

Ecotourism Engagement and Community Wellness: The Moderating Role of Cultural Factors in SVD Laudato Si' Farm, Tagaytay

Shane B. Bobadilla, Alyssa Mae B. Arintoc, Cristine T. Caromayan, Jeremy Joshua Celindro,
Karylle B. Paraiso, Merlyn M. Pascual, April Abby O. Sulbuan, Kathline Mae Bayabay*,
Aljevin A. Comiso, Anderson Ray C. Arcadio

Department of Hospitality and Tourism Studies, Cavite State University- General Trias Campus,
Cavite, Philippines

*Corresponding Author Email: kathline.bayabay@cvsu.edu.ph

Date received: September 9, 2025

Date revised: October 17, 2025

Date accepted: November 4, 2025

Originality: 93%

Grammarly Score: 99%

Similarity: 7%

Recommended citation:

Bobadilla, S., Arintoc, A.M., Caromayan, C., Celindro, J.J., Paraiso, K., Pascual, M., Sulbuan, A.A., Bayabay, K.M., Comiso, A., & Arcadio, A.R. (2025). Ecotourism engagement and community wellness: The moderating role of cultural factors in SVD Laudato Si' Farm, Tagaytay. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, 3(12), 27-34. <https://doi.org/10.69569/jip.2025.661>

Abstract. Despite the growing popularity of eco-tourism, limited research examines how it contributes to community well-being when cultural factors are considered. This study aimed to investigate the relationship between eco-tourism engagement and community well-being, and to determine whether cultural factors influence this relationship. A quantitative correlational design was employed, involving 317 tourist respondents at SVD Laudato Si' Farm in Tagaytay, selected through simple random sampling. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, regression, and moderation analysis. The findings revealed high levels of eco-tourism awareness and participation, along with strong perceptions of physical and mental well-being among the respondents. Results further indicated a significant positive correlation between eco-tourism engagement and community wellness. Moderation analysis revealed that traditions slightly weakened this relationship, while beliefs and community values showed no significant moderating effects. The study concludes that eco-tourism enhances community wellness when it aligns with local cultural contexts. These findings underscore the importance of culturally grounded and inclusive eco-tourism initiatives to foster both community health and heritage preservation.

Keywords: Ecotourism engagement; Community wellness; Cultural factors; Descriptive correlational design; Philippines.

1.0 Introduction

Ecotourism plays a crucial role in promoting sustainable development by integrating environmental conservation, economic growth, and cultural preservation, particularly in community-based initiatives (Manalo et al., 2024). In the Philippines, it fosters environmental awareness and economic resilience, especially in rural areas where nature-based tourism supports local livelihoods (Gabriel, 2022; Castillo, 2024). Community participation ensures that tourism initiatives align with local needs and cultural values (Cabaguino, 2024). However, challenges such as weak policy implementation and sustainability issues underscore the need for stronger environmental management and community-led practices (De Jose, 2024).

Beyond its ecological and economic contributions, ecotourism also enhances community wellness. According to Jimenez et al. (2024), the rise of wellness tourism reflects a global response to modern lifestyles marked by stress and disconnection. Activities such as nature immersion, healthy eating, and spiritual reflection can improve both physical and mental well-being (Lopes & Rodríguez-López, 2022). The SVD Laudato Si' Farm in Tagaytay exemplifies this approach by integrating environmental education, organic farming, and spiritual renewal. Through reflection, ecological engagement, and farm-to-table experiences, it promotes holistic wellness and sustainable living (Yap, 2023; Gutierrez et al., 2024).

Cultural preservation is another essential dimension of ecotourism. It allows communities to share their traditions, beliefs, and values with visitors, thereby reinforcing identity and pride. Liangco (2023) highlighted how cultural elements influence community participation and perception in tourism initiatives, while Aguilar and Domasian (2023) noted that festivals, rituals, and storytelling enhance both community pride and visitor experience. Similarly, Verances et al. (2021) demonstrated that combining traditional practices with sustainability initiatives creates economic opportunities and safeguards cultural heritage. Also, Venegas (2024) further emphasized that traditional ecological knowledge aligns with global sustainability goals, reinforcing culture as a cornerstone of long-term ecotourism success.

