communication. To achieve this level of communication and some shared understanding requires a degree of partnership between horses and humans (Maurstad, Davis, & Cowles, 2013). This partnership often develops over time, and is vulnerable to breakdown during periods of stress and in the face of unfamiliar environments and stimuli, such as might be experienced away on holiday (Dashper & Brymer, 2019). Some of these issues are explored further in the narratives presented below.

However, ideas of partnership and recognition of individuality across species boundaries should not be overly romanticised and human-horse interactions highlight numerous issues in relation to unequal power relations between humans and nonhumans. Questions of animal agency are complex, but agency may be best understood as a continuum along which all animals are positioned, human and nonhuman (Pearson, 2013). Horses do have some agency to act in ways that cause affects and impact on others, including humans. However, as I discuss further below, given that horses are positioned in a human-centric world in which human interests are prioritised, the horse's agency is limited by the human's response (see also Carter & Charles, 2013). The horse may not want to step into a stream, for example, and may act to try and resist this by backing up or turning around. However, if the human really wants the horse to walk through the stream then the human has capacity to enforce this behaviour through various practices (Dashper & Brymer, 2019). Therefore, when considering multispecies holidays questions of power and agency are significant.

Consequently, there are some important aspects of human-animal relationships in general, and human-horse relationships in particular, that are likely to shape multispecies tourism. These include:

- Horses (and indeed all companion species) are seen, by their 'owners', as individual beings with distinct personalities, likes, dislikes, needs and moods that may need to be catered for on holiday;
- Relationships between horses and their human 'owner' are likely to be close, built on a level of embodied knowledge developed over time through practices including riding, and these relationships will form a key aspect of the multispecies holiday;
- Humans express love for their horse, seeing them as a member of the extended family, and so will invest emotionally in the experiences of the multispecies holiday;
- However, horses are not quite family. They are still subject to human-based expectations about how they should behave, and human desires to ride or not, to pursue a particular track, or even to go on the holiday in the first place. Multispecies holidays are thus likely to be beset by complex power relations between the different actors.

These issues suggest that holidays involving established human-horse pairs (i.e. an 'owner' taking their leisure horse away on holiday) are likely to reflect many of the broader complexities of interspecies relationships. The narratives presented below illustrate some of the ways in which these issues can manifest in the context of multispecies holidays.

4. Research approach and methods

All relationships are complex, but those between humans and nonhuman animals are further complicated by issues of communication, in that we cannot discuss things directly with other species and so cannot talk about issues and shared experiences. This poses difficulties for researchers in trying to understand interspecies encounters. Tourism researchers to date have mostly avoided this issue by concentrating solely on the human side of the relationship, seeking out only human experiences and viewpoints and human assessments of the success or otherwise of multispecies tourism experiences (e.g. Carr & Cohen, 2009; Hung et al., 2016). While this is understandable, it fails to engage with many of the important aspects of interspecies interactions and relationships that are at the heart of multispecies tourism. If we only consider these activities from the perspective of the human participant, we will gain only partial understanding and may miss many of the important nuances that shape multispecies tourism and that may contribute to greater understanding, both conceptually and in practical, market-oriented terms.

4.1. Multispecies ethnography

In this study I was interested not just in the constraints that people may experience in taking their horse away on holiday, or their satisfaction or otherwise with facilities and services. Rather, I wanted to try and understand more about the experiences of human-horse holidays, and some of the ways in which horses themselves, as individual actors, can shape those experiences. I conducted multispecies ethnography, a practice that attempts to explore some of the 'contact zones' (Haraway, 2003) between humans and nonhumans, sometimes trying to decentre and de-prioritise human perspectives in an effort to try to understand some of the messy entanglements that make up our multispecies world (Kirksey & Helmreich, 2010). Multispecies ethnography is "an epistemologically revised and ecologically attentive mode of writing and research exploring our manifold relations with nonhuman species" (Locke, 2018: 1). Consequently, it represents a paradigm shift

in thinking about human-animal interactions in and through tourism, and can be understood as "a mode of attunement to the power of nonhuman subjects to shape the world and to the ways in which the human becomes through relations with other beings" (Ogden, Hall, & Tanita, 2013: 16–7).

