Travel to sacred sites constitutes an integral part of New Age spiritual culture. As a largely middle-class phenomenon, New Age travel shares much with the culture of twenty-first century tourism, but it differs in key respects. Some scholars have argued that New Age spirituality is a form of ‘self-spirituality’, an expression of the trend within advanced capitalism to commodify everything and convert it into a marketplace of choices for individual consumers (e.g. Bruce 1996; Heelas 1992, 1996; Johnson 1995; Lasch 1980; Urban 2000; and van Hove 1999). This chapter will examine the phenomenon of New Age pilgrimage at a prominent centre of New Age activities, the town of Sedona in north-central Arizona. By comparing it with tourist activities more generally in the Sedona area, however, we will see that despite some overlap, New Age approaches to space, place, landscape and nature depart markedly from the tourist commodification of landscape that analysts have identified as part and parcel of consumer capitalism. Such a comparison sheds helpful light on the ways in which New Age spirituality both reflects and contests popular understandings of the relationship between self and the natural world.

It should be mentioned that not all spiritual travellers to Sedona and other New Age sites identify themselves as New Age. Such recognised New Age hubs as Sedona, Glastonbury in southwest England, and others, are notable by the overlapping and mutable nature of religious and spiritual categories (see Bowman 2000; Ivakhiv 2001, 2003; and Riches & Prince 2001). They have become hubs of spiritual creativity, where New Age adherents mix and mingle with Neo-Pagans, extraterrestrial ‘contactees’, Theosophists, occultists, liberal Christians, and others, resulting in a hybridisation and cross-breeding of alternative spiritualities. Due to the prominent role of New Age discourse in the pilgrimage activities at these places, however, what emerges from this mix could justifiably be considered a form of ‘New Age culture.’ Let us begin by examining the geographical contours of New Age culture.
As a phenomenon that began within western metropolitan centres, the 1960s counterculture was conspicuous in its tendency to move away from those centres, whether in a relocation ‘back to the land’ or as a more ephemeral drift to places of exotic allure or vague spiritual import. Of the first group, many rural communards eventually returned to the cities, but a significant minority stayed on and dug their heels into the land. For some, the rural communes and intentional communities which emerged and grew in the 1970s were seen as places in which the practical implications of the ‘new consciousness’ could be worked out; and over the years surviving communities organised themselves into networks, such as the Federation of Egalitarian Communities, the Fellowship of Intentional Communities, the Alternative Communities Network in Britain, and the International Communes Network. By the mid-1970s, the more explicitly spiritual or New Age communities, such as Scotland’s Findhorn Community and India’s Auroville, had begun expressing the vision of a neo-monastic communitarianism, consisting of ‘centres of light’ linked in a network that would provide the infrastructure for a ‘new planetary culture’ (Spangler 1977; Thompson 1974). Countercultural historian Theodore Roszak (1978) compared the present period with the waning decades of the Roman Empire, and saw this new communitarian “monasticism” as a tested historical model for the “creative disintegration of industrial society”, a model which “illuminates the way in which the top-heavy and toxic institutions of an exhausted empire were sifted down into civilised, durable communities where a vital, new sense of human identity and destiny could take root” (1978:289). To this day, Findhorn, Auroville, Tennessee’s The Farm, and numerous other intentional communities interact with the broader culture in a dialectic which helps to sustain New Age and alternative spirituality (e.g. Popenoe & Popenoe 1984; McLaughlin & Davidson 1986; and Fellowship for Intentional Community 1995).

At the same time, the countercultural movement to rural and non-metropolitan areas closer to home (for instance, to places in the US southwest, northern California and the Pacific northwest states or, in Britain, to southwest England and Wales) began turning into a broader pattern of ‘counter stream migration’ consisting mainly of middle-class urban expatriates looking for quieter, safer, and more ‘natural’ havens for relocation. Fuelled by environmentalist discourse and imagery, effective real estate marketing strategies, and the geographic imperatives of