Despite these findings, a clear research gap remains. While prior studies have discussed the environmental and economic benefits of ecotourism, limited attention has been given to its role in promoting community wellness—especially when cultural factors are at play. Existing research often treats wellness tourism and sustainable tourism as separate domains, overlooking the intersectional impact on health, quality of life, and social cohesion (Mathew & Pillai, 2021; Díaz, 2022). Addressing this gap is crucial, especially in developing communities where tourism can serve as both an economic driver and a catalyst for improved well-being.

This study, therefore, aims to examine the relationship between ecotourism engagement and community wellness at SVD Laudato Si' Farm in Tagaytay, with a focus on the moderating role of cultural factors. By integrating wellness and cultural perspectives into ecotourism research, it offers new insights into how tourism can promote holistic, sustainable community development. Furthermore, the study supports Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) and 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) by emphasizing tourism's potential to enhance community well-being while preserving cultural identity.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study employs a quantitative correlational research design to investigate the relationship between ecotourism engagement and community well-being at the SVD Laudato Si' Farm in Tagaytay. Using structured survey instruments, data were collected directly from participants who were either directly involved in or affected by ecotourism activities. The quantitative approach enables the researcher to objectively measure the degree of association between ecotourism engagement and perceived wellness at the community level. This design is appropriate for identifying patterns and determining whether a statistically significant relationship exists between the two variables. As noted by Truong et al. (2020), a quantitative approach is practical for identifying key factors and confirming their significance in analyzing community perceptions of tourism impacts.

In addition to examining the direct relationship, the study introduces cultural factors as a moderating variable. The purpose of this component is to investigate whether the influence of eco-tourism engagement on community wellness is affected by the cultural context in which it occurs. By incorporating moderation analysis, the study aims to offer deeper insights into the variability of outcomes across different cultural backgrounds. Statistical techniques, such as multiple regression analysis, were used to test for interaction effects, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of how culture shapes the relationship between eco-tourism and community well-being. This approach is supported by He et al. (2022), who examined the moderating role of cultural factors in shaping tourists' behaviors and their engagement in eco-tourism, emphasizing the significant influence of cultural context on tourism-related outcomes.

2.2 Participants and Sampling Technique

The population of this study consists exclusively of tourists visiting SVD Laudato Si' Farm in Tagaytay, as they are the primary participants engaged in ecotourism activities on the site. To ensure the reliability and generalizability of the results, the study adopted simple random sampling, a probability-based method that

guarantees each tourist has an equal chance of being selected, thereby reducing selection bias and enhancing the representativeness of the sample. An actual sample of 317 respondents was selected to provide a reliable basis for analyzing the study's key variables. This number is intended to capture a broad range of tourist perspectives, enabling meaningful insights into the underlying factors and correlations in the data. Through this sampling strategy, the study aims to obtain high-quality, unbiased data that represent the broader tourist population at SVD Laudato Si' Farm.

The inclusion criteria required that participants be tourists aged 18 years or older who visited the farm during the data collection period and voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. The exclusion criteria included individuals below 18 years old, non-tourists such as farm staff or residents, and those who refused to provide informed consent.

2.3 Research Instrument

The research used an adapted questionnaire to assess Ecotourism Engagement, Community Wellness, and Cultural Factors, ensuring alignment with the study's objectives. The instrument consisted of four (4) sections: Part I collected demographic information, including an optional name, age, and sex, to understand the respondents' background. Part II focused on ecotourism engagement, addressing both awareness and frequency of participation in ecotourism activities, and included six (6) statements based on the frameworks established by Tian, Z., Guo, Y., & Zhang, Y. (2018) and Marahatta, D., & Devkota, H. (2024). Part III contained six (6) statements evaluating community wellness, encompassing both physical and mental health, developed based on the works of Somanchi, H. (2023) and Brimer, E., & Davids, K. (2014). Part IV explored cultural factors such as traditions, beliefs, and community values through nine (9) statements guided by the study of Gutierrez, J., Mendoza, J.K., Cercado, J., and Paganao, S., Jr. (2024). All items were measured using a 4-point Likert scale to capture varying degrees of agreement or disagreement. The instrument's overall reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.89, indicating excellent internal consistency. This comprehensive instrument enabled the study to effectively capture the relationships and moderating role of cultural factors in SVD Laudato Si' Farm, Tagaytay.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers conducted on-site, face-to-face data collection at SVD Laudato Si' Farm in Tagaytay. A structured, paper-based survey was distributed to tourists who were actively participating in ecotourism activities at the location. Data collection was conducted over a defined period during operational hours to ensure access to a diverse and representative group of respondents. Participants were selected using simple random sampling, allowing each individual an equal chance of being chosen. Before answering the survey, all participants were informed about the study's purpose and provided voluntary informed consent. After data collection, responses were compiled and organized for analysis. The researchers employed appropriate statistical tools, including frequency and percentage counts, mean and standard deviation, Pearson correlation, regression analysis, and moderation analysis, as needed to address the specific research problems. The results were presented using tables and narrative interpretations to highlight patterns, relationships, and key findings.