Multispecies ethnography involves multiple methods to try and understand different aspects of our multispecies encounters, at least in part on the terms of the nonhuman partner. These methods vary by research site, and by types of animals involved, but include both traditional social science ethnographic tools (such as participant observation, interviews, textual analysis) and more interdisciplinary approaches that draw on ethological insights and recognise that different species perceive the world somewhat differently to humans. In Pacini-Ketchabaw, Taylor, and Blaise (2016) study with dogs, this involved prioritising different sensorial experiences – such as smell – in an attempt to shift focus away from dominant human perspectives. This is extremely challenging, especially for tourism scholars schooled in traditional anthropocentric social science methods that favour notions of the detached researcher, producing 'rigorous', repeatable and generalizable results, but is necessary if we are to try and understand more about multispecies tourism experiences.

As with ethnography more broadly, multispecies ethnography recognises the value of unplanned research encounters and of small, local stories and embodied experiences to inform wider debates and discussions (Fujii, 2015). In the context of this study, multispecies ethnography involved participant observation based around lived, embodied experiences of holidaying with my horse (along with other horses and humans). Over the course of three years we went on four holidays, involving 2–3 nights staying away from our normal homes, in locations with appealing natural scenery for riding, such as beaches and moorland, and designated horse and human facilities (consisting of, at minimum, a field or turnout space for horse grazing, possibly a stable, and human lodgings). On the first of these trips I recognised how both my own and my (human) companions' experiences of being on holiday with our horses was different to our expectations, and highlighted aspects of our interspecies relationships in surprising ways that caused us to reflect on our ideas of what a fun holiday might actually be, for both ourselves and our horses. Consequently, on subsequent trips I adopted a more analytical approach and recorded fieldnotes to chronicle our experiences. Data were collected through numerous forms including through the use of a Go-Pro camera to record our rides visually, still photographs taken of the horses in their paddocks and stables, and a reflective narrative written after the trips occurred. As these were leisure trips, engaged in with friends, we have also discussed our experiences, memories and opinions of the holidays on numerous occasions, adding to my insights as presented below.

Human-nonhuman animal relationships are intensely personal, often based on deeply embodied interaction that is far removed from verbal communication, and so several researchers have found autoethnography to be a useful approach to trying to understand and express aspects of these more-than-human encounters (Harmon, 2019; Nottle & Young, 2019). Autoethnography – the practice of the researcher using his or her own experiences and reflections as the basis from which to explore wider social and cultural issues – has been used effectively to communicate various aspects of tourism experiences, and can be particularly suited to exploring emotional facets of tourism (Markula, 1997; Noy, 2008).

I have 'owned' my horse – Charlie - for over 15 years, and so we have developed a close and sustained relationship built on intimate knowledge and experience with each other in different contexts. He was 5 years old when we first met, still very young and at the beginning of his ridden career, and has been in my care ever since. Over this time we have interacted (almost) daily, both 'on the ground', in terms of routine horse care activities such as grooming and feeding, and during ridden exercise. Charlie lives at a specialised horse livery yard, close to my home, and I visit him most days for several hours. We have competed regularly in equestrian sport competitions over this period, initially in show jumping and lately more in dressage. This requires regular ridden training, both by ourselves (Charlie and I) and with our trainer (see Dashper, 2017). At the same time we 'hack out' several times a week, to intersperse this more relaxed ridden exercise with the formal training. We also take part in 'pleasure ride' events which involve hacking in new or different settings (see Dashper & Brymer, 2019). Hacking – riding out in open space, be that on roads, fields, forests, moorland etc. – is what we also do together on our holidays, as discussed below, and so we are both, as a horse-rider pair, habituated to hacking activities and being together in different environments. Charlie and I have been away for overnight stays (both holidays and for competition) most years, and we travel to competitions and events monthly, so he is used to travelling and being in novel environments. Charlie and I know each other well through this prolonged routine interaction. We communicate non-verbally and rarely seem to misunderstand each other. Very few other humans have ever ridden Charlie and so our interspecies ridden language has been developed together over 15 years of negotiation. This is important for our trust in each other and for our communication in times of stress or in novel, potentially scary (for Charlie, mainly) situations. Our communication and interspecies knowledge are difficult to put into words and depend on deep embodied awareness of each other. This embodied knowledge formed an important aspect of the research process.