2.5 Data Analysis Procedure

The responses gathered from the structured survey were analyzed using quantitative methods. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages, were used to interpret the demographic profile of the respondents. To assess the levels of ecotourism engagement, community wellness, and cultural factors, the researchers used mean and standard deviation to determine the central tendency and variability of the responses. To examine the relationship between ecotourism engagement and community wellness, Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation was used to assess the strength and direction of the relationship. At the same time, Regression Analysis was conducted to determine the predictive effect of ecotourism engagement on community wellness.

Furthermore, Moderation Analysis was used to test whether cultural factors — specifically traditions, beliefs, and community values — moderated the relationship between the two variables. In terms of validity, the questionnaire was adapted from previously validated studies to ensure alignment with the study's objectives. The reliability of the data was strengthened through the use of a consistent Likert scale and expert review by a statistician. The ethical collection of data, random sampling, and accurate statistical analysis supported the overall trustworthiness of the study.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted responsibly and courteously, prioritizing respondents' privacy. Participation was voluntary and informed, with participants provided with information on the study's objectives, methodology, potential risks, and benefits. Respondents' consent was obtained prior to data collection to ensure they understood the research's goals and scope. The researchers also ensured that respondents were informed of their rights, including the ability to withdraw from the study at any moment without penalty or loss of rewards.

To guarantee anonymity and confidentiality, and to avoid potential harm, all information was handled confidentially, with respondents' names and identities withheld, in accordance with RA 10173, the Data Privacy Act. As part of the commitment to data protection, the researchers respected data subjects' rights, including the right to erasure. To further protect respondent data, all acquired data were retained for 160 days before being permanently deleted. The researchers used rigorous protections throughout the research process to prevent unauthorized access, disclosure, or use of respondent data.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Demographic Data

Table 1 presents the age distribution of the 317 respondents at SVD Laudato Si' Farm in Tagaytay: 41% (n = 131) are aged 18–24, 22% (n = 70) are 25–34, 18% (n = 57) are 35–44, 12% (n = 37) are 45–54, and 7% (n = 22) are 55–64.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents in Terms of Age (n=317)

Age	Frequency	Percentage
18-24 years old	131	41.00
25-34 years old	70	22.00
35-44 years old	57	18.00
45-54 years old	37	12.00
55-64 years old	22	7.00

With over 60% of participants being 34 or younger, the study primarily captures the perspectives and experiences of a younger demographic. This element could shape findings on ecotourism engagement and community wellness, as younger individuals generally show a greater inclination toward environmental awareness and ecotourism activities.

Table 2 presents the distribution of respondents by sex among the 317 participants at SVD Laudato Si' Farm, Tagaytay: 63% (n = 201) are female, 36% (n = 115) are male, and 1% (n = 1) preferred not to disclose their sex.

Table 2. Demographic Profile of the Respondents in Terms of Age (n=317)

Age	Frequency	Percentage
Male	115	36.00
Female	201	63.00
Prefer not to say	1	1.00

The sample thus has a higher representation of females, a factor that may shape the study's outcomes, since gender differences can influence engagement with ecotourism and perceptions of community wellness. Recognizing this skew toward female participants is important when interpreting the findings, as the results may primarily reflect women's experiences.