Building on my former academic background in equine science, and my experiences of working in the equestrian industry, I attempted to deploy both my ethological knowledge and my senses to understand some of the reactions and behaviours of the horses in this study, through observations of their body language, interactions and responses. Madden (2014: 285) argues that "to treat animals seriously as ethnographic subjects we must do more than simply be with them, rather we should explore if there are ways to know what it feels like to be them." This is clearly complex, and to try and understand what it feels like to be another subject – even another human – is perhaps an impossible task, made more complex by a lack of shared verbal language between humans and other animals. However, just because we cannot talk verbally to animals does not mean we cannot communicate with them and so are absolved of any responsibility for trying to account for their experiences in our practices, including tourism, as well as in our research. People who spend significant time around individual animals learn to communicate effectively with them, to read their moods, assess their wants and dislikes, and many animals in turn can do the same with humans. As ethologist Marc Bekoff (2006: 123) argues, "what people sense is likely what animals are feeling". Sustained experience of being around horses – both Charlie and many others – backed up by academic knowledge of horse behaviour, enables me to claim to know, to some extent at least, what the horses were 'feeling' at various times over the course of our multispecies holidays. I observed, listened to and felt their responses, and interpreted their meaning based on broader equine science insights and my own embodied experiences. I cannot know all they felt at any time, but I can know some of it. Therefore, although I exercise caution in claiming to 'speak for' the horses in this study, careful informed analysis and close interaction and knowledge means that my accounts, offered below, represent at least a partial picture of their/our experiences.

Drawing on the traditions of evocative (auto)ethnography (Ellis, 2004), the following sections present two narratives that draw together many of the issues observed, experienced and discussed over the course of this project. In addition to reviewing the reflective narrative fieldnotes, photographs and Go-Pro videos collected on the holidays, I also relied on 'headnotes' – memories, experiences and impressions of those experiences - which Wall (2008) suggests may sometimes be more important than formal fieldnotes in constructing narratives. I engaged in the practice of systematic sociological introspection (Ellis, 1991) to imagine myself back in those experiences and the emotions and sensations that were important to providing meaning to those experiences.

Through these processes I tried to select encounters and occasions which reflected the broader felt experiences of these multispecies holidays. Within both ethnography and autoethnography, writing – graphy – is an important consideration and *how* we choose to represent our research findings has an impact on the messages we can communicate and how they will be received. This may be particularly important in multispecies ethnography where we attempt to communicate something of the embodied richness of our interspecies encounters – relationships that occur largely outside of human verbal language, but which must be condensed down into the traditional academic written article.

The narratives presented have been crafted based on multiple experiences, and in conversation with other (human) participants in the study, to offer the reader - who may have little personal knowledge and experience of being around horses - some sense of these encounters. The narratives were thus created specifically for this paper, based on the multiple practices and considerations discussed above. I sought to offer 'narrative truth' (Ellis, 2000) to try and evoke some sense of these multispecies experiences within the reader, and to act as a springboard for subsequent discussions about multispecies tourism. Issues of data trustworthiness are integral to rigour in all research, but the criteria for assessing such trustworthiness differ with research approach and paradigm. Bochner (2000) argues that such criteria are not value-free and can often constrain researchers through focus on narrow questions of validity rather than asking if our work is meaningful and to whom. In this study I drew on criteria developed in relation to auto/ethnography, such as trying to 'show' rather than 'tell', to offer the reader some insight into the lived experiences of these multispecies holidays (see Ellis, 2000; Herrmann, 2012; Richardson, 2000).

Ethics run through all research projects, and perhaps are particularly important when we attempt to represent those who cannot represent themselves (at least in academic writing), as is the case with nonhuman animals (see also Ellis, 2007). I have attempted to offer fair representations of these multispecies experiences, checking them with other human participants for their view on the sense of 'narrative truth' that was being portrayed (Ellis, 2000), but I acknowledge that, as with all research, these are my narratives and so present a partial, if illuminating, account of holidays with my horse.