3.2 Level of Ecotourism Engagement

Table 3 summarizes respondents' self-reported levels of ecotourism engagement at SVD Laudato Si' Farm, showing strong familiarity and positive attitudes towards ecotourism. Respondents demonstrated a solid understanding of ecotourism's benefits, with an overall mean awareness score of 3.60 (SD = 0.51) and participation score of 3.64 (SD = 0.46). The combined level of ecotourism engagement yielded a mean score of 3.62 (SD = 0.45), reflecting a well-informed and actively engaged population. This engagement aligns with research emphasizing the crucial role of community involvement in successful ecotourism (Kumar et al., 2023; Kia, 2021), which promotes environmental stewardship, sustainable resource management, and socio-economic benefits. Sustained educational programs are vital for long-term viability, underscoring the need to continuously enhance educational outreach and participatory opportunities to deepen community involvement and amplify the positive effects of ecotourism (Gumede & Nzama, 2022).

Table 3. *Level of Ecotourism Engagement Among Respondents at SVD Laudato Si' Farm, Tagaytay*

Dimensions	Mean	SD	Interpretation
I am familiar with the concept of ecotourism and its benefits to the environment and local communities.	3.56	0.61	Very High
I understand that ecotourism, including visits to farms like SVD Laudato Farm, helps promote sustainable farming practices and environmental education.	3.66	0.53	Very High
I am aware that SVD Laudato Si' Farm offers ecotourism experiences that promote environmental awareness and cultural heritage.	3.56	0.67	Very High
Ecotourism Awareness	3.60	0.51	Very High
I would be interested in participating in ecotourism activities at SVD Si' Laudato Farm, such as farm tours, nature walks, or environmental education programs.	3.55	0.60	Very High
I believe that participating in ecotourism at SVD Laudato Si' Farm provides valuable learning experiences about sustainability, agriculture, and conservation.	3.68	0.50	Very High
I would recommend ecotourism experiences at SVD Laudato Si' Farm to others who are interested in environmental education and sustainable farming practices.	3.70	0.51	Very High
Ecotourism Participation	3.64	0.46	Very High
Level Of Ecotourism Engagement	3.62	0.45	Very High

Note: 3.25-4.00: Very; 2.50-3.24: High; 1.75-2.49: Low; 1.00-1.74: Very Low

3.3 Perceived Community Wellness

Table 4 presents descriptive statistics on respondents' perceptions of community wellness at SVD Laudato Si' Farm, focusing on physical health benefits and mental well-being. Mean scores range from 3.59 to 3.67 on a 4-point scale, indicating strong agreement with the positive health impacts of ecotourism. For physical health, respondents affirm improved well-being through farm visits ($M = 3.63$ – 3.66), including increased physical activity.

Table 4. *Perceived Community Wellness Among Respondents at SVD Laudato Si' Farm, Tagaytay*

Dimensions	Mean	SD	Interpretation
I believe participating in ecotourism activities at places like SVD Laudato Si' Farm improves my physical health.	3.63	0.55	Very High
Visiting farm like SVD Laudato Si' Farm provides opportunities for outdoor physical activities that promote health.	3.66	0.51	Very High
I feel more physically active after participating in ecotourism activities, especially those at farms like SVD Laudato Si' Farm.	3.59	0.59	Very High
Physical Health Benefits	3.63	0.48	Very High
I believe ecotourism activities at farms like SVD Laudato Si' Farm help reduce my stress levels.	3.67	0.52	Very High
I feel more relaxed and at peace when participating in ecotourism activities at SVD Laudato Si' Farm.	3.67	0.54	Very High
Participating in ecotourism activities at SVD Laudato Si' Farm helps me feel more connected to nature and increases my sense of mental well-being.	3.66	0.53	Very High
Mental Well-Being	3.66	0.47	Very High
Perceived Community Wellness	3.65	0.43	Very High

Note: 3.25-4.00: Very; 2.50-3.24: High; 1.75-2.49: Low; 1.00-1.74: Very Low

($M = 3.59$), with an overall mean of 3.63 ($SD = 0.48$). This supports evidence that nature-based ecotourism enhances environmental and cultural engagement while also strengthening social support and health outcomes in vulnerable communities (Ziegler et al., 2020).