5. Findings: holidays with my horse

The following narratives give the reader a sense of two different multispecies holidays: one at a beach, one in the quintessential English countryside. For the beach holiday we stayed at a dedicated horse farm that had extensive equestrian facilities, including stables, paddocks, a cross country jumping course and indoor and outdoor riding arenas. Each horse was provided with a stable and a small rectangular paddock, secured by electric fencing. Hay and straw were available. The humans stayed on site in static caravans. For the countryside holiday the humans stayed in a pub/inn. We made arrangements with a local farmer to use one of his fields, just around the corner from the pub, with no additional facilities (Figs. 1 and 2).

5.1. Holiday one: Galloping along the beach

As we walk the mile-long path down to the beach from the farm the horses are alert to their different surroundings, heads held high and ears pricked as they catch the salty scent of the sea air. Our pace quickens as we approach the sand dunes and I smile in anticipation. I've been looking forward to this for weeks. Then Charlie stops dead, frozen to the spot at the edge of the sand. No, he seems to say, I don't think I want to walk on that. Dude walks past him, steps on the sand, but then rushes backwards. What is that?! Charlie pulls on the reins, turns his head back in the direction we came from; let's just go back. Luckily Dancer marches past them and confidently up the dunes. The boys follow meekly behind and we're on the beach!

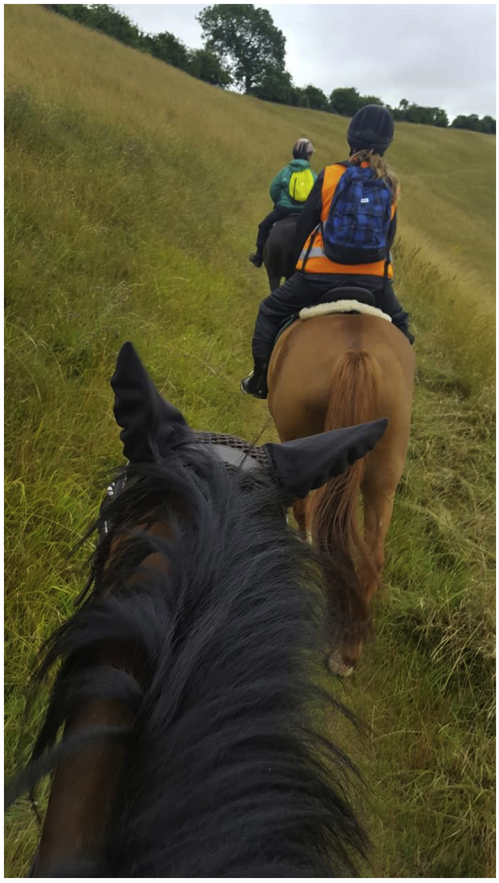

Fig. 1. Out on a ride.

After walking cautiously across the sand for a while we pick up a trot and then a steady canter. I smile, relaxing into the rhythm, as the wide beach opens up before us. Then, suddenly, we've stopped dead again, and I have to work hard to keep from shooting over Charlie's shoulder and into the stream of water running in front of us, down towards the sea. He snorts and shakes his head. He stretches down and sniffs suspiciously at the salty water. Come on, I say, it's only water. He lets out a deep sigh, and steps cautiously into the shallow stream.

After the initial trepidation, the horses do seem to relax and before too long we are galloping across the sand, three abreast, hooves hammering and our eyes streaming. We feel like we're going on forever as the sand and sky seem to merge on the horizon. The flatness of the terrain and the wide open space encourage the horses to open their strides and power across the sand. We let them go as fast as they like, our exhilarated laughter carried away by the wind.

Back at the farm that evening we're still buzzing, remembering the feeling of power and freedom. After washing the salt, sand and sweat from the horses we turned them out in the small individual paddocks, hoping they can graze even though there is very little grass available. Before dinner we go to bring them into the stables. They're keen to come in, rushing past the electric fencing and heading straight for their full nets of hay, hungry after their exertions and the lack of grass available in the paddocks. We leave them, munching contentedly, and head back to our caravan for a glass of wine.