3.4 Perceived Cultural Factors

Table 5 presents descriptive statistics on respondents' perceptions of cultural factors at SVD Laudato Si' Farm, focusing on traditions, beliefs, and community values. Mean scores range from 3.57 to 3.70 on a 4-point scale, reflecting strong agreement on the presence and importance of these elements. For traditions, respondents report the farm preserves local customs ($M = 3.57$ – 3.62), with an overall mean of 3.59 ($SD = 0.48$), indicating strong cultural continuity. Beliefs are also highly rated ($M = 3.59$ – 3.65 ; $M = 3.61$ overall, $SD = 0.48$), affirming the farm's emphasis on stewardship and faith-based values.

Community values received the highest ratings ($M = 3.62$ – 3.70 ; $M = 3.65$ overall, $SD = 0.46$), indicating strong social integration, cooperation, and inclusivity, and suggesting that strong cultural foundations foster positive attitudes toward ecotourism and enhance sustainable development outcomes (Angessa et al., 2022).

Table 5. *Perceived Cultural Factors Among Respondents at SVD Laudato Si' Farm, Tagaytay*

Dimensions	Mean	SD	Interpretation
The SVD Laudato Si' Farm preserves and promotes local traditions.	3.57	0.53	Very High
The farm integrates cultural rituals (e.g., land blessings, environmental ceremonies) in its activities.	3.58	0.56	Very High
Traditional farming practices are actively observed and valued in the farm.	3.62	0.55	Very High
Traditions	3.59	0.48	Very High
The farm promotes the values of SVD Laudato Si' Farm (e.g., caring for creation, sustainability).	3.60	0.56	Very High
The principles of SVD Laudato Si' Farm are well communicated through the farm's programs and initiatives.	3.59	0.56	Very High
Faith-based activities at the farm help strengthen environmental responsibility.	3.65	0.56	Very High
Beliefs	3.61	0.48	Very High
The farm strengthens community bonds by promoting shared cultural values.	3.62	0.55	Very High
Activities in the farm encourage cooperation and social responsibility.	3.64	0.52	Very High
The farm provides an inclusive space where cultural diversity is respected.	3.70	0.47	Very High
Community Values	3.65	0.46	Very High
Perceived Cultural Factors	3.62	0.42	Very High

Note: 3.25-4.00: Very; 2.50-3.24: High; 1.75-2.49: Low; 1.00-1.74: Very Low

3.5 Relationship between Level of Ecotourism Engagement and Perceived Community Wellness

Table 6 reports the bivariate correlation analysis between ecotourism engagement and perceived community wellness at SVD Laudato Si' Farm, Tagaytay. The Pearson correlation coefficient ($r = 0.69$, $p < .001$) indicates a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship, suggesting that higher engagement in ecotourism is closely associated with greater perceptions of community wellness.

Table 6. *Relationship Between Level of Ecotourism Engagement and Perceived Community Wellness of Respondents at SVD Laudato Si' Farm, Tagaytay*

Variable Pair	Pearson's r	P-value	Sig. @ 0.05	Status of Hypothesis
Ecotourism Engagement and Perceived Community Wellness	0.69	<.001	Significant	Rejected H0

The magnitude of 0.69 indicates a substantial association, suggesting that more active participants tend to report higher levels of well-being. The significance level ($p < .001$) indicates that the relationship is unlikely to be due to chance, supporting the rejection of the null hypothesis. Culturally rich, where heritage and social cohesion strengthen community wellness. This relationship underscores that the benefits of ecotourism extend beyond environmental and economic gains, significantly enhancing community perceptions of quality of life and social well-being (Xaba & Adanlawo, 2024).

3.6 Regression Analysis of Level of Ecotourism Engagement and Perceived Community Wellness

Table 7 presents the regression analysis on the relationship between ecotourism engagement and perceived community wellness at SVD Laudato Si' Farm, Tagaytay. The model shows a statistically significant positive association, with an unstandardized coefficient of 0.67 ($SE = 0.04$, $t = 16.92$, $p < .001$), indicating that each one-unit increase in ecotourism engagement raises perceived wellness by 0.67 units.