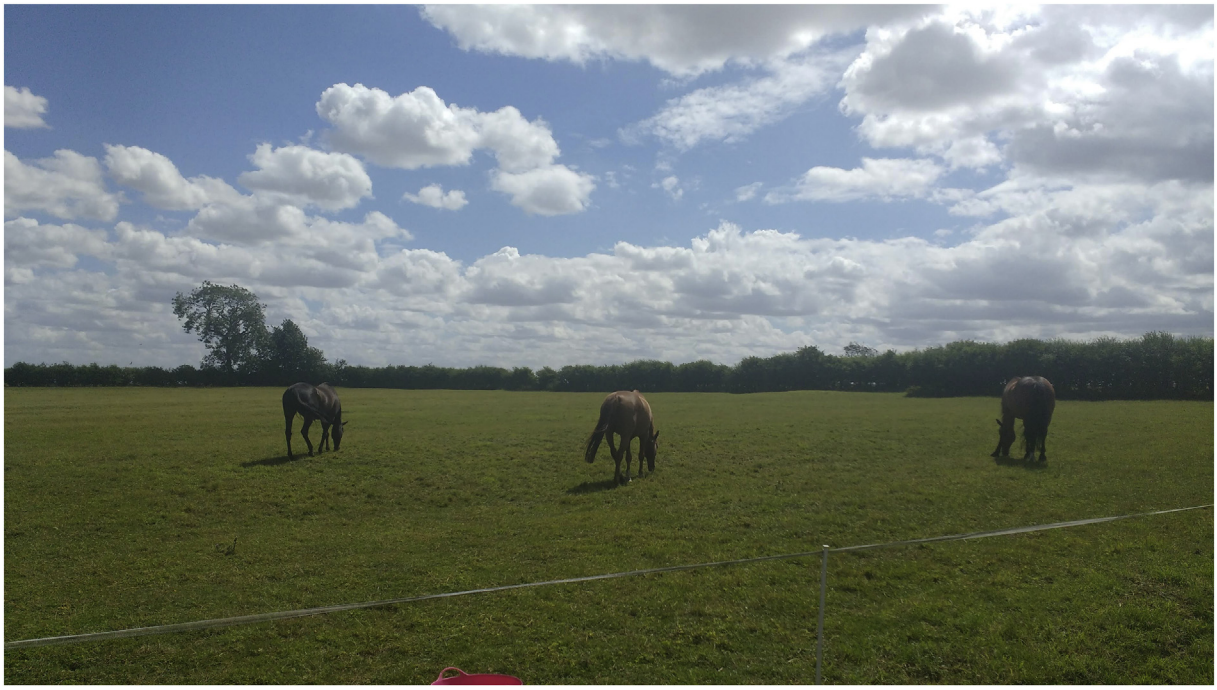

Fig. 2. Horses grazing in the field.

5.2. Holiday two: escape to the countryside

We park up the horse boxes next to a fence and stand looking amazed for a minute at the huge field in front of us, lush with grass even after the dry summer. The horses are going to love this. We lower the ramps and unload them from the wagons. Charlie is on his toes, grown taller than normal and dancing around me, whinnying in excitement. We lead them into the field, release their headcollars and stand back to watch. They're still for a moment, looking around, ears pricked, and then as if at a secret signal they all take off. They're running round the large field, surveying their home for the next few days, stopping sometimes to sniff the grass, then taking off again. Dude gets down to roll on the ground, before rushing back to his feet and running to the others, kicking his heels into the air as he goes. Charlie and Dancer are moving in unison, circling, crossing tracks, stopping to nuzzle each other, before setting off again squealing in delight. When they finally settle down to graze we head to our accommodation around the corner, at the local pub.

Later, we are out on our first trek of the holiday, taking in the stunning scenery of rolling hills, moors and grassland. The horses are confident and relaxed, in this unknown but still familiar environment. Charlie has a spring in his step as he walks along, and as we turn onto a stretch of grassland he effortlessly picks up a powerful but steady canter, covering the ground in unison with the others. We follow the track, winding our way under branches and jumping the odd little bush or ditch, and come to an easy stop at the end of the field. For hours we explore the countryside, passing through picturesque villages, lush grassland valleys, hills and forests. We cross streams with no hesitation from the horses, who confidently step into the water with only a slight glance, and stride out positively, shifting between paces almost without being asked, tuned into our commands, each other and their surroundings.

When we get back to the field we take their tack off, give them a quick brush down and let them back through the gate to enjoy the feast of grass before them. Again, they take off together, for a shorter run this time but still showing their ecstasy at this simple, horse-friendly space they can enjoy with each other. We leave them, grazing nose to nose, and head back to our accommodation.

6. Discussion

The narratives presented above raise some important issues associated with multispecies tourism, which are discussed in this section. The practical aspects of any holiday are important; facilities need to be suitable for the participants, travel arrangements need to be put in place, entertainment and other services need to be planned and enjoyed. The wider literature on multispecies tourism has highlighted practical constraints as a major factor in why people may choose not to holiday with an animal, as hotels, airlines and other facilities are rarely well set-up to accommodate nonhuman travellers (Carr & Cohen, 2009). As indicated in the narratives presented above equine facilities vary widely, ranging from highly specialised locations to simple spaces. What is considered 'good' facilities will vary depending on who is doing the judgement. The horse farm in Holiday One certainly provided more extensive facilities, and catered to the needs of equine and human guests, but it was the much simpler facilities in Holiday Two – basically just a large field with plenty of grass – that resulted in happier, more relaxed nonhuman travellers (and consequently their human companions). This points to an important issue in relation to multispecies tourism: who are facilities aimed at, the nonhuman traveller, or the paying human guest? If it is the second, the human, then the extensive facilities in Holiday One are more likely to result in high satisfaction levels, as there was an array of equipment and facilities to support the human in looking after the animal. However, if the focus is more on the needs and wants of the nonhuman traveller then the simple provision in Holiday Two is much more effective as it caters for the core needs of those animals. Service providers need to consider who they target facilities at (human or nonhuman) and how to balance provision to try and suit both groups.

However, holidaying with a 'pet' or companion animal like a horse is about much more than just the practical, logistical factors associated with travel and accommodation. These kinds of multispecies tourism experiences are based around close bonds built through intimate knowledge of each other, and these pre-existing relationships form an important aspect of the tourism encounter. The simple facilities offered

in Holiday Two were clearly preferred by the horses, as observations of their behaviour revealed, and so although the facilities in Holiday One were more attractive to the human eye, we were happy to see the joy and relaxation of our horses on Holiday Two and so were also more content with those facilities. Our pre-existing relationships with our horses meant that we could recognise their preferences and so were more relaxed when we realised they too were happy in their surroundings. This carried over into the core activity of these holidays: riding. Horses are creatures of habit who thrive on routine and familiarity (Keaveney, 2008), so taking them away to a new location has potential to unsettle them. This was particularly apparent in Holiday One, where the horses were cautious and uncertain when they first encountered the unfamiliar territory of the beach. This led to behavioural responses which indicated their anxiety – such as stopping and going backwards. As riders/'owners' we worked with our horses to overcome their initial anxieties, and did manage to get to a situation where we all – horses and humans – relaxed and settled into the beach environment. This was facilitated through our prior relationships which meant the horses were more likely to trust us (Gilbert, 2014), and we were able to manage them in such a way as to reach our human dream of freely galloping across the sand. The relationships between horses and riders, as well as between the human participants themselves, were fundamental to overcoming any obstacles or anxieties. Galloping along the beach is indeed a dream for many horse riders, as acknowledged in the promotional materials of the horse farm in Holiday One. However, galloping along the beach *on your own horse* is that little bit more special than hiring an unknown animal to borrow for the experience. Achieving this *together* makes the experience all the more extraordinary, especially when this involves overcoming setbacks as we did on our initial arrival at the beach. Consequently, multispecies holidays – as with other tourism activities – are built around experiences, and these are often based upon the relationships between people and other animals. Multispecies tourism needs to build on these relationships to try and create memorable and rewarding experiences.

The narratives presented above raise some interesting conceptual issues. I have described these experiences as 'holidays', but is this a holiday for everyone involved? Certainly for me and the other human participants these were wonderful holidays; space away from our usual routines and locations, spending time with friends and our beloved horses engaging in our hobby – riding – in beautiful surroundings. But was this was a holiday for our horses? Certainly not. Dashper (2017) points out that riding is considered 'work' for horses, and on a horse-based holiday it is likely that the horse may actually 'work' for longer than normal. For example in Holiday Two the horses were ridden for approximately five hours a day, in comparison to their normal one to two hours work at home. At the same time, while the human guests enjoyed the novelty of new surroundings and unusual environments to both ride through and stay in, horses prefer familiarity and will have found the different settings potentially stressful, as their behaviour at times indicated. A holiday for the horses would really involve staying in their own home environment, not having to 'work' (be ridden) and enjoying time grazing in the field with other familiar horses; almost the opposite to the multispecies tourism experiences described above.