Table 7. *Regression Analysis of Level of Ecotourism Engagement and Perceived Community Wellness of Respondents at SVD Laudato Si' Farm*

Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	P-value	Stand. Estimate	R ²
Intercept	1.23	0.14	8.52	<.001		
Level of Ecotourism Engagement	0.67	0.04	16.92	<.001	0.69	0.48

The intercept value of 1.23 ($SE = 0.14$, $p < .001$) represents the baseline level of wellness when engagement is zero. The standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.69$) suggests a strong effect size, with ecotourism engagement accounting for 48% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.48$), reflecting substantial explanatory power for a single predictor in social science research. Acknowledged in the literature as contributors to enhanced community well-being. This positive relationship reflects the multidimensional benefits of ecotourism—economic opportunities, environmental stewardship, and social cohesion—all of which are recognized in the literature as contributors to enhanced community well-being (Saefullah et al., 2023).

3.7 Cultural Factors as Moderators of the Relationship between Ecotourism Engagement and Perceived Community Wellness

Table 8 presents the moderating effects of cultural factors—traditions, beliefs, and community values—on the relationship between ecotourism engagement and perceived community wellness at SVD Laudato Si' Farm,

Tagaytay. Ecotourism engagement is positively and significantly associated with community wellness across all moderators: 0.37 (SE = 0.07, $p < .001$) for traditions, 0.39 (SE = 0.07, $p < .001$) for beliefs, and 0.39 (SE = 0.06, $p < .001$), showing a consistent positive effect.

Table 8. Cultural Factors (Traditions, Beliefs, and Community Values) as Moderators of the Relationship Between Ecotourism Engagement and Perceived Community Wellness at SVD Laudato Si' Farm, Tagaytay

Moderator	Predictor	Estimate	SE	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	z	p-Value
Traditions	Level of Ecotourism Engagement	0.37	0.07	0.24	0.51	5.51	< .001
	Traditions	0.31	0.06	0.21	0.42	5.55	< .001
	Level of Ecotourism Engagement * Traditions	-0.19	0.07	-0.33	-0.02	-2.64	0.008
Beliefs	Level of Ecotourism Engagement	0.39	0.07	0.26	0.52	5.93	< .001
	Beliefs	0.35	0.06	0.24	0.46	6.08	< .001
	Level of Ecotourism Engagement * Beliefs	-0.07	0.10	-0.15	0.22	-0.76	0.450
Community Values	Level of Ecotourism Engagement	0.39	0.06	0.27	0.52	6.21	< .001
	Community Values	0.37	0.06	0.25	0.49	5.91	< .001
	Level of Ecotourism Engagement * Community Values	-0.10	0.07	-0.23	0.07	-1.48	0.139

The direct effects of cultural factors are also positive and significant: traditions (0.31), beliefs (0.35), and community values (0.37), all with $p < .001$. However, traditions significantly moderate the relationship, with a negative interaction of -0.19 (SE = 0.07, 95% CI [-0.33, -0.02], $p = .008$), suggesting stronger adherence weakens ecotourism's positive impact. In contrast, beliefs (-0.07, $p = 0.450$) and community values (-0.10, $p = 0.139$) show no significant moderation, implying that their effects are independent. (Muslim, 2021).

4.0 Conclusion

This study found that ecotourism engagement significantly enhances community wellness at SVD Laudato Si' Farm in Tagaytay. Respondents demonstrated high levels of participation and awareness, which were strongly associated with improved physical and mental well-being. Cultural factors—particularly traditions, beliefs, and community values—also played a significant role, with traditions exhibiting a modest moderating effect on the relationship between engagement and wellness. These findings underscore the importance of incorporating cultural identity into ecotourism initiatives to enhance their social and wellness benefits. Tourism stakeholders are encouraged to design culturally grounded and inclusive programs that support both environmental education and community well-being. Future research may explore the impact of ecotourism in other communities or across diverse cultural settings to broaden understanding of how culture shapes sustainable, wellness-oriented tourism development.

5.0 Contribution of Authors

None declared.

6.0 Funding

None declared.

7.0 Conflict of Interest

None declared.

8.0 Acknowledgment

None declared.

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