This shows the importance of acknowledging that a holiday for one individual depends on the work of others, and those others may be nonhuman co-travellers. Ivanov (2018) points out that tourism is a human concept, even though nonhumans are often involved. He uses the phrase 'nonhuman traveller', rather than tourist, to denote 'pets', toys and robots and this distinction is important. Nonhumans are not tourists, in the sense that people are, as they do not make the decision to engage in these activities, select where to go and what to do, and although they may enjoy aspects of the experience (such as the horses in Holiday Two enjoying being in the large field) they do not seek out these experiences as a form of escape and relaxation, as human tourists do. These are not holidays for the animals, even if they contain some pleasurable moments which develop from the relationships they have with their human and nonhuman companions, or the environment in which they find themselves. Therefore although these experiences can usefully be described as 'multispecies tourism' this is tourism for humans only, and nonhumans are there as a result of human decisions to satisfy human needs. This raises complex questions about the ethics of involving animals in our pleasure in these ways, and points to the need to ensure that we try, as far as possible, to ensure the physical, social, relational, and emotional needs of nonhuman travellers are accounted for in order to reduce stress and anxiety.

This relates to the issues discussed above regarding the agency of nonhuman animals, or - perhaps more accurately - their capacity to affect situations. Carter and Charles (2013) adopt a relational view of agency that sees agency as inherently social and shaped by wider structures of power. All nonhuman animals are disadvantaged by their position within a world heavily skewed towards human interests and priorities, and this affects their capacity to act and bring about change, as they are often reliant on human responses to those actions. The horses in the narratives above are positioned within the human-defined frameworks of both companion animal 'ownership' and tourism, which affect their capacity to act. They were able to express preferences – such as not wanting to walk on the sand at the beach – and to express some agency to change things – such as backing up and turning away from the beach. However, their status as 'our horses' meant that our human interests – wanting to ride on the beach – took precedence and so we limited their (horse) agency and required them to walk onto the beach. The human-centric discourse of tourism suggested that we, as carefree human holiday-makers, should enjoy our experience of galloping across the sand, regardless of our horses' wishes to do so or not. Consequently, the effectiveness of animal actions to bring about change is heavily dependent on human responses to those actions which often curtail nonhuman animal agency.

Our horses, as presented in these narratives here, could be considered relatively privileged nonhuman animals in the context of human-dominated worlds, and not all nonhuman animals, or indeed all horses, will experience multispecies tourism in such ways. Horses involved in commercial tourism organisations, such as trail-riding horses, may have more severe limits placed on their agency in order to ensure they conform with human-defined organisational goals and tourist demands (Dashper, 2020). 'Pets' may also suffer restrictions on their agency and ability to withdraw from or shape tourism experiences. While dogs may become accustomed to travelling with their 'owner' and attending tourism attractions, this is not without stress for the dog (and sometimes 'owner') as many attractions do not cater for nonhuman guests and may lack appropriate facilities (Carr & Cohen, 2009). Other humans may react negatively to the presence of dogs in tourism spaces (Hung et al., 2016). In such contexts the dog (or, less frequently, cat or other 'pet') may have to endure an uncomfortable and potentially stressful situation from which they cannot choose to disconnect. Non-domesticated animals, such as elephants, may suffer even more severe restrictions in their interactions with humans through tourism, as when in captive situations their 'normal' behaviours will be heavily restricted by human demands and expectations (Dashper, in press; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009). Consequently, in considerations of multispecies travel and tourism, the agency of nonhuman animals, their capacity to effectively bring about change in the context of human-dominated settings and the power relations inherent in these practices need to be further examined.

Although I would argue that the stories presented above did not represent holidays for the horses involved, there were pleasurable aspects of these experiences for them. One of the key enjoyable factors was clearly the presence of other, familiar horses. In Holiday One the horses gained confidence from each other, with Charlie following his friend onto the beach after his initial hesitation. They settled down in large part because of the opportunity to gallop together, matching each other's paces and falling into rhythm. In Holiday Two they delighted in each other's company in the field, enjoying the opportunity to graze and

relax together. Therefore, although the horses cannot be classified as tourists, in the sense that the human participants are, and are not really on holiday in the way we were, the presence of other familiar creatures of their own species was important for their experiences and for beginning to balance – at least to a limited extent – some of the complex power relations inherent in multispecies tourism. As social animals, horses enjoy the company of other, familiar horses. Ensuring that they had this company whilst away on our holiday went some way to maximising their well-being and providing them with some enjoyment.

Multispecies tourism is complex, and the discussion here illustrates that experiences can vary widely. In the final section I consider some of the implications of these findings for understanding multispecies tourism.

7. Conclusions

Multispecies tourism is a growing niche, reflecting the importance we often place on our 'pets' and companion animals who we want to include in special activities, like holidays. In some ways, holidaying with a 'pet' is similar to holidaying with any other family member, as issues of emotion and companionship, annoyance and delight can all come to the fore. However, 'pets' are not quite full family members, and this becomes apparent in the context of tourism where the activity itself is built around very human-centric concepts and practices that prioritise human needs and desires. The topic of multispecies tourism is in its early stages of development, but this paper makes two important contributions to the field.

First, the paper illustrates the need to (re)examine theoretical frameworks for understanding tourism, and for problematizing some of the central, often take-for-granted, concepts and ideas around which the field of tourism studies is based. The multispecies holidays presented here indicate the importance of relationships to understanding these practices, why they matter to people, what can make them successful and what might cause failure. Relationships, trust and emotion are at the centre of human-companion animal bonds, and must be considered in future research on multispecies tourism. Further, consideration of nonhuman travellers, their roles, needs and behaviours, helps draw attention to implicit assumptions in tourism theory, such as what is meant by a 'holiday' and who can be considered a 'tourist'. If nonhuman travellers cannot be considered as true tourists, or as 'on holiday', this can provoke deeper critical reflection on those terms, who is included and excluded, and the consequences of our pleasure-seeking tourism activities on others.

Second, the paper shows the importance of acknowledging the power relations inherent in contemporary practices of tourism. All sentient beings have some degree of agency, but the ability to act to bring about change in circumstances is contingent on the individual's position within a human-centric world. Nonhuman animals are vulnerable within tourism as their experiences are dependent on where they sit in relation to humans, and they are subject to human whim, expectations and desires. Animals cannot choose to be involved in tourism, and cannot understand the terms of their involvement or the wider contexts of their practice. Subsequently they are reliant on humans to treat them with respect and consideration, but remain vulnerable to having their interests disregarded and possible abuse and exploitation. The horses in the narratives presented in this paper may have experienced only mild infringements on their agency, but they did have to do what humans demanded in the context of human-centric practices, and other animals will suffer far greater restrictions which often result in mistreatment and reductions in welfare. Consequently, all discussions of multispecies tourism need to consider the power relations inherent in these practices, and the vulnerability of nonhuman travellers in the context of the anthropocentric world of tourism.

In this study I tried to remain cognisant of these issues and to give the horses at least a limited 'voice' yet I am aware that this has been at best only partially successful. Human perspectives and interpretations dominate, and the horses' responses and behaviours are given significance only in relation to their implications in terms of human-centric goals and priorities. As other researchers have acknowledged it is extremely difficult to move beyond anthropocentric research paradigms and practices, especially when we are constrained by academic practices which favour the written word (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2016). However, this is not an excuse to not even try. There is need to go much further in our attempts to understand the experiences of other animals within tourism, and to develop more innovative methods to try and capture something of nonhuman experiences. Multispecies ethnography attempts to begin to do this, as I have here in this paper, but this needs to go further if we are to try and understand nonhuman experiences at least partly on their own terms. This will involve more interdisciplinary work, between ethologists and social scientists, amongst other disciplines, and more creative formats than the traditional academic article. Tourism remains a human practice; it is understood by and actively participated in only by humans. However, tourism involves nonhumans in a variety of ways, whether they be companions, service providers or attractions. Tourism research needs to acknowledge that, in many ways, tourism is moving beyond humans and our practices, methods and conceptual apparatus may also require radical rethinking to account for the complexities of more-than-human worlds.

Funding

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Author credit

The author is responsible for all aspects of the article.